



**“We have to be ecology, biology and botany experts, mechanics, weather forecasters and more...the list is endless”**

# A day in the life

Steve Castle heads to Lymm Golf Club for a greenkeeping crash course

**Stuart Yarwood looks on with a mixture of pity and vague concern as I struggle with my latest task during a typical day in the life of a greenkeeper.**

I've spent my morning haphazardly aerating greens and moving pin positions and now I'm failing to remove the tines from a tining machine. Stuart tells me that he'd appreciate it if I completed this challenge sometime before Christmas.

Perhaps he's already regretting his invitation for me to muck in at the Club – which I eagerly accepted. It's absolutely crucial for me to appreciate the daily difficulties faced by greenkeepers across the UK – particularly as I'm not from a greenkeeping background.

And as the day unfolds we battle torrential rain while investigating problems with drainage on parts of the course – something which hundreds of greenkeepers have had to contend with during the washout summer.

I arrive for my 'shift' woefully underprepared wearing just a polo shirt and thin jacket. Stuart looks at me disapprovingly – not for the last time – and grabs a more suitable coat for the inclement conditions to come before taking me out onto the greens and explaining some of his theories behind greenkeeping.

"One of the things many people, and I daresay many members, don't understand is it's such a wide ranging role. We have to get away from the traditional image of someone just mowing the grass. We have to be public relations experts within our teams and across the golf club.

"We have to be ecology, biology and botany experts, mechanics, weather forecasters and more...the list is endless."

He enthusiastically grabs a handful of soil.

"There are billions of life forms in this, so much activity. They help clean up and aerate the soil, recycle nutrients, and decompose organic matter. "The way I look at it is I've

got billions of greenkeepers here, all helping me out - all I have to do is look after them. It's a little community, an ecosystem and as such needs to be grown, nourished and nurtured."

Stuart is a founder member of the 'Gingerbread men' – a group committed to raising the profile of environmentally sustainable golf course management. They have stimulated intense debate in the industry, which explains their name – they are used to getting their heads bitten off.

He's the first to admit that not everyone agrees with his opinions on greenkeeping, or his methods, but he'll defend them to the hilt. He's incredibly passionate about the industry and undoubtedly has a talent for explaining highly complex matters to the uninitiated such as myself.

Stuart then guides me through solid tine aeration. I mark the greenside sprinklers then attempt to use the Toro Procore 648 pedes-



## FACTFILE

Name: Stuart Yarwood  
Born: Knutsford, 15 July 1975  
Marital Status: Married to Paula with two children  
Handicap: 11  
Hobbies: Motor sport, caravanning, performing rubbish magic tricks  
Favourite Sport: British Touring Cars



trian aerator machine, guiding it warily across the green under the watchful eye of greenkeeper Robert Cooper. Stuart and his team aerate the course between 30 and 40 times a year, at different times and at all manner of different depths.

As I survey my questionable handiwork I realise that I'd been more than a little wayward. But despite my complete inability to walk in a straight line while guiding a machine, and needing a couple of attempts at changing the 17th hole, I feel cautiously optimistic. I don't appear to have wrecked the course – or if I have, Stuart's too polite to say.

The afternoon would be spent investigating drainage issues on a specific part of the course, which seemed a reasonable request particularly in the autumn sun which had broken through.

But the weather then reverted to type and I experienced the reality of the outdoor lifestyle of the greenkeeper.

Together with two of Stuart's colleagues I began to dig a drainage ditch on the side of the first fairway – however we were quickly swamped by an absolute deluge.

I soon envied a passing group of golfers who were able to seek shelter while we plugged away, digging the ditch down to the level of the drain underneath the fairway to hopefully dispose of the excess water. Just when it seemed all our efforts were in vain the water began to drain away – a real breakthrough and a reward for a soaking afternoon of hard graft.

As we worked I had a crucial

opportunity to listen to the views of Stuart's colleagues on BIGGA, its communication with its members, the way forward and listen to some of their suggestions.

After a well-earned cuppa, Stuart took me on a tour of the course – which intriguingly, is two diverse courses in one. The top eight holes close to the famous Manchester Ship Canal are heath-like, while the rest are classic parkland.

Indeed, the canal and the course are inextricably linked as Stuart explained. The company in charge of constructing the canal owned the land either side of it, and used part of this area for dumping the soil from the digging of the waterway. This explains why holes three to ten are elevated.

As he gazed out across the canal – a fine view he's become accustomed to since joining Lymm in 2000 - Stuart's thoughts returned to greenkeeping as a whole.

"BIGGA's goal should be to empower the greenkeeper. Training and education are absolutely paramount and while it's improving, even more needs to be done.

"Today's been hugely beneficial for me and my colleagues to show someone from HQ exactly what we do, how we do it and why we do it."

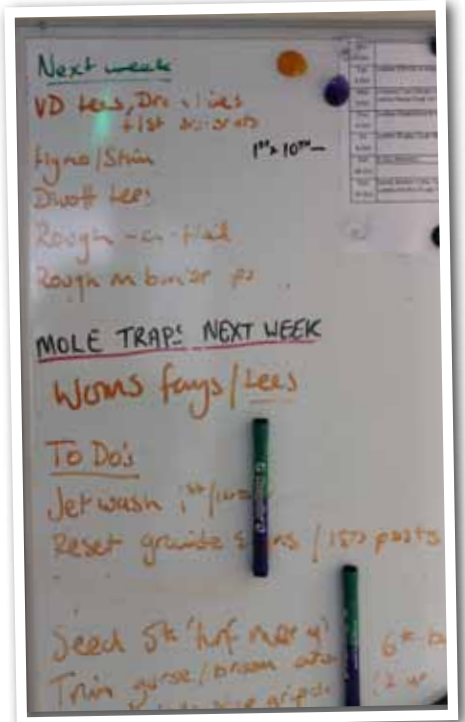
I couldn't agree more. It's been exhausting – and above all, wet – but I've learnt an enormous amount from Stuart and his colleagues, not only about the industry but also their views on BIGGA, and the challenges we all face.

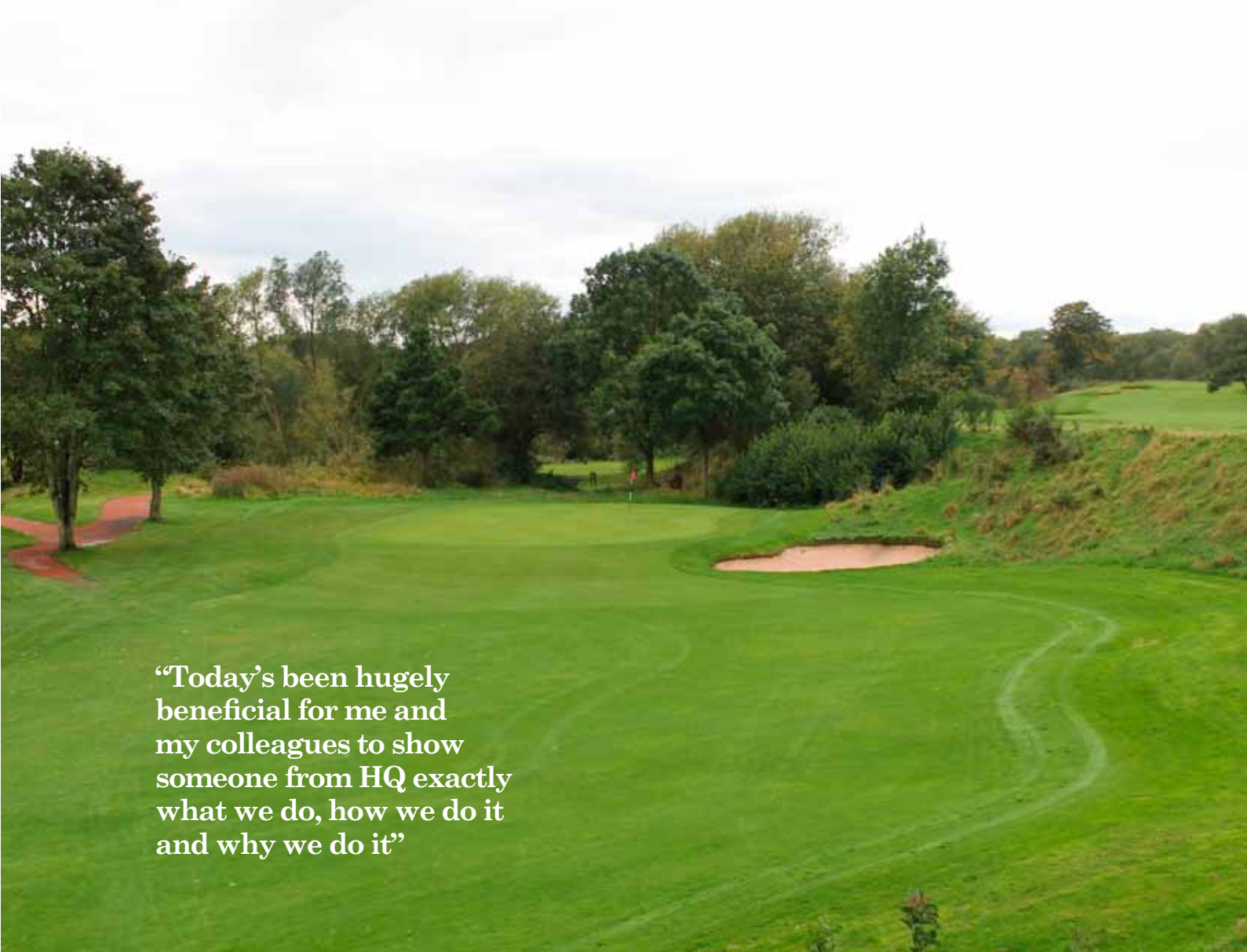
Whether I'll ever be invited back to work on the course again is another story...



INSET ABOVE: Steve Castle digging in!

RIGHT PAGE BOTTOM: The team at Lymm: David Whitby, Robert Cooper, Ian Taylor, Stuart Yarwood. Missing is Alan Gerrard (who refused to have his photo taken!)





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