

Back in time

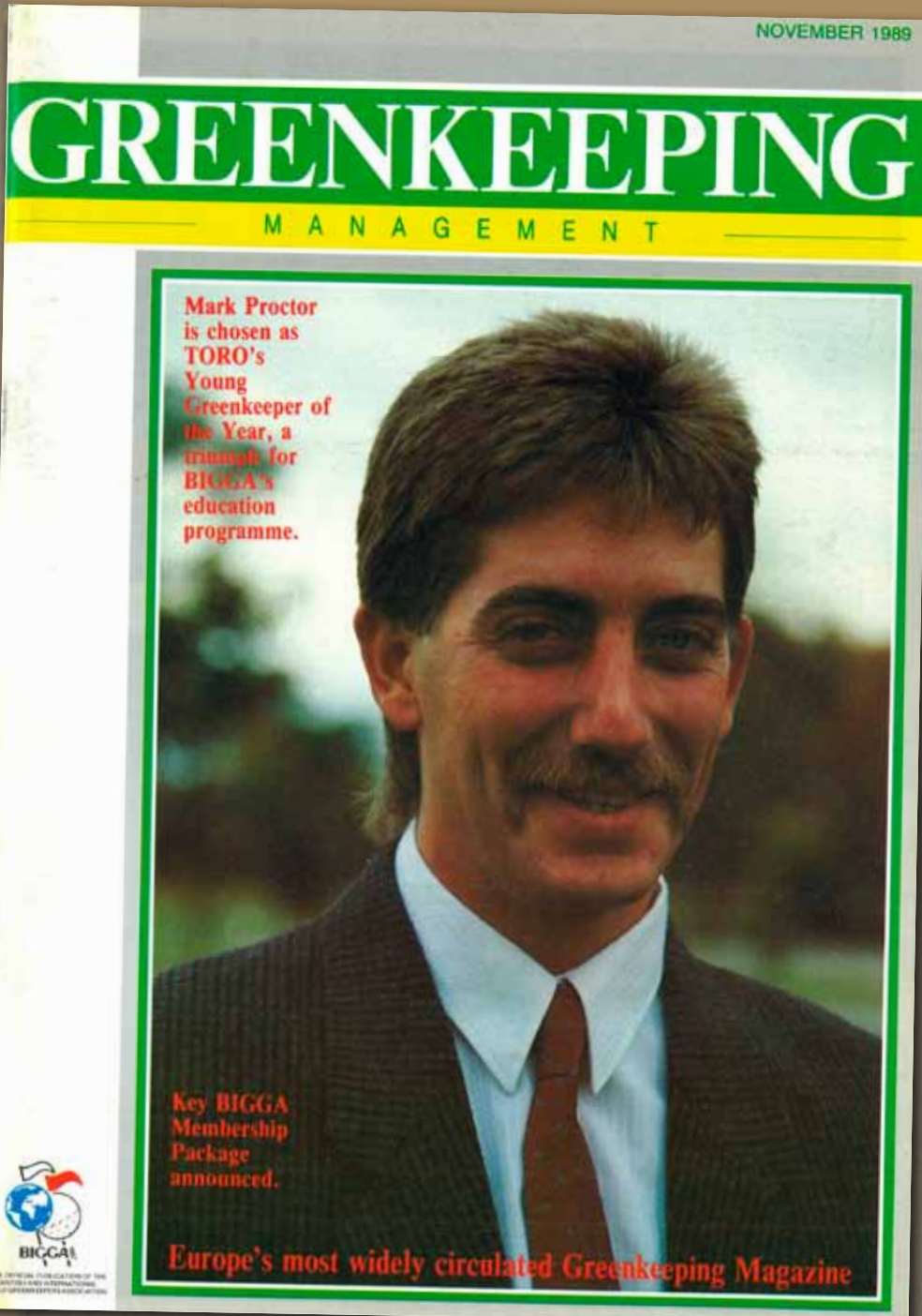
Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Special

Do you have any old artifacts from days gone-by?

Perhaps your grandad was a greenkeeper and has something stored away in the loft? Maybe an Association tie, or a journal? If so we would love to hear from you. We are particularly interested in the early part of the last century, but anything you have would be worth considering for future editions of this article.

Please contact us on 01347 833800 or email Elliott Small, BIGGA Past Chairman, elliott.edna@hotmail.co.uk

Back in time looks back at cuttings of greenkeeping news from days gone-by. 2012 is a landmark year, being the centenary of Greenkeeping Associations, as well as 25 years since BIGGA was formed. This month, in another Special Feature, we take a look back at over two decades of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award – and speak to one of the very first winners who explains how his victory gave his fledgling career a huge boost



1989 saw the opening broadcast from little-known satellite TV station Sky, the Church of England vote to allow female ministers to be ordained and Nick Faldo become the first ever English winner of the Masters.

The last year of the eighties also saw the first winner crowned of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year – a delighted Mark Proctor.

The accompanying piece in the November edition of 'Greenkeeping Management' – as this magazine was then known – described how Mark would partake in the 'Winter School for Turf Grass Managers' at the University of Massachusetts.

The article added that Mark was looking forward to his first plane journey, and also tucking into an American 'whopper'!

1992 winner Barry Rhodes was pictured on the front cover with the winner's shield – and the first winner this century was Jonathan Cleland, now Course Manager at Elderslie Golf Club.

Celebrating in 2005 was Alan Pierce – who is now a Master Green-



keeper – and in 2007 the victor was Avon Bridges.

Above all, the long-term success of many of the winners proves that all the finalists have a bright future in greenkeeping.

DAVID NORTON'S STORY

Just three years after winning the 1990 Student Greenkeeper of the Year title, David Norton (main right) was Head Greenkeeper at The Belfry.

This graphically demonstrates the impact the competition can have on a fledgling career.

He was a 21-year-old assistant greenkeeper at Beverley & East Riding Golf Club when he clinched the title, and the following January he headed to the Winter School for Turfgrass Managers course at the University of Massachusetts.

Over two decades on David can still recall the details of the “fantastic” trip stateside – and describes how it played a huge role in both his personal and professional development.

He said: “Firstly I was flattered to be nominated, then on the day of the final I made sure I was honest. I think it’s tempting to say what you think the interviewers want to hear, but I didn’t do that. I tried to give logical answers.

“I was delighted to win it, and the trip to America was fantastic in every way. The educational side was terrific, and the social side was too. I was only 21, it was my first trip to America, and I learnt so much. It stood me in good stead professionally and personally. It genuinely helped me develop as a young adult.

“It also gave my career a big boost. I was offered a job at Mid Yorkshire Golf Club in Pontefract off the back of it, which I accepted, and I then applied for a job at Gleneagles.

“Technically, I didn’t have enough years of experience to go for that job but they considered me because they saw I had Student Greenkeeper of the Year on my CV. They had around 500 applicants and I got down to the last two but just lost out.

“However, getting that close to a job at such a prestigious course helped my confidence massively and I soon got the job at The Belfry.

“Also, don’t be despondent if you get to the final and don’t win. A nomination still does wonders for your CV and I know many of the finalists have gone on to have superb careers.”

In 1995 David moved to Forest Pines Hotel and Golf Resort close



INSET ABOVE: 1992’s winner Barry Rhodes



to his home town of Beverley, where he is still Head Greenkeeper today. He’s also Group Golf Course Manager for Q Hotels who have four courses across the UK – including the course at Aldwark Manor. Finalists are still asked to produce a report on a specific aspect of this course as they were in 1990.

David has plenty of sound advice for young greenkeepers at the beginning of their careers.

“Being able to see things logically from both a golfer’s perspective and a greenkeeper’s perspective is vital. So play golf! It doesn’t matter whether you’re good or bad, it increases your appreciation of courses.

“Look at as many different courses as possible and think about what’s good and what’s bad. That ensures you can avoid the bad and try and implement the good on your course. You also have to remember every golf course is different – what works on one may not work on another.

“The biggest thing is don’t be afraid to ask questions. Get as much knowledge as you can and use this to your advantage.”