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Greenkeeper International

The greenkeepers' greenkeeper

Chris Sealey retires after half a century of agronomy

■ Practical Greenkeeping

A close look at bunker
refurbishments

■ From Your Association

Introducing our next
president – Ronnie Myles

■ BTME

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of our flagship event



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The magazine for BIGGA members
Greenkeeper International exists for you, our members. Since 1987 BIGGA has helped thousands in golf greenkeeping to progress their careers, find inspiration and get involved in our varied and vibrant community. This magazine aims to reflect the passions and preoccupations of our members and we'd like you to be involved. Please drop us a line, send us a picture or post on our social media pages.

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ISSN: 0961-6977

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Welcome

It is the nature of this industry to always be looking forward. At a time when most people will be reflecting on the year that is coming to an end, greenkeepers are always looking forward to next season and the completion of winter projects.

Likewise, with BTME looming we're always very focussed on next year, but it is important to take stock.

I'm delighted therefore that the survey we distributed recently has seen an excellent response. Over 1,000 people, from both within and without the membership completed the survey.

The results will help us shape the future membership offering for the Association. We already have a strong membership but in order to succeed in our mission to improve the industry for greenkeepers we need to ensure membership is relevant to all sectors and that our benefits and initiatives continue to provide value.

I'm delighted that in this edition we are able to pay tribute to Chris Sealey, who has given several decades of service to BIGGA and to supporting his fellow greenkeepers. He is a wonderful gentleman and a great servant to Chippenham Golf Club and his industry.

“May I wish all of our members and your families a very Merry Christmas and a successful New Year”

It was my absolute pleasure recently to surprise him at his retirement celebration and have the chance to say a few words about how much he means to BIGGA.

We now look forward to the festive season and, of course, to BTME.

We're on track for a larger exhibition than last time and Continue to Learn registrations are off the charts.

It is sure to be yet another brilliant event.

May I conclude by wishing all of our members and your families a very Merry Christmas and a successful New Year, and I hope to see very many of you over the course of 2025.



Jim Croxton
BIGGA Chief Executive

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First Cut

All you need to know from around our industry

- Winners of the BIGGA 2025 calendar competition announced
- Golf Environment Awards 2025 finalists revealed



L-R Lewis Blois, Landscape & Industrial Business Development Manager; Ian Graham, Amenity Forum Chairman; Sean Loakes, Syngenta Technical Manager

Finalists of the Amenity Sprayer Operator of the Year Award announced

The finalists for the Amenity Sprayer Operator of the Year (ASOOTY) Award were announced at the recent Amenity Forum Conference.

Selected from the biggest ever entry to the prestigious competition to find the UK's best sprayer operators across the industry, the finalists through to the next round of judging are:

- Mark Sippitt – Top Grass UK Ltd
- Sarah Phillips – Complete Weed Control (South & Central Wales) Ltd
- Peter Pattenden – Carden Park Golf Club

The ASOOTY Award is organised by the Amenity Forum with the support and sponsorship of ICL and Syngenta. Announcing the finalists, Amenity Forum chairman Ian Graham said:

"Being named a finalist is a testament to your hard work, dedication and expertise in amenity spraying."

He also commended all the entrants for their hard work and dedication to the industry.

"We would like to extend our sincerest thanks for your participation," he added. "We strongly encourage you to apply again next year, as each entry helps to raise the standards and recognise the excellence in our industry."

Along with assessing operators' skills of spray application and use of products, the ASOOTY judging panel also now incorporate the importance of an integrated pest management approach to any issues involving turf

and landscape maintenance.

The next stage of the competition will involve individual interviews for the finalists with the judging panel. The overall winner will be announced at the BIGGA Celebration at BTME in Harrogate in January 2025.

Dan Waring, professional spray technician at JCB Golf and Country Club in Uttoxeter, took home the prize last time around and encouraged his fellow sprayer operators to seize all opportunities to hone their skills.

"I would urge all sprayer operators to undertake as much training as possible," he said. "That will enable people to be more confident in what they are doing and give the spray tech's role the credit it deserves." **GI**

The BIGGA Calendar

December: Alistair Morrison, Durness

Download the desktop calendar by scanning the QR code



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Scotland's first Mental Health First Aid course held

BIGGA hosted the first Mental Health First Aid course for Scottish members at Dunblane in September.

Members who will benefit from the training hailed from golf clubs all over Scotland, including Royal Dornoch, Spey Bay, Portlethen, Whitecraigs, Erskine, Crail Golfing Society and Western Gailes.

Darren McLoughlin, deputy head greenkeeper at Erskine, said: "I was thrilled for the opportunity to become a mental health first aider. This is something that sits close to home for me and the course has given me confidence in possible situations for the future, so I would like to thank BIGGA for providing the opportunity."

The hosting of Mental Health First Aid workshops is a flagship initiative by



BIGGA that seeks to provide members with the tools and ability to support their colleagues who may be encountering mental health challenges.

BIGGA is currently the only association in Scotland that is providing this type of training for its members and what's more, the

learning is provided free of charge.

Darren added: "A friend I grew up with in Inverclyde has started the Man On Charity and it shows the need for these types of services."

"Developing our greenkeepers, in what can be a lonely environment, to open up, talk to each other and realise the seriousness of the agenda can only be a good thing for our industry and for the people who are also affected by our work, such as friends, family and stakeholders."

With more training of this type intended to be provided in future, we would love to hear from you if you are interested in getting involved. **GI**



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A greenkeeper's best friend – Whinny

Owner: Alex Borrer
Club: Fulford
Breed: French Bulldog
Age: 5 years old



Favourite treat: Dental sticks
Favourite spot on the course: Sat on the greens in the sun
Naughtiest moment: Eating greenkeeper's pack-up
My dog is happiest: When sat on the Mule while setting up the course

What's on this month



Dates for your diary

3 December

BIGGA Sheffield Section Christmas Golf Day – Wheatley Golf Club

4 December

BIGGA SE Region Irrigation Workshop – JK Irrigation
BIGGA D&C Turkey Trot Golf Day – Perranporth Golf Club



Perranporth

BIGGA London Section Turkey Trot – Mill Hill Golf Club

5 December

BIGGA East Midlands Turkey Trot – TBC

9 December

BIGGA South Wales Turkey Trot – Pyle & Kenfig Golf Club

10 December

BIGGA East Anglia Section Turkey Trot – Wensum Valley Golf Club

11 December

BIGGA SE Region Irrigation Workshop – JK Irrigation

13 December

BIGGA South West Turkey Trot – Clevedon Golf Club

18 December

BIGGA SE Region Irrigation Workshop – JK Irrigation

19 December

BIGGA Sussex Section Turkey Trot – East Brighton Golf Club



BIGGA

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Joe's disbelief after BIGGA photo contest three-peat

Joe Simpson expressed his disbelief after winning the BIGGA Annual Photography Competition sponsored by Syngenta for the third time.

The greenkeeper at Ipswich Golf Club added to his triumphs in 2020 and 2022 after capturing a stunning shot of colleague Pete Dunnnett mowing the 5th fairway of the Purdis Heath Course as the autumn sun was breaking through the morning fog.

His snap wowed voters and the judging panel as he saw off stiff competition from a host of high-class entries, sealing a remarkable hat-trick of victories.

"I honestly can't believe that I've won the competition three times," said Joe, who took up photography as a hobby 10 years ago. "The standard of the photo entries grows year on year, so it's become incredibly competitive, which makes winning for a third time even more special.

"One of the biggest lessons I've learnt when it comes to photography is that you don't always need the perfect weather conditions to get your best shot. For this reason, I take photos throughout all four seasons at various times of the day, so I have a diverse selection to choose from for the competition."

The top 12 images were whittled down from 24 finalists following a public vote, with each of them appearing in the BIGGA and Syngenta 2025 desktop calendar.

Carlisle Golf Club's Kevin Irving, whose effort proved popular

with voters on social media, took top honours in the landscape category and cited patience – and maybe a little bit of luck – as key when it comes to getting the best snap.

"I've always thought that it would make a great shot with the yellow irises, the pond and the fourth green in the background," he said. "I just needed the right light to make it, and I was just lucky enough to be there at the right time.

"I have always had a keen eye for photography and we are in a job where we are privileged to see some amazing scenery."

Kevin used his camera phone to capture the scene at the Cumbrian course and revealed he is always primed and ready to document the beauty of the world around him.

"I'm always on the lookout for the perfect shot and I never hesitate to get my camera out when I can," he said. "I love taking photos of landscapes, whether that's on the golf course or in the nearby Lake District.

"To not only get a picture of Carlisle Golf Club in the BIGGA calendar but to be one of the category winners makes me feel very proud. I'll absolutely be entering again next year."

While Joe will receive a DJI Mini 2 SE Drone and a framed print of their winning photograph, presented at BTME 2025, the category winners each get a £150 Love2Shop Gift Card. **GI**



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Category winners



- **Greenkeeping: David Ball, Thetford GC**

Greenkeepers are up early and they often work late – and they always put 100% effort into preparing the golf course. This category is about sharing that hard work and success.



- **Landscape: Kevin Irving, Carlisle GC**

Golf courses provide some of the most spectacular landscapes to be found anywhere and this category celebrates the wonderful natural world, where greenkeepers are privileged to spend their working lives.



- **Wildlife: Craig Sinclair, Camberley Heath GC**

Peaceful, remote and surrounded by the natural world, it's no surprise that greenkeepers often enjoy close encounters with some spectacular natural wonders. This category celebrates the beautiful wildlife that can be found on our golf courses.

Golf Environment Awards 2025 finalists revealed

The Golf Environment Awards (GEAs) are celebrating their 30th year and the finalists for 2025 have been announced.

Since the launch of the awards in 1995, the aim has been to recognise, reward and promote outstanding individuals and golf courses, no matter how big or small, for the time and effort they have put into protecting and preserving their unique surroundings.

"Going into our 30th year of the GEAs, we continue to be impressed by the dedication and commitment to protecting our environment," said Richard Stuttard, STRI group director.

"The standard of entries is high every year, and we're delighted to see new individuals and clubs at the awards each year."

From the start of this year, entries were submitted for six categories, each with a different environmental focus. The entries were reviewed by an internal panel at STRI Group and shortlisted as finalists, and a final judging day will take place in November with representatives from The R&A, Aquatrols, BIGGA, Jacobsen, Syngenta and Tillers Turf.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony on 22 January 2025 at The Crown Hotel, Harrogate.

All winners receive a £750 grant to help fund further ecological and environmental projects at their clubs, a visit from an agronomic consultant, entry to the Foundation Award in Amenity Horticulture Course, BIGGA membership for the Conservation Champion award winner and promotional materials to display across digital platforms (UK and Ireland only). **GI**

Conservation Champion Award

Matthew Grainger, Brampton Golf Club
Andy Reason, North Hants Golf Club
Chris Greely, Royal Dublin Golf Club
Adam Olliver, Weybrook Park Golf Club

Ecological Project of the Year Award

Fife Golf Trust
Formby Ladies Golf Club
Hinckley Golf Club
Leckford Golf Club

Operation Pollinator Award

Bamburgh Castle Golf Club
Goring and Streatley Golf Club
North Hants Golf Club
Warren Golf Club

Sustainable Project of the Year Award

Annanhill Golf Club
Bowring Park Golf Club
Kingarrock Golf Club
Bidston Golf Club

International Environmental Golf Club of the Year

Afriyea Golf Academy
Camiral Golf & Wellness
Minthis Golf Club
Mjolby Golf Club
Quinta do Lago Resort

UK Environmental Golf Club of the Year

Colmworth Golf Club
North Hants Golf Club
West Sussex Golf Club
Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club

Bamburgh Castle Golf Club -
Operation Pollinator Finalist



Fife Golf Trust -
Ecological Project of the Year Finalist



Quinta do Lago - International
Environmental Golf Club of the Year Finalist



West Sussex Golf Club - UK Environmental
Golf Club of the Year Finalist



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from





From your Association

Representing the greenkeeping community

- Take a look ahead to the main events of BTME and Continue to Learn 2025
- We introduce Ronnie Myles as the new president of your association

"I honestly thought the conference was one of the best I've attended. The speakers were excellent,"

James Lindsay, course manager at Stirling Golf Club

"The speakers were good, with Mark Hunt the highlight for me. All in all, a great day." **Andy Wilson, course manager at Whitecraigs Golf Club**

"The presentations by David Cole and Mark Hunt were exceptional and extremely interesting," **Shaun Cunningham, course manager at Prestonfield Golf Club**



Thank you for coming to the 2024 BIGGA Regional Conferences

November's BIGGA Regional Conferences welcomed greenkeepers from across the country to participate in a full day of learning and networking opportunities.

The series of events kicked off at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Dunblane, Scotland, where speakers included The R&A's James Walker, Perennial's Helen Waddington and Director of Agronomy at A&M Fife David Cole.

Mark Hunt, of Prodata Weather Systems, spoke about weather

patterns and the effects on golf course management.

"The weather data is something that I'm really interested in," said Robert Tosh, deputy golf course manager at Kilmarnock Barassie. "It really helps to plan our jobs on the golf course on a day-by-day, week-by-week basis. I think it's only going to be more important as the future goes on with weather and climate change."

Impressed first-time attendee James Larter, of Kingsknowe Golf Club, said he plans to return next year.

"It's been interesting, especially Mark Hunt talking about the weather," he said. "It's good to see that from a different perspective, because we're always looking at our phones for the weather, so having his level of insight on that was really useful."

Other speakers included ICL's Dr Andy Owens, with a talk on soil microbial management. Rob Phillips, who discussed the roadmap for the GTC in the future, and BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton, who provided an update on the association. **GI**

The BIGGA National Board is comprised of the following members who volunteer their time to support the association: Gordon McKie, Kevin Fish, Jack Hetherington, Antony Kirwan, Andrew Laing, Iain Macleod, Lucy Sellick and Andy Smith
BIGGA President John Keenaghan, BIGGA Chairperson Steven Lloyd



First Green in all weathers

BIGGA members have an excellent opportunity to inspire young people with hands-on environmental learning through First Green field trips.

While we always hope for the events to take place on a calm, sunny day, the reality of working outdoors in the UK means you must prepare for all types of weather. We've compiled six top tips to ensure your First Green event runs smoothly, whatever the forecast. **GI**

About First Green

First Green is an innovative environmental science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education outreach programme using golf courses as hands-on learning labs. The initiative aims to introduce young people to the career opportunities available in golf and showcase the skills required for these roles. In doing so, First Green hopes to inspire the next generation of greenkeepers.



Scan Me to find out more

Get involved by scanning the QR code

1. Safety first

Safety is paramount, especially in adverse weather. Check the course for any potential hazards, such as slippery areas or standing water. If bad weather is forecast, could you have an indoor back-up plan?

2. Provide shelter and warmth

Whether it is sunny or wet, having a sheltered area where students can gather is essential. If your course has a terrace or clubhouse nearby, this will be an ideal spot for breaks or activities that don't require being on the course or practice area. In colder months, plan to keep the stations short and focused, and encourage the schools to advise students to wear warm clothing and appropriate footwear. Pop some gazebos up at your stations so groups can be sheltered at each one. Woburn Golf Club made sure that they had lots of golf umbrellas on hand at each station for those who needed them.

3. Waterproof activities

Plan stations that can be completed in wet conditions without compromising the experience. Soil testing, water quality sampling and wildlife stations work well in rainy conditions. Bring waterproof containers and equipment to protect any samples or tools used. Laminate the lesson plans and worksheets and have each group use dry wipe pens.

4. Make the weather part of the learning experience

Younger students, especially, love an adventure in the rain. Lean into how the weather impacts the golf course – explore how rainfall affects turf health, examine wet soil conditions or track local wildlife that might be more active in certain weather.

5. Encourage flexibility and creativity

Remember, First Green is so important as it raises awareness about golf courses and their role in the environment but also puts a big emphasis on sustainability while helping to promote greenkeeping as a STEM career. Let students know that the unpredictable British weather is part of what makes your work so interesting.

6. Be realistic

Unfortunately, there will be instances where postponing is the only realistic option. As turf professionals, you are always aware of the weather forecasts and will be able to make a decision with the school in advance.

The R&A seeks feedback on Golf Course 2030 initiative



Greenkeepers and golf club managers now have an opportunity to influence The R&A's Golf Course 2030 programme, through a survey designed to identify drivers and needs for future sustainable turf management.

Golf Course 2030 aims to help golf courses to mitigate the impact of climate change, resource constraints and regulation on course condition and playability, according to The R&A GC2030 Project Manager John Kemp.

We need views and feedback from industry stakeholders"

It promotes sustainable golf course management practices to ensure the best possible playing conditions for golfers.

"As part of the ongoing development of Golf Course 2030, we need views and feedback from industry stakeholders to assess the impact of what has been offered by the project so far and what is required for the future," he said.

"That will ensure it continues to provide practical support to course managers and clubs.

"Golf Course 2030 supports golf facilities, greenkeepers

and industry advisors with essential information to make more informed everyday business decisions on how they manage their turf.

"It is essential that we identify how useful the guidance and resources provided by Golf Course 2030 have been, as well as their influence in helping golf courses and turf managers to make necessary changes in their practices and identifying future needs to inform business development." **GI**



Scan Me to find out more

GC2030



Scan Me to find out more

Take the survey

Greenkeepers and golf course managers can take the five-minute survey by scanning the QR code below.

Once a greenkeeper, always a greenkeeper



Andy Smith
Guardian

Retirement did not happen on my own terms, but I spent my working life doing a job I love

Unfortunately, after 45 years of greenkeeping, I have had to retire due to my ill health. My overriding feelings are of pride and affection for our profession, tinged with sadness as I've had to leave before my time.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have offered their support and kindness. That sense of community and togetherness is a rare and incredibly valuable feature of our industry.

Since retiring, it's remarkable how quickly my obsession with the weather has abated! I now look at the forecast once a day, as opposed to a dozen. No longer rising at 3.45am each day, I couldn't tell you whether there has been a frost or not. I now realise that members who play later in the day will have no idea either and will be unaware of the impact on course maintenance those conditions will have.

What I have learned over the years is that communication with members is key and I would recommend using as many different forms of media as possible. Our chairperson, Steve Lloyd, has a members' WhatsApp



“My overriding feelings are of pride for our profession”

group which he posts on daily with responses blocked. What a great way to put your message over without any negativity coming back!

It was great to see the relaunch of the excellent Your Course magazine, an invaluable asset for greenkeepers to share relevant information with those who frequent the club house.

Communication and presentations skills will

once again be a feature of the educational opportunities at Continue to Learn in January. I thoroughly recommend attending.

For too many greenkeepers, the lack of understanding of their roles and lack of respect for the skills they have is still far too common. BIGGA continues to strive to banish those outdated attitudes and elevate the profession to the status

its diligent and dedicated workforce deserves. For anyone experiencing any issues, I would urge them to seek help and advice from their membership services manager.

Finally, it was great to see that Ronnie Myles has accepted the role to become our president for 2025. Ronnie will be an absolute asset in representing BIGGA. Enjoy 2025 Ronnie, this honour is fully deserved.

I wish all of you a very happy Christmas and New Year, and look forward to meeting up at BTME. **GI**

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Seven Canyons, USA

Nicholas Dash (I)

Tyrixfjord Golfklubb,
Norway

Matt Earhart (I)

Chartwell G&CC, USA

George Foutsis (I)

Costa Navarino – Troon
Golf, Greece

Ryan Franklin (I)

Indianapolis Motor
Speedway, USA

Connor Carmichael Lindsay (I)

Royal Ostend, Belgium

Cole Miedema (I)

Overlake G&CC, USA

Tyler Miget (I)

Harmony Club, USA

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Buffalo, USA

Clay Payne (I)

Buffalo Dunes Golf
Course, USA

Carol Turner (I)

Bigwin Island, Canada

Craid Turner (DCM)

Golfclub Munchen
Eichenried, Germany

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HG Head Groundsperson

I International Member

L Life Member

M Mechanic

P Partner

R Retired Member

RP Regional Patron

S Supporter

ST Student Member

SUP Superintendent

Kian Ross (APP)
Cabot Highlands

Alasdair Shearer (GK)
Fort William

 **Northern**

Ryan Andrews (HGK)
Woodham G&CC

Jack Cormack (APP)
Charlie Greaves (APP)
Sam Wilby (APP)
Headingley

Thomas Hall (GK)
Northop

Harry King (APP)
Malton & Norton

Thomas Milligan (AGK)
George Washington

Jacob Moon (AGK)
The Mere Golf Resort & Spa

Steven Oldfield (GK)
Headlam Hall

Gavin Quinn (GK)
Boldon

Joe Riley (APP)
Hillsborough

Jack Whiteman (FA)
Pike Hills

William Wright (HGK)
Darrington

 **Central**


Matthew Axton (M)
Copt Heath

William Campbell (AGK)
March

Joshua Cox (APP)
Chloe Willshire (APP)
Billingbear Park

Simon Giles (GK)
Collingtree Park

Rhys Greer (GK)
Letchworth

 **South East**
Alfie Alburey (APP)
Top Meadow

Jonty Barker (AGK)
James Gilmour (AGK)
Royal Wimbledon

Connor Brown (GK)
Woldingham

Max Cutting (APP)
Mundesley

Sam Field (AGK)
Ealing

Keith Jarvis (AGK)
Birch Grove House Estate

Isaac King (APP)
Ryley White (APP)
Barnham Broom

Chris Nunn (AGK)
Forrester Park

James Perrin (APP)
Chart Hills

 **South West & South Wales**

Joe Atkins (APP)
George Lunnion (APP)
King Weston

Harvey Ryder (DHGK)
Forest Hills

Simon Harvey (AGK)
Farrington Park

Fred Humphries (GK)
Ross-on-Wye

Stuart Larkins (APP)
Ogbourne Downs

Jason Bassett (CM)
Oliver Price (GK)
Ryan Skinner (GK)
Ethan Smith (AGK)
Woodspring G&CC

Russell Tate (GK)
Lee-on-the-Solent

Bradley Varcoe (APP)
St Austell



BIGGA
CPD Continuing Professional Development

Congratulations to the following members who have achieved **CPD Approved status**

Steven Harvey, Royal North Devon

Roger Barrett, Aldwark Manor Estate

Matthew McCreadie, Tadmarton Heath

Richard Johnstone MG, Royal Aberdeen

Graeme Roberts, Hayling

Charlie Sorrell, Seaford

Simon Parmenter, Sunningdale

Matthew Kent, Surbiton

Stephen Watson, Royal Aberdeen

Tommy O'Neil, Pennant Park Golf (Wayfind)

Marcus Davies, Royal Golf Club, Bahrain

William Moore, Kilworth Springs

Congratulations to the following members who have achieved their **CPD Milestone**

Graeme Roberts, Hayling

Charlie Sorrell, Seaford

Gavin Steed, Affiliate

Shaun Cunningham, Prestonfield



Sunningdale

BTME Breakfast Session

The agronomic story of the 152nd Open and 2024 AIG Women's Open

Join us for the BTME Breakfast Session and hear about the behind-the-scenes work that went into presenting the golf course at Royal Troon for The 152nd Open and the 2024 AIG Women's Open at St Andrews.

Hosted by Gareth Jones, this session will see The R&A's Sustainable Championship Agronomy team of Adam Newton and Richard Windows share their experiences and learnings from staging these major championships, along with insights from the greenkeepers and other supporters who work to deliver courses for the highest level of golf.

"These events are the pinnacle of the professional championship agronomy season," said Richard, The R&A's head of sustainable agronomy – Championship venues. "The Breakfast Session at BTME in January will provide a great opportunity to talk about the sustainable agronomy and greenkeeping programmes that were implemented in the lead-up and throughout the respective championships.

"The staging of all our championships are done so with complete collaboration and support from our host venues, in this case Royal Troon Golf Club and St Andrews Links Trust, so the session will include their insight during the lead-up and championship stage too.

"We will discuss all aspects of the agronomy and how it relates to the set-up of the course, volunteering at championships and the day-to-day decision-making during the two championships.

"The session will provide an interesting insight into how the golf course and agronomy is tailored in accordance with prevailing weather conditions and how best-practice agronomy and greenkeeping is utilised to deliver world-class playing surfaces in a sustainable way."

This session is free to attend for all visitors and there is no need to book a ticket. **GI**



Scan Me to
find out more



When: **Tuesday 21
January, 8am-9am**

Where: **Seminar Theatre,
Hall 3, Harrogate
Convention Centre**





The five pillars of The R&A's Sustainable Golf

Sustainable Agronomy Service

Providing bespoke advice and guidance to golf facilities worldwide to increase awareness and adoption of best practices in sustainable agronomy.

Sustainable Championship Agronomy

Delivering sustainable, world-class playing conditions for championship venues – a platform for showing what is possible.

Golf Course 2030 Research

Providing research funding to establish practical solutions in sustainable agronomy, resources, biodiversity and climate change.

Sustainable Greenkeeping & Scholarships

Providing support, funding and opportunities for practical experience to new and developing greenkeeping talent.

Sustainable Championships (Greenlinks)

Demonstrating leadership in hosting sustainable golf championships and addressing The R&A's operational impacts in staging major sporting events.



Continue to Learn 2025: Conference

The two-day Conference programme will be held across Monday 20 January and Tuesday 21 January.

A stellar list of keynote speakers, including some of the most influential names in the industry, will deliver an unmissable Conference programme at Continue to Learn 2025.

The two-day event, in which sessions typically run between 40 to 60 minutes in length, covers a vast range of topics from agronomy, ecology and technology, to leadership, strategy and wellbeing.

With two speaker programmes running adjacent to each other, attendees can select the learning that most closely suits their needs and have the option to move between rooms to maximise their experience.

The list of names who will address the Conference includes The R&A's Alistair Beggs, Dr John Dempsey of Independent Turfgrass Research, Penn State University's Dr Ben McGraw, and Owen James of England Golf.

The Conference will take place in the DoubleTree by Hilton Harrogate Majestic Hotel & Spa, located adjacent to the Harrogate Convention Centre.

While the programme is best suited for those currently in or aspiring towards a managerial role, all are welcome to attend. [GI](#)

The New Greenkeepers Conference

Held on Wednesday 21 January, after the main Conference programme has concluded, the New Greenkeepers Conference, kindly supported by The R&A, is for those of any age who are new to the greenkeeping industry. If you would like to meet others who have just joined the industry or who are making their first steps into learning and development, it provides an excellent opportunity to network with like-minded greenkeepers. Featuring five learning stations, attendees will be split into groups and will spend 30 minutes at each station, before rotating to the next. All stations will be educational and some will be very hands-on. The informal setting allows for questions and interactivity between speakers and attendees.



Scan Me to
find out more

Ticket details

Two-day Conference ticket Member £270 + VAT Non Member £540 + VAT
One-day conference ticket Member £150 + VAT Non Member £300 + VAT

BOOKING DEADLINE FRIDAY 10 JANUARY 2025

BIGGA members set for Sawgrass trip with John Deere volunteer programme

The seven BIGGA members who will undertake the trip of a lifetime to TPC Sawgrass for next year's Players Championship have been revealed.

Each year, the PGA Tour headquarters plays host to the unofficial fifth major, where players battle it out for one of the most lucrative prizes in the sport.

With its famous island green and stunning Florida setting, the Stadium Course is considered among the most spectacular golfing challenges on the planet.

And to help prepare the course for such a prestigious event, the home greenkeeping team are supported by a multi-national group of volunteers, including representatives from each of BIGGA's five regions, along with two international members.

The chosen seven will be flying to Ponte Vedra Beach, courtesy of BIGGA Premium Partner John Deere, who will also provide accommodation, food and uniform for the duration of their stay in America.

While in Florida, the greenkeepers are fully immersed into the TPC Sawgrass agronomy team, joining more than 100 turf professionals from across the globe and gaining

experience of elite championship agronomy, which they bring back to their home venues.

Jim Croxton, BIGGA CEO, said: "The relationship between BIGGA, John Deere and TPC Sawgrass stretches back over a decade, and we're incredibly proud of the role BIGGA members play in the hosting of The Players Championship each year.

"In participating in this initiative, BIGGA members join a global community of tournament volunteers who have created memories that will last a lifetime, and so our thanks go to John Deere and the team at TPC Sawgrass for enabling our members to return in 2025."

Chris Meacock, John Deere division sales manager for golf and turf, said: "It's hugely rewarding to hear just how much greenkeepers who take part in this initiative take from the experience. It's a once-in-a-career trip that adds real value in terms of professional development.

"John Deere is proud of its long-standing partnership with BIGGA, which has enabled dozens of talented greenkeepers to see what tournament set up is like on one of the biggest stages of all." **GI**



TPC Sawgrass Volunteers 2025

- Scotland & Northern Ireland: Alistair Morrison, Durness Golf Club
- Northern: James Hampson, Llanymynech Golf Club
- Central England: Jake Boardman, Frilford Heath Golf Club
- South West & South Wales: Sam Ewing, Crane Valley Golf Club
- South East: Wayne Aris, Langley Park Golf Club
- International: Damien Coleman, Galway Bay Golf Resort, Ireland
- International: Timothy Leat, Rich River Golf Club, Australia

From Ibrox to Buchanan Castle – the amazing legacy of BIGGA's new president

BIGGA is proud to reveal the appointment of former Buchanan Castle Course Manager Ronnie Myles as president of the association for 2025



When Jim Croxton sat down for a conversation with Ronnie Myles at the BIGGA National Championship, the former UEFA-licensed referee could tell something was up.

"I had a suspicious conversation with Jim," said BIGGA Life Member Ronnie, 67. "He was asking certain questions that made it intriguing. Then a fortnight later he phoned me and said the National Board had nominated me to be BIGGA president.

"I was absolutely flabbergasted. I was very proud and honoured, obviously, because I've been a member for 50-odd years. When I was made president of BIGGA Scotland, I thought that was the pinnacle, but obviously that's now been surpassed."

Ronnie's career in greenkeeping began in May 1971 at East Kilbride Golf Club. A golfer, he spent a lot of time at the club and Head Greenkeeper David Peacock asked if he wanted a summer job. After two summers doing this, David offered him a permanent role and, despite being only 15, Ronnie accepted the apprenticeship offer and began what would become a lifelong career.

Over the past half century, across roles at Erskine, Helensburgh, Scarcroft and Buchanan Castle, Ronnie has witnessed many positive changes in the greenkeeping profession.

"I've seen massive enhancements in the profession and the trade and just the way that members now perceive greenkeepers," he said. "Speaking to members from different golf clubs, they now appreciate what the greenkeeping profession does.

"Before, it was just a case of 'they only cut grass', but it's become more and more technical. I can remember back in the 1970s when the first thing you threw on the grass in spring was nitro chalk to get the grass growing. If you got disease, you just sprayed it and there was no thought to what you were doing to the soil. We're much better now."

Ronnie was introduced to greenkeeper associations by Bob Moffat, the secretary of the Scottish & International Golf Greenkeepers Association from 1963 to 1976, and

he joined his first committee aged just 20.

Ronnie said: "My first event was at Windy Hills Golf Club in 1971 and myself and Bob picked up a guy called Ian Fraser, who also became SIGGA secretary. We dropped him off at his house afterwards and I met his daughter Kay, who I later married. So believe it or not, SIGGA was what introduced me to my wife."

At Erskine, Ronnie hosted the Scottish Professional Championship, won by Sam Torrance and broadcast live on the BBC. The family then relocated to Helensburgh, where the venue hosted multiple amateur European championships. Ronnie continues to volunteer at high-level events to this day, heading to The JCB last summer as Callum Wark and his team hosted a LIV Golf event, and volunteering for The Open Volunteer Support Team in 2022.

While still based in Scotland, Ronnie got into a second career as a first-class football match official, overseeing Scottish first division fixtures where he worked his way through the ranks to run the line for an Old Firm game in January 1987, despite being a lifelong Rangers fan.

He must have done a good job, however, as a letter arrived through the post soon after informing Ronnie that he'd been

selected to join the officiating team for a European Cup tie in Copenhagen, a match that coincidentally was future Rangers legend Brian Laudrup's first European appearance.

"It just shows you how one game can make or break your career," Ronnie said. "Just that one high-profile game and everything went right for me."

Five more European ties awaited Ronnie, including a hair-raising trip to communist East Berlin, but the strains of doing a full-time greenkeeping job and match officiating were beginning to tell on the family. A broken leg suffered at his wife's birthday party during an ill-advised attempt at skateboarding left Ronnie in a plaster cast for 16 weeks and it was soon after that he

I was absolutely flabbergasted"

“I’ve seen massive enhancements in the profession”



Ronnie with Dave Jones of Knutsford



Ronnie and Euan Bogle won nearest the pin prizes at the BIGGA National



David Fellows, Paul Russell and Ronnie Myles

decided to hang up his flag and whistle.

Ronnie’s connection to football didn’t end there and, through his friendship with Alan Ferguson, then the head groundsman at Ibrox and now head of pitches for FIFA, he became a matchday groundsperson – though that was not his most memorable role.

Ronnie explained: “The mascot at Rangers is called Broxi Bear and the guy who played him was unwell. Alan came into the ground and said, ‘They’re looking for someone to be Broxi Bear today’, and stupidly I said, ‘I’ll do it!’. I began doing every home game and before I knew it, I was doing it on a permanent basis, so for two and a half years, I was Broxi Bear.”

Out on the golf course, Ronnie’s greenkeeping career took a twist as he made the decision to move the family to Yorkshire, taking up the head greenkeeper role at Scarcroft near Leeds.

“It was the best club I ever worked

for,” said Ronnie. “The things they did for me and my family were unbelievable.”

But the family failed to settle and after three years they moved back to Scotland, where Ronnie’s career continued at Buchanan Castle, the place he would remain until retiring from full-time work in 2022.

Ronnie’s deputy, Matt Housman, remains course manager at Scarcroft today and he’s part of a long legacy that Ronnie is particularly proud of. Among his former staff he now counts 11 current head greenkeepers, with many others in various roles across the golf industry.

After retiring from Buchanan Castle, Ronnie has taken up part-time seasonal work at Stirling, close to where the family now lives.

“This might seem strange,” Ronnie said. “But the last two years have been my most enjoyable in greenkeeping. I come in on a morning, I cut greens or whatever James [the course manager] asks me to do. Then I wash the machine,

put it away and go home. I’m not having to worry about managing staff, managing budgets, managing everything and it has just given me great satisfaction.”

The BIGGA presidency role may mean he steps away from Stirling for the next year or so, but Ronnie sees it as an opportunity to give back to the profession that has given him so much.

“This year I hope we’re able to enhance the profile of greenkeepers and continue the progression of our association, which has come a long way over the last 10 to 15 years. Fifty years ago it was thought of as a dead-end profession but now, there’s a real opportunity that comes with greenkeeping and the chance to build a great career.

“My first job was on the golf course, my refereeing career started on the golf course because the refereeing supervisor was a member at East Kilbride, and I met my wife through golf. It’s just amazing how golf has impacted my life.” **GI**



The Legacy Club

Through the greenkeepers he has worked with throughout his 50 years in greenkeeping, Ronnie has already left a remarkable legacy. But not content, he now sits alongside other Scottish greenkeeping veterans to develop the Legacy Club.

This is a group of BIGGA members who have been in greenkeeping 25 years or more and who are over 55 years of age. Anyone working in Scotland who falls into that category is invited to attend the club, which hosts events including the Legacy Championship in June each year. The group also decides the winners of several Scottish Awards categories and determines the president and vice-president of BIGGA Scotland.

But there's also the opportunity for mentoring the next generation that Ronnie is keen to explore.

Ronnie said: "The Legacy Club is about having that expertise and passing it on to the next generation. We sat around a table one day, there was 24 of us, and we realised we had over 1,000 years' worth of experience in greenkeeping between us.

"Trainee greenkeepers may not realise that the world is their oyster, but a greenkeeper trained in the UK is worth their weight in gold and that's recognised the world over.

"It's such a wonderful occupation and I hope over the next 18 months the Legacy Club begins to help people appreciate that."

For more information about the Legacy Club, contact John Young, BIGGA MSM for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

If you're well paid, work great hours, get good holidays and really feel appreciated at work, carry on reading the magazine, it's a very good read.

If not, scan the QR code and watch this...



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Member Interest

Where we meet your fellow turf professionals and share their stories

■ **Chris Sealey:** The greenkeepers' greenkeeper and former BIGGA board member reflects on a career spanning more than half a century



A hobby to die for – meet the greenkeeper who acts in murder mysteries

Dave Collins has been stabbed and killed more than once, which sounds like awfully bad luck – not to mention miraculous – but he keeps coming back for more.

The head greenkeeper at Lickey Hills has been acting in murder mysteries across the West Midlands for the past 12 years, demonstrating a range that would test even Hollywood's finest, from besuited gent to a stricken Father Christmas.

It is a hobby that pays, just like his role on the matchday ground staff at Villa Park, and both pursuits provide a welcome break from the trials and tribulations of working at a golf course that has regularly fallen foul of vandals.

"I'd never done any acting before,

but somebody suggested I go for an audition," he explained.

"I got through and I absolutely love doing it.

"When you've got a lot going on at work, it's good to let your hair down and have a complete break from it."

Dave does two or three such events every month and admits he still feels some nerves each time, though the pleasure he takes in being able to inhabit another character brings him great joy. His wife Nicki also gets involved and has reportedly "taken great pleasure" in murdering Dave more than once.

While murder mysteries may not be an obvious path for many greenkeepers to choose as their release from the day job, Dave

highlights the vital importance of having some way for turf professionals to channel their energy away from the golf course.

And as someone whose course has unfortunately suffered more than 30 incidents of vandalism this year, Dave knows just how challenging a job it can sometimes be.

"We have a lot of issues at our golf course with damage from bikes and motorbikes," he said. "I know other greenkeepers face the same problems and it can be really hard.

"I'm fortunate to have two hobbies which I get paid for and they are my escape, because greenkeeping can become all-encompassing and it's important to have a way to get away from it." **GI**



A photograph of a utility site. In the foreground, a large black metal structure, possibly a gate or part of a crane, is visible. Behind it, there are green trees and a clear blue sky. A white and black utility box is mounted on a post, with yellow hoses and other equipment nearby.

The Sealey Years

Chris Sealey certainly made an impact during his long career in greenkeeping, with many citing him as a mentor and friend. The popular former BIGGA board member reflects on more than half a century in the industry



Highlights

12 Opens
2007 US Open
2008 Ryder Cup
2010 Ryder Cup

It's all well and good having grand plans and mapping out the life you want, but sometimes things just happen and you go with the flow. For Chris Sealey, who last month called time on a fine 54-year career, his start in greenkeeping came in precisely that fashion.

Back in 1970, just a teenager with little idea of what he wanted to do for work, Chris was caddying at Lansdown Golf Club for a friend of his father's who happened to be the greens chairman. Not only that, but this was a greens chairman on the lookout for new staff.

"They were thinking of taking on an apprentice," Chris explained. "I wasn't too committed to what I wanted to do at that time, so I thought I'd give it a go."

“I left school when I was 15, had one week off, and then I started greenkeeping – I've done nothing else ever since”

Lansdown provided a bracing introduction to the profession, with the course perched on a hilltop just outside Bath and affording panoramic views but little in the way of protection from the elements. Chris was also going in cold in terms of his understanding of exactly what greenkeeping entailed, and he readily admits to initially thinking, "it was just cutting grass".

"It took me a good while before I started to understand the job and the depth to it," he confessed. "I was well into my apprenticeship before I could appreciate the finer details of managing soils, pesticides, insecticides, fungicides, pests,

diseases, weeds, drainage and so on, as well as cutting the grass of course!"

After 12 years at Lansdown, Chris was relieved to be able to shed "about three layers of clothing" when he moved to lower-lying Saltford as deputy, where he was inspired under the tutelage of boss Ian McFarlane to broaden his skill set beyond the agronomic sphere, leading him to what would become a long-standing association with BIGGA.

"Ian sadly passed away a few years ago but he taught me so much," he said. "This was also around the time I got involved with BIGGA and started going to Harrogate and attending seminars.

"When I joined Saltford I didn't have much managerial experience and BIGGA was running week-long management training courses at headquarters, which was at Aldwark in those days.

"They were really good because it was a bit of agronomy, but a lot of it was management techniques, interview techniques, how to deal with staff, how to motivate staff, how to manage a budget. That really helped me learn that side of the job."

Still, the position of deputy was one Chris enjoyed so much that the offer of a course manager's role at Chippenham did not immediately persuade him to leave.

"Being deputy is great because you get the best jobs, but you don't have to deal with the staff on a regular basis, and you don't have to deal with the directors and the committees," he said.

"I really wasn't sure about it and I came up a few times to Chippenham before making a decision, and in the end I'm glad I chose to make the move."

He can't have known when he arrived in 1990 that the



Career Timeline



What BIGGA means to me

The value that BIGGA has provided to me throughout my career has been enormous. One of the greatest things it provides is networking opportunities. We all have times when we're down in the dumps or you're getting criticised, and it can often be things beyond your control – like the weather! But you can always pick up the phone to another BIGGA member, friends you've made thanks to that common ground, and you'll be able to have a good chat and feel better about it. Having been involved with BIGGA at many levels, it's always been the people who have provided the highlights.



Wiltshire venue would be the place he would see out the rest of his career, let alone the many amazing experiences he would have along the way.

Chris' willingness to embrace opportunities has opened doors to worlds seen by only a few, such as when he travelled to Oakmont as a volunteer at the 2007 US Open for a trip that left him with an envy matched in colour by the verdant putting surfaces.

"I was talking over a coffee one morning with the consultant agronomist and we got to the subject of the budget," he explained. "I wasn't asking for a figure because I could only imagine how much it would be, but he told me, 'JZ [Superintendent John Zimmer] is the only man who can overspend an unlimited budget'.

"On the Wednesday before the tournament, JZ came over and asked what I thought could be done to improve the course and I said, 'What, apart from putting a roof on it?'. It was just immaculate. The greens were the fastest I've ever seen – like putting on a marble staircase."

Such experiences will live long in the memory for Chris, but his real legacy is in his work with BIGGA – having risen to the position of chairperson in 2014 after many years' involvement at section, regional and national level – and in the transformative impact he has had at Chippenham.

His first task was to bring the greens up to scratch, having inherited surfaces that were "dark green and spongy". The fact some members liked it that way meant Chris had to cash in on the goodwill sometimes afforded to course managers in their "honeymoon period" as he set about putting things right.

"I came in and ripped everything to bits," he said. "There were chunks of turf flying all over the place because the greens

The future's bright

I've been a judge for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year and been involved with many other initiatives and what I love is seeing the enthusiasm there among the younger generation in this industry. There are some fantastic opportunities out there to engage with if you're prepared to put yourself forward and I would encourage people to do just that. I think a lot of people were terrified when Covid hit that it might be the end for many golf clubs, but in fact many more people have taken up golf and the need is greater than ever for educated, motivated and committed greenkeepers.



had never had any hollow tining or deep spiking and it was all shallow-rooted, and just a case of: water, fertiliser, cut.

"The members loved them because they were easy to land a ball on and then I came along and stopped watering them, stepped fertilising, did some scarifying and really got to work on them, and of course quite often they were almost yellow to start with. I had to get that work done in my honeymoon period."

Chris knew that short-term pain would deliver long-term gain, and sure enough Chippenham's greens flourished, with a programme of sand top-dressing cultivating surfaces that are smooth and consistent and benefit from much-improved drainage, even if members now have to be a little more accurate.

“I came in and ripped everything to bits”

The playing experience and reputation of Chippenham were greatly enhanced during Chris's tenure as he was also an integral figure in the addition of seven new holes in 2012, something he relished.

"It was wonderful to be a part of that development, transforming 45 acres from a farmer's field into part of a golf course," he said. "I was heavily involved on a daily basis from the design to the grow-in and it was a fascinating and incredibly rewarding process."

Speaking shortly before heading into a hard-earned

retirement, Chris shared a vignette of his life as a greenkeeper that serves as a reminder why people can fall in love with the job, even those who in their youth assumed it was little more than cutting grass.

"I've always loved looking at the golf course, either in the early morning sunshine or the evening as the sun is going down, when the long fescue rough is blowing in the breeze and there's a golden glow to the landscape – that was my favourite way to see it," he reflected.

With such comforting memories to take with him, Chris is leaving Chippenham in the safe hands of Nick Perkins and, though he will gladly be on hand to assist his successor if required and has also lined up some consultancy work, he is otherwise looking forward to spending more time with Patricia, his ever-supportive partner of 32 years.

"We're off to India for a month in February," he said. "We're going to see the Taj Mahal, and then a few weeks in Sri Lanka."

On Chris' return from his last trip to the South Asian island, he was greeted on his first day back at work by a ruptured water main that was coughing up 7,500 litres a minute. He can rest assured that won't happen this time, or at least if it does, it'll be someone else's problem. Meanwhile, Chris will be preoccupied with a new companion of the four-legged variety, who he hopes will keep him active as he contemplates turning 70 next April.

"Because of the hours that I work, I haven't had a dog for the last 12 years, so I'm going to have a dog again," he said. "I like to have a beer or two, so having a dog to take for walks will help me counteract that!" **GI**

Wholehearted and humble – Jim Croxton

I've often heard Chris referred to as 'the greenkeepers' greenkeeper', which I think is the perfect way to sum him up. He's absolutely had his heart in the industry and the association throughout, but he's always been a very humble and nice man. He also had exceptionally high standards as a greenkeeper and has been a mentor to many. I'd like to thank Chris for his support and friendship over the years and wish him all the best in retirement.

First a mentor, now a friend – John Keenaghan

In my early years in greenkeeping, Chris was a mentor for me. He got me involved in Section Committee and then Regional Board, and I'm grateful for that. We talk on a regular basis and we go out to dinner with our wives, so it's more of a big friendship now. Chris has worked so hard at Chippenham to turn it around. I know in retirement he won't be one for sitting on the beach – he won't be able to stay away. He's got a good relationship with Nick, who is coming in as course manager, and Chris will be on hand for him with anything he wants to know. Chris is that type of guy.



Latest job vacancies

Assistant Greenkeeper

Knaresborough Golf Club, North Yorkshire



Knaresborough GC are seeking an experienced Assistant Greenkeeper to join the team.

The ideal applicant will have 2+ years' experience, a positive work attitude, be flexible, self-motivated and able to work to a flexible weekend rota system and be resourceful and organised with the ability to prioritise appropriately.

Qualifications: NVQ Level 2 or equivalent and above; PA1, PA2 and PA6a chemical application licenses; City & Guilds NPTC Level 3 Award in Felling and Processing Trees Over 380mm; Digger qualifications desirable but not essential
In return you will receive: Competitive salary (up to £27,500 dependent on experience and qualifications); company pension scheme; pro-active career development; BIGGA membership; 50% discount on meals while at work; 28 days holiday per annum (including bank holidays); complimentary golf.

Applications via email to: manager@kgc.uk.com

Assistant Head Greenkeeper

Tyrifjord Golfklubb, Norway



Tyrifjord is seeking an experienced Assistant Head Greenkeeper to join our team. Located just 40km from Oslo, our course offers a unique, natural setting and has hosted the Norwegian Strokeplay Championship.

You will work closely with our Head Greenkeeper, Nick Dash, to maintain the course to the highest standards.

The ideal candidate will have NVQ Level 3 in Greenkeeping, at least 7 years of experience and strong leadership skills.

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Waterton Park Golf Club, West Yorkshire



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Salary: Starting from £25,000 per year (negotiable based upon experience).

If you are interested in this role, please email a copy your CV and a covering letter to info@watertonparkgc.co.uk by Friday 13th December 2024.

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Chris Yeaman is looking forward to tackling some long-standing drainage issues on several greens



What we do in... December

Club: Royal Burgess Golfing Society of Edinburgh, Scotland

We are gearing up for a busy month to finish the year, with drainage work at the top of the priority list.

As it was such a wet winter and spring at the start of 2024, we extended the season for an extra three weeks and were still playing normal summer conditions into November. That meant our routine winter maintenance tasks were pushed back and we had to complete those before moving onto the bigger projects.

Now we're in a position to tackle long-standing drainage issues on three greens and one of our fairways.

Starting with the 13th green, we'll install a full drainage system feeding into a main drain that's in the area, before doing the same with the 5th and the 3rd. Our plan is to

have that completed by Christmas.

We did the same with the 11th and 15th greens two years ago, and the difference was remarkable. We found underneath, like a lot of greens back in the day, that they were built on ash that had come from factories, so the water didn't have anywhere to go.

Once we got through the ash layer, we were down to 20 inches – where 100mm

WavinCoil drainage pipe was put in, then washed drainage grit, then 70/30 root zone and then the turf went back on.

Within two weeks, we had the annual Captain's Bell competition, and we had heavy rain into the early hours, but by the time they teed off at half eight, the greens were perfect.

The next day I had an email from the captain saying he couldn't believe the improvement in how

quickly those greens drained.

In addition to the greens, we'll be addressing the fairway on the 1st, as the first 150-180 yards is quite flat, then it goes up and flattens again, so water accumulates in the lower part.

We'll connect the drainage there to what's called a Cundy, a hand-built system underground that's common around Edinburgh where stones are assembled like in a dry-stone wall, leaving gaps for water to seep through and drain away.

This project will be undertaken in-house, as we have our own AFT trencher and gravel barrow, with seven of the team working on it. The other two will be on leaf duty, which is always a big task for us. **GI**



Now, we're in a position to tackle long-standing drainage issues on three greens and one of our fairways"

Changing times for turf disease

Weather patterns are creating an increasing challenge for turf management. That has huge implications for damaging disease effects.



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Changing weather patterns have created a wholesale shift in diseases affecting turf in recent seasons, along with the patterns of outbreaks occurring.

Where early winter microdochium patch (fusarium) was once the primary scourge of surface quality, on many golf courses dollar spot is now having the most protracted damaging effects, or anthracnose hits during periods of turf stress.

But as weather patterns continue to change, with prolonged leaf wetness and the warm micro-climate of the turf surface, so management practices need to evolve to meet different disease threats. Greenkeepers and turf managers must be ready to better adapt strategies and practices to effectively counter the threats.

Hard winter frosts, that were once a huge helping hand in stopping disease development, are now few and far between for many in a 'new-normal' season. And, if the trends continue, will be less and less frequent in the

future. Even a short cold snap is now often bookended by periods of mild and wet weather.

In Bingley, Yorkshire, for example, where we conduct many turf trials and fairly central to UK, in the 1990s around 17% of the year the temperatures were too cold for microdochium

patch to develop. However, in 2020 that had reduced to just 6% (Fig 1).

Looking at the trends for dollar spot conducive conditions (Fig 2), it is clear why the disease is becoming more prevalent, and why, without greenkeepers' intervention, that is likely to continue. Furthermore,

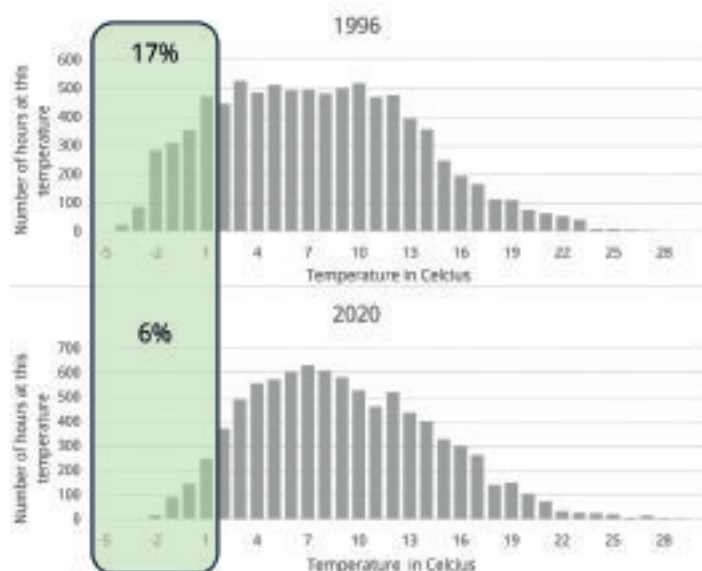


Fig 1: Reducing hours of temperature suitable to stop microdochium developing



New strategies are required to counter wet and warm weather conditions that favour disease development.

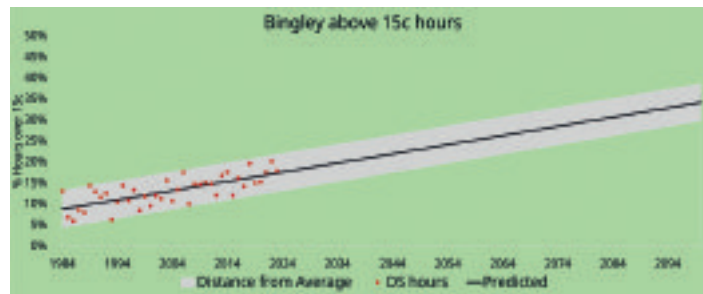


Fig 2:
The trend
to warmer
temperatures
is increasing
dollar spot
pressure

pathogens increasing.

With such fluid multi-factor influences and the relatively rapid change in conditions, it is more important than ever to have fungicide plans and strategies that can be adapted to the complexity of current situations.

The first, and fundamental, change is that a historical approach of fixed routine fungicide applications, relying on the same products applied on calendar dates, have little value in tackling today's challenges.

Fungicide programmes must now be more dynamic and more adaptable to seasonal threats and real-time disease pressures, using the most appropriate

fungicide applications are going to be required to maintain the consistent level of disease control compared to current conditions. Fortunately, greenkeepers now have more fungicide products available and more effective options, with further new chemistry from Syngenta in the UK registration system.

There will be increased pressure to use the fungicides more effectively, including application best practice and improved timing of treatments to prevent disease establishing that could increase infection pressure.

ITM will help to create healthier plants that are better able to withstand the

Fungicide programmes into the future must be more dynamic and adaptable to real-time disease pressures

similar changes in rainfall patterns and temperatures have ramifications for disease development and for turf health. That's all compounded by turf itself struggling to adapt to rapidly changing seasonal weather conditions and management strategies.

Most greenkeepers have instigated and evolved successful Integrated Turf Management (ITM) practices to mitigate against some of the common disease threats, and why microdochium is possibly in better control in recent years. But as weather patterns and diseases change, some of those practices - such as nutrition, height of cut or moisture management - may, inadvertently, be contributing to other

products at the optimum timing.

ITM strategies will remain crucial, but the timing and the intensity of actions may need to be adapted to counter different disease pressures.

Better forecasting of diseases and matching to weather conditions has developed hugely in recent years, with improved accuracy of the disease models and precision weather forecasting. The Smith Kerns model, for example, has been instrumental in identifying dollar spot risks, with the model in the Syngenta Turf Advisor app proven to enhance disease control through better Instrata Elite and Ascernity fungicide application timing.

Another factor for closer consideration will be the frequency of fungicide applications required to protect turf through prolonged periods of increased disease pressure at higher temperatures. Disease pathogens are more active in warmer conditions, while the duration of efficacy of fungicides is shortened when it is hotter.

Essentially, in most situations more

effects of stress, which is often a precursor of disease outbreaks. Promoting stronger plants, typically with greater and deeper root mass, builds better resilience to the changing climatic stress.

Combinations of biostimulants and fungicides, along with other turf health inducing attributes of Primo Maxx II PGR and Qualibra moisture management strategies, for example, can keep greenkeepers ahead of changing disease pressures - backed by ongoing turf research and decision support tools to help get the best possible results.



Follow the conversation



Author: Sean Loakes, Syngenta Technical Manager UK & Ireland

Read this for:

- Future fungicide strategy
- Disease forecasting
- ITM approaches

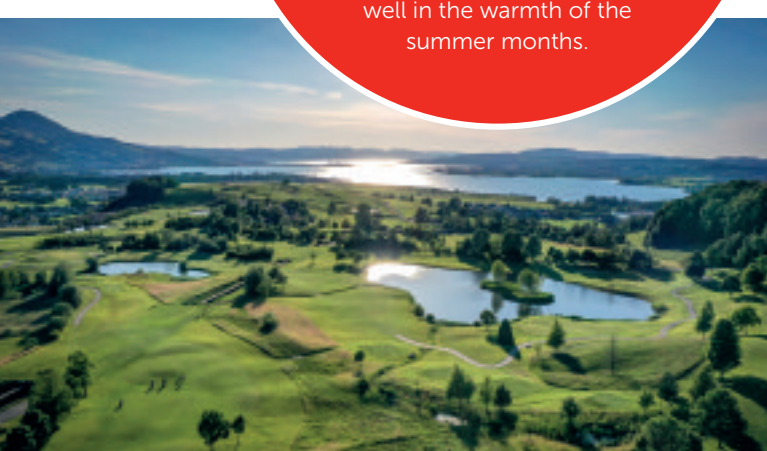


The world of greenkeeping

From Italy to India and America to Australia, there are BIGGA members working all over the world

Steven on the Swiss climate

We have 8-9 months of summer here, when the temperature can get up to 36-38 Celsius, and 3-4 months of winter, when it can go as low as minus 30. We have creeping bent on the tees, greens and fairways as it's the perfect grass type for our climate – it survives well through the winter and copes well in the warmth of the summer months.





Steven Tierney MG
Golfpark Zurichsee, Switzerland



Steven Tierney went to Switzerland at the age of 20 for what was supposed to be a three-month stay and never came back.

Having started out at Turton Golf Club in Bolton, Steven spent time at Fulford before heading to the continent to help with the grow-in for the nine-hole course at Golfpark Zurichsee. By the time he was 21, the head greenkeeper's job was his.

His subsequent long career included spells in Germany, Austria and the Middle East, but the Master Greenkeeper is now settled and enjoying life at his Zurich course, where he is setting the standard in environmental best practice.

Steven has received multiple accolades that demonstrate his green credentials, the latest of which came at the 2024 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards, where he was chosen by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America as the winner of the Healthy Land Stewardship Award.

It is a category that recognises effective strategies for efficient use of pesticides and nutrients, as well as pollution prevention – all things that matter to Steven.

"We are guardians of the natural habitats, not just the golf course," he said. "In my opinion, we should be doing everything possible to maintain it to better the environment we live in today and be able to pass it on to the next generations knowing we have done our best to maintain and improve our golf courses and local environments."

Steven has been in the industry 42 years, spending the last 26 at Golfpark Zurichsee, where he and his team use zero insecticide. To combat leatherjacket outbreaks, the team use black plastic tarps on greens at night and then manually clear the larvae in the morning.

They use 18-foot buffer zones around all water and do not mow wildflower meadow areas before 10 June each year. In addition, a recycling programme has reduced waste 30% in the last 10 years as the facility works to get as close to zero waste as possible.

Steven and his team of 12 have a healthy budget to work with at the privately owned facility, which he likened to an American resort course, though his pride comes not only in producing a course that reflects that financial clout but doing so in a way that upholds a greenkeeper's duty to safeguard the environment.

"With fungicides we're down to two or three applications a season now," he said. "We do a lot more mechanical work and keep the grass plant healthy without using chemicals."

It's an approach that has yielded impressive results, with a 2024 GEO Certification report stating: "The head greenkeeper prefers to try more mechanical treatment to improve the root zone of the turf, helping to remove soil compaction and support better irrigation and aeration. The results are deeper rooting and healthier surfaces."

"We are guardians of the natural habitats, not just the golf course"

Golfpark Zurichsee has been GEO Certified since 2009, having earned the endorsement five times, and Steven wants the message spread far and wide that golf courses are havens for wildlife.

"Greenkeepers can sometimes be our own worst enemy, because we do all this work and we document it all, but we don't share it – we don't inform the public what we're doing and the benefits it has," he explained.

"Every year we do a different ecological study involving the national association, the government and our own staff, and it could be to do with butterflies or birds or plant diversity, and we document it and publish it. It all goes towards that GEO Certification and it highlights the work we're doing here for the environment." **GI**

GEO Certified since 2009

The 2024 GEO Certification report for Golfpark Zurichsee cited:

- A 20% increase in natural areas
- Extensive wildflower meadows in out-of-play areas
- Six man-made lakes and biotopes providing habitat for birds, amphibians, mammals and insects
- The installation of bird boxes, attracting a wide variety of species
- A 90% self-sufficiency in terms of irrigation water



Blackmoor:

A course transformed,
one bunker at a time



James Norris has overseen a transformation at Blackmoor Golf Club that he hopes will leave a legacy long after he has gone.

Blackmoor Golf Club's three-year improvement project was concluded in August, bringing upgrades to all 18 holes on the Harry Colt course.

Work to upgrade the bunkers and improve drainage had long been on Course Manager James Norris' wish list, with the reshaping of fairways to enhance visibility and aesthetics having come as an added bonus along with new pathways and heather planting.

The project, delivered in partnership with architects LOBB & Partners and contractors Profusion Environmental, represents an investment in the region of half a million pounds in the Hampshire venue, which was already ranked among the top 100 courses in England.

James has been at Blackmoor for 20 years and hopes the bunker refurbishment, which has yielded immediate results to the playing conditions and ease of maintenance, will futureproof the club and further bolster its reputation as one of the finest heathland courses in Britain.

Why did the bunkers need this work?

We are fortunate that Blackmoor sits on sandy subsoil which helps alleviate flooding and support course drainage, however, over time the bunkers had changed shape and the sand mix had become inconsistent. We would often find the bunkers would hold water and, particularly through winter, we'd have flooding issues. It was difficult to achieve the quality and consistency we wanted with things the way they were. Previous attempts to address the issues with drainage projects and different sand types were sticking plasters and we wanted long-term improvements.

When was the idea for this project first formulated?

We had been speaking to a few architects and other golf clubs who had done this type of work to get



About Blackmoor Golf Club

Established in 1913, Blackmoor is a stunning par-69 heathland golf course designed by renowned golf architect Harry Colt. Noted for its quality greens and playable throughout the year, the course is ranked within the top 100 in England. Blackmoor hosted the regional qualifying for The Open between 1998 and 2003, is an England Golf Championship venue and is home to the Selborne Salver, one of Britain's most prestigious amateur events, attracting both International and Walker Cup Players.

“The project has allowed us to present higher quality bunkers with less labour input”

some insight on what's involved. After we appointed LOBB & Partners, we did a presentation to members to get them on board with the idea of a whole refurb. They were fully behind it and it was just a case of finding the funding, but then Covid hit and I thought that would put a stop to it. As we know, Covid ended up providing a boost to golf and that allowed us to commit to the project.

How many bunkers did it involve?

As we decided to do the whole course rather than just the worst bunkers, there were 41 in total. There had been more in the past but some had been filled in over time. This project took the number up to 45 as a few more were added to enhance the strategic play on some holes.

Can you explain the role of the golf course architects?

They were critical in this and I must say Tim Lobb was excellent to work with, as were the contractors. We still had a lot of the original bunkers because there hadn't been too much interference, but they assessed every bunker based on aspects such as its location, size and shape.

They looked at whether they were causing traffic issues in walk-off areas around greens and other pinch points, and they determined whether they were adding anything to the playing experience.

The underpinning philosophy was that the bunkers should be smaller, in the right position to enhance the playing experience, and also they should be visible. That was not the

case with all of them, particularly if you were stood on the tee, so with those the face was raised up so it could be seen and not there as a hidden hazard.

What were the practical steps involved in upgrading each bunker?

Once those assessments had been made, the contractor came in with the digger to do the shaping work according to the architect's ideas and there was a concerted effort to ensure there was a style and visual impact that was consistent across the course. That process sometimes involved some little tweaks before the final look was rubberstamped by the architect.

The shape of the bunker was covered in a Type 1 scalping stone, with the drainage system installed into that, and then 50mm Blinder rubber liner was laid on top to create the pre-sand finish. We then addressed the edges before adding the sand.

Were the results immediately apparent?

We cut from our heather turf areas and transplanted it to the edges and that had an instant effect of naturalising the bunkers, so from a visual point of view it was very apparent. We had beautiful, manicured nursery turf brought in but put that in the areas that we were going to keep tidy and short, and then used turf from a site where there was native longer grass and had a mix between that and the heather to achieve a more rustic look.

And how about from a maintenance perspective?

That was the biggest thing – the difference was massive. The sand areas have been reduced which means there's less labour involved in maintaining it and we can offer a better standard in presentation with the raking and the edging, which itself requires less management.

When you include the improved drainage, the project has allowed us to present higher quality bunkers with less labour input.

What was the level of disruption while the work was ongoing?

From starting work in November on six holes, the bunkers would be out of play until the April of the next year. We did six holes each year and the contractors did not have any work going on at weekends to minimise disruption. On those six holes we'd obviously have the bunkers as ground-under-repair through that time, but by April we'd bring them into play for that season.

They did away with the winter competitions to allow us to get all of that done and the members were really understanding with it all.

Did it all go to plan?

It pretty much did actually, even the weather didn't prove too much of an issue. Nothing really came up that surprised us or set us back. We had maybe a couple of small drainage issues where we had to redo what we thought was a good drain to tap into, but nothing more than that.

How involved were your team?

I wanted to make sure everyone had the opportunity to be involved with this. This work meant our list of winter projects was reduced as the bunkers were our priority. The team all contributed to the cutting off turf and doing the edges around the bunkers as well as filling in the sand. It was important to have everyone involved in this and working with the contractors on a project as significant as this one was.

There must be pride at being involved in something that will leave a lasting legacy at Blackmoor?

Definitely. As with any project like this, you don't want to be accused of spending money on something that doesn't have any benefits, so you do put your neck on the line a bit. But you also understand that you're delivering a project that's



been designed and approved by experts who know what they're talking about, so you have trust that it will be worthwhile. We've had some great feedback from members and visitors and the work has definitely raised the profile of Blackmoor. It was a big step for the club to go ahead with this, but we're already seeing that it's been money well spent.

What other plans are in the pipeline?

There's lots more to do! The tee complexes are next on the list and we only have a small putting green so there's another project on the horizon to create a bigger one. We'll be continuing our upgrade to rubber-top pathways around the course as well. [GI](#)



“We're already seeing that it's been money well spent”



David Thompson discusses the pleasures and pitfalls of maintaining a course where trees are abundant.





Rooted in tradition – Hexham's trees are an invaluable part of the golf course

Hexham's trees are as aesthetically pleasing as they are agronomically challenging, and Course Manager David Thompson wouldn't have it any other way.

The traditional parkland course sits on free-draining land on the south side of the River Tyne, with its variety of trees – one thought to be over 700 years old – a stand-out feature.

This rich arboreal heritage is a point of pride for the club and its members, but it also presents a host of challenges for the greenkeeping team.

David has been at the Northumberland venue for 15 years, spending the last seven in his current role, and here he provides an insight into managing Hexham's tree-lined surfaces.

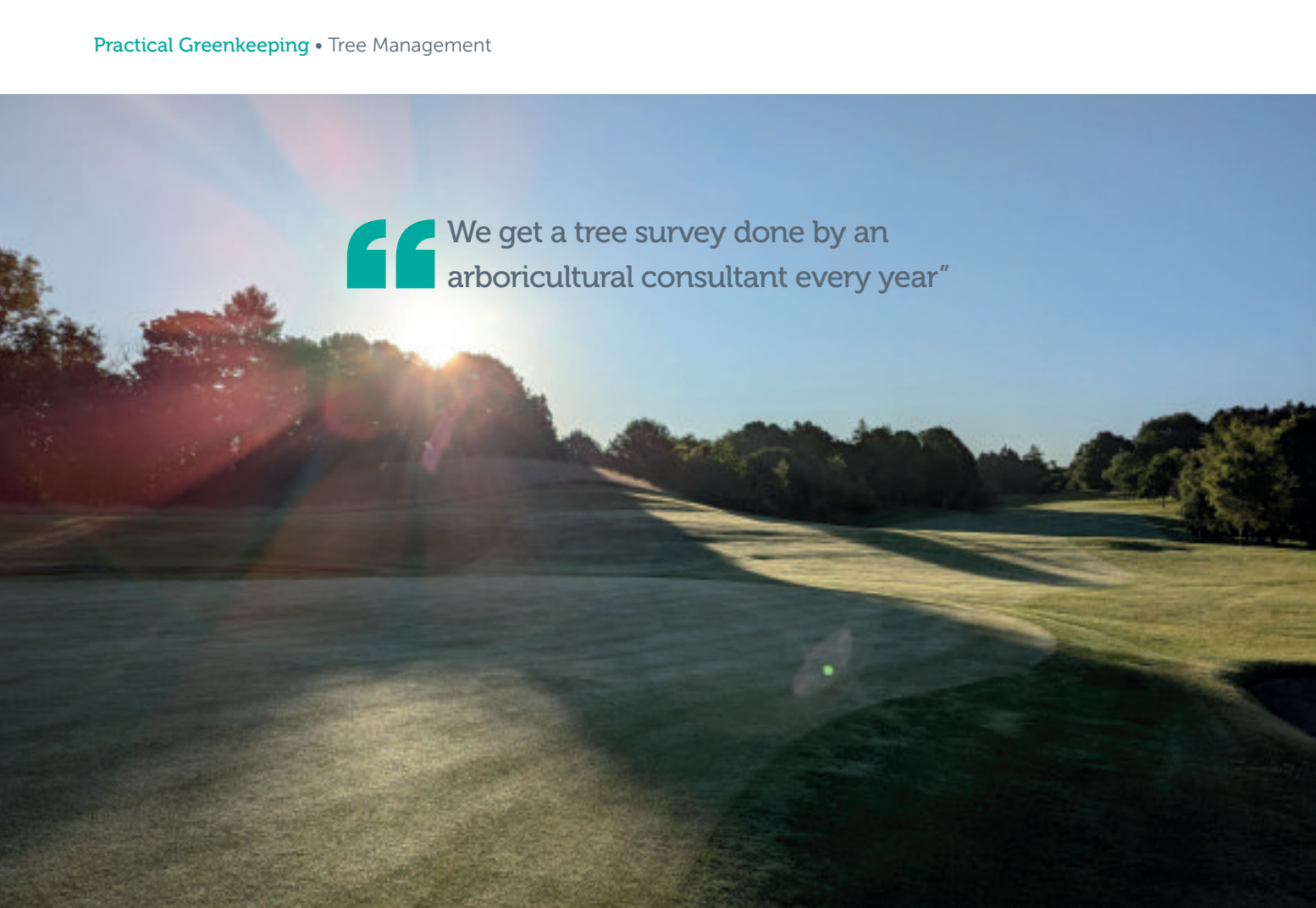
What variety of trees do you have at Hexham?

We have about 46 different types of tree on the golf course.

We have a lot of beech, ash, sycamore and a variety of oak trees. We have a large range of mixed-stage specimens, ranging from young to semi-mature, ornamental and amenity trees, and then to large veteran trees as well. Years ago one of the members went around and identified the different trees and we have around 200 identification plaques around the course.

Are there any particularly interesting ones?

We have one that ecologist James Hutchinson identified as being an ancient oak tree that's upwards of 700 years old, and that's registered in the Ancient Tree Inventory. It's called the Leper Oak as the present clubhouse used to be a leper hospital run by the monks from the nearby Hexham Abbey. They say people from the town used to put food out for the lepers underneath the tree.



“ We get a tree survey done by an arboricultural consultant every year”

What is pollarding and should you be doing it?

David revealed that one recommendation sometimes made by the arboricultural consultant is to pollard some trees, which involves cutting back a tree's main stem and branches to a predetermined height. This results in the tree producing new growth from the cut points, rather than continuing to grow taller.

The benefits of this method include:

- **Habitat creation:** By leaving the tree trunk and stems, it creates a habitat for invertebrates and other small organisms. This helps maintain biodiversity on the golf course.
- **Safety:** Pollarding can help address safety concerns with large, mature trees by removing the upper branches and reducing the risk of falling limbs without removing the tree entirely.
- **Preservation:** Pollarding retains the tree as a landscape feature while managing its growth and potential hazards.

What tree-management plans do you have in place?

We get a tree survey done by an arboricultural consultant every year. He surveys the whole site and identifies any areas that need addressing, including anything that's dead or decaying. Health and safety is a constant consideration because we have a main road that runs along the northern edge of our property and public bridleways which are heavily tree-lined.

He can recognise issues where we might not see them and there have been examples where we've thought a tree was healthy, but we've stripped the ivy off them and found big cavities and signs of significant decay. On the back of the report the consultant provides, we do the work that's necessary and we've been doing that for the past four years.

What problems do trees pose to the maintenance of a golf course?

It creates shade and moisture issues that cause disease pressure, particularly in the shoulder periods of spring and autumn when you get the low-lying sun. There are areas that don't get much sunlight and that impacts the type and quality of grass you can maintain. Leaves are a big factor and it's a lot of work to clear those. The tree roots suck up moisture and nutrients and that means the grass is dryer and under more stress, so there are a number of agronomic challenges to overcome when trees are such a feature on your course. If you didn't have the trees, the course wouldn't look as spectacular, but it would be a lot easier to manage!

Do you think the average golfer understands the



challenges for a greenkeeper managing a course where trees are so abundant?

I don't think they realise the resources and the logistics involved, particularly at this time of year. People who work in the industry will understand, but the average golfer sees trees as a nice feature of the course or something that might get in the way of their shot. The trees have a big impact on our resource here as a five-man team, where just clearing the leaves is a major daily challenge.

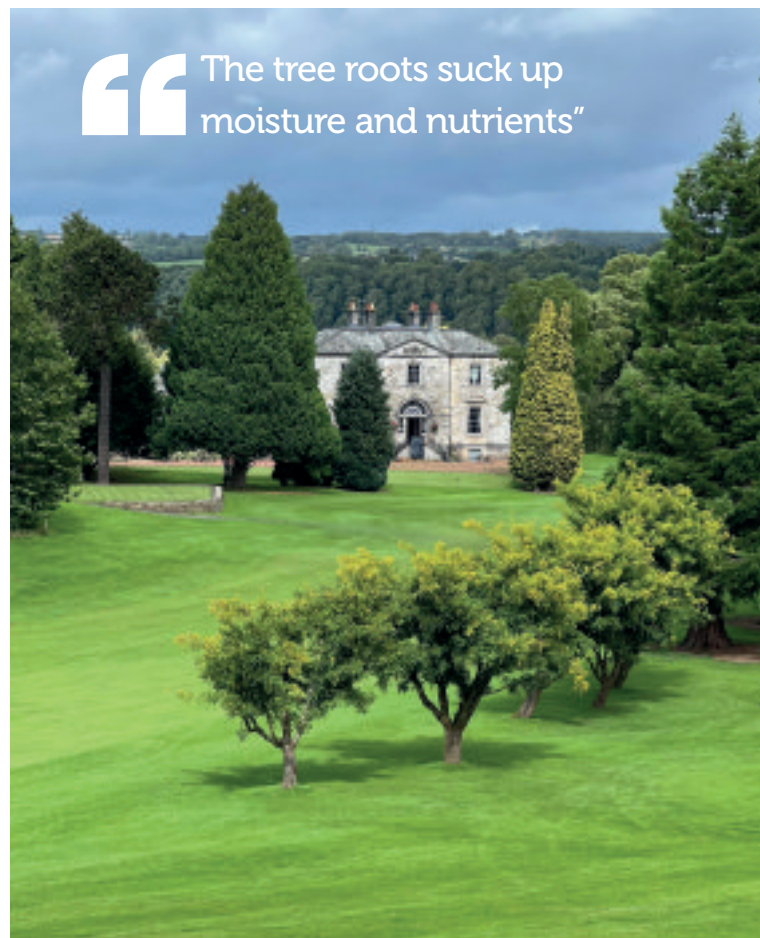
What part do the trees play in the wider ecosystem of the course?

The trees support vast amounts of insects, pollinators and birds large and small. You see in the spring they come to life, particularly the oaks and the beech, as they support a lot of invertebrates and that's a part of the food chain. We have raptors and all sorts of birds, so we put bird boxes up to encourage them. A lot of the older trees have holes and cavities which offer natural nesting areas.

How important is the ecological aspect of greenkeeping to you?

It's massive and it's something we put a lot of focus on at Hexham. In out-of-play areas we'll let the long grass come up and we have scrubland areas just left for the wildlife. We build eco-piles and encourage wildflower areas and do all sorts to promote biodiversity around the course. I think perceptions are changing now and people realise golf courses are great places for wildlife and it's part of our job as greenkeepers to make sure we're promoting that. **GI**

“The tree roots suck up moisture and nutrients”



Education & Training

As a member of the Greenkeeper's Training Committee, BIGGA is dedicated to elevating professional education with a range of dynamic resources— from local workshops to national conferences. We collaborate closely with UK training providers to ensure greenkeepers have access to formal qualifications that drive their career growth. Here, you'll find a selection of educational organisations offering training opportunities and apprenticeships designed specifically for golf greenkeepers.

The Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC) maintains a list of Approved Training Providers (ATPs), recommending colleges and training centres that deliver Government-approved greenkeeping courses and qualifications built by the GTC and key industry bodies.

Unsure about the best training provider, course, or qualification for your career path? Reach out to the GTC for guidance on choosing the right option for you. Contact rob@bigga.co.uk or jo@bigga.co.uk



Hadlow College



Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0AL
Contact: Anthony Stockwell
t: 01732 850551 e: AnthonyStockwell@northkent.ac.uk
w: www.hadlow.ac.uk

Hadlow College is proud to offer Level 2, 3, and 5 apprenticeships, providing a clear path from entry-level roles to management in greenkeeping. These qualifications are designed to grow your knowledge, sharpen your skills, and maximise career potential. Step into an exciting future in the greenkeeping industry and build a career that works flexibly around you. Discover our new opportunities and take the next step in your professional journey. For a full list of courses, visit www.hadlow.ac.uk.

For further information please contact
anthonystockwell@northkent.ac.uk or
waynesyres@northkent.ac.uk



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Myerscough College and University Centre is the pioneering centre for sports turf and golf course management education in Europe. Courses are available at all levels, from introductory practical skills training to the postgraduate Masters Degree in Sustainable Golf Course Management. There are options for full time or part time online study. The foundation degree, honours degree and MA programmes are available online and have students enrolled from across the globe. Apprenticeships delivery is across England and includes Golf Greenkeeper Level 2, Advanced Sportsturf Technician Level 3 and Golf Course Manager Level 5 with flexible start dates across the year. We also offer a wide range of industry short courses.



Plumpton College



Ditchling Road, Plumpton, East Sussex, BN7 3AE
Contact: Plumpton Business Services
t: 01273 892127 e: business@plumpton.ac.uk
w: www.plumpton.ac.uk

Plumpton College is a leading land-based further and higher education provider of apprenticeships and specialist training and assessments, supporting golf clubs and greenkeeping professionals across the South of England. The college delivers Golf Greenkeeping Level 2 and Advanced Sports Turf Technician Level 3 alongside a suite of LANTRA and NPTC-approved industry courses and assessments, delivered either at the main college near Brighton or onsite with the employer. Training is delivered by expert tutors with extensive experience of working in a commercial industry setting with excellent results for learners. Plumpton prides itself on its partnership with employers to develop the most appropriate learning programme to meet their business needs.



Sparsholt College



Westley Lane, Sparsholt, SO21 2NF
Contact: Karen Jackson
t: 01962 797452 e: Karen.Jackson@sparsholtservices.ac.uk
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Our stunning 450-acre campus boasts all the facilities students need. The college cares about the environment and is well on its journey towards carbon neutrality. We have a team of industry experts to deliver and assess the Level 2 Golf Greenkeeping and Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician Standards as well as the Level 2 Sports Turf and Level 2 Horticulture or Landscape Construction Operative standards. Our assessing and teaching team has experience that enables them to support with the End Point Assessment. In addition to this the college offers short courses in horticulture, landscaping and arboriculture, such as pesticide application, safe use of brush cutters and strimmers, first aid and more.



Askham Bryan College



Askham Bryan, York, YO23 3FR

Contact: Apprenticeship Department

t: 01904 772277 e: apprenticeships@askham-bryan.ac.uk

w: www.askham-bryan.ac.uk

Askham Bryan College is a specialist land-based college and university centre offering a large range of courses from foundation to degree level and beyond, which will set you up for a career doing what you feel passionate about. In addition to Level 2 Golf Greenkeeper, Level 2 Sports Turf Operative, Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician and Level 3 Advanced Golf Greenkeeper standards, we can offer specialist short-course training and bespoke CPD events based on your business need.

Askham Bryan college is a great place to study and is graded as 'good' for teaching and 'outstanding' by Ofsted for its care provision and accommodation. The college prides itself on making all students feel welcome and providing a great learning experience.



Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA)



Hall Place, Burchetts Green, SL6 6QR

Contact: Lawrence Jones

t: 01628 824444 e: Lawrence.Jones@windsor-forest.ac.uk

w: www.bca.ac / www.windsor-forest.ac.uk

Based on a beautiful 400-acre campus, BCA is one of the largest providers of greenkeeping qualifications in the country and has been delivering land-based and vocational education training since its establishment in 1949.

Our industry expert skills coaches deliver student focused guidance, support and training in an aligned approach that suits a work-based apprenticeship. BCA offers the Level 2 Golf Greenkeeping, Level 2 Sports Turf and Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician standards.

BCA also offers many short course programmes including PA1, PA2, PA6, chainsaw, brush cutter, tractor driving and first aid for those additional training needs.



Oldham College



Rochdale Road, Oldham, OL9 6AA

Contact: Phil Lomas

t: 07912 485436 e: Phil.Lomas@oldham.ac.uk

w: www.oldham.ac.uk

Oldham College is the first-choice college for work-based greenkeeping apprenticeships in Greater Manchester and the surrounding areas. Michael Russell, current Toro Greenkeeper of the Year, is a student at the College and working towards the completion of his Level 3 apprenticeship.

With strong employer links, the College offers Golf Greenkeeping Level 2 and Advanced Sports Turf Technician Level 3 Apprenticeship standards. We also offer short courses, including Pesticide Application and Safe Use of Mowers..

Our teaching staff have vast experience in the greenkeeping sector, keeping up-to-date with current practices to ensure high-quality provision is delivered. The team also has first-hand experience of the End Point Assessment process, ensuring apprentices will have the best possible experience.



Pershore College



Avonbank, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10 3JP

Contact: John Colclough

t: 0330 135 6940 e: employerenquiries@wgc.ac.uk

w: www.wgc.ac.uk/apprenticeships

A national centre for horticulture situated on a 60-hectare site near Evesham. Pershore College (part of WCG) offers the very best in land-based learning.

Land-based apprenticeship standards available at Pershore College include: Arborist (Level 2); Crop Technician (Container Based Level 3); Golf Greenkeeping (Level 2); Horticulture Supervisor (Level 3); Horticulture Operative (Level 2); Landscape Operative (Level 2); Land-based Service Engineering (Level 2 Engineer, Level 3 Technician); Sports Turf Operative (Level 2).

Pershore College also offers short courses in landscaping and horticulture as well as pesticides training: PA1, PA6 and more.



SRUC Elmwood



Carslogie Road, Cupar, Fife, KY15 5YT

Contact: Course enquiries team

t: 01334 658800 e: study@sruc.ac.uk

w: www.sruc.ac.uk

SRUC Elmwood is based in Fife just 10 miles from St Andrews. For those seeking an entry level qualification we offer Work Based Modern Apprenticeships at SVQ Level 2. For those looking to develop their managerial careers, the college offers SVQ Level 3 in Sportsturf, as well as our online Higher National Certificate/Diploma in Golf Course Management.

The curriculum is embedded with sustainability and enterprise, while offering an international perspective. We recognise the rapidly changing challenges facing the golf sector, their impact, and the opportunities they present to future leaders in the industry.



Suffolk New College



Charity Lane, Otley, Suffolk IP6 9NE

Contact: Apprenticeships

t: 01473 382600 e: apprenticeships@suffolk.ac.uk

w: www.suffolk.ac.uk

Our Suffolk Rural campus at Otley benefits from an extensive number of regional golf clubs where we offer a high quality educational experience for trainee greenkeepers, amongst an offer of 40+ apprenticeship standards. Our industry experts deliver Countryside Worker, Sports Turf Operative, Golf Greenkeeping and Horticulture or Landscape Operative routes as well as a wide range of business and professional services standards to support you in both attracting new talent and upskilling existing members of staff. Our workplace-based delivery model enables flexible start dates and assessment in the workplace. We also offer a range of short courses including pesticides encompassing PA1, PA2 & PA6 accreditation, chainsaw and first aid qualifications.





40 years of expertise

David Mitchison answers your top grinding questions

For over four decades, David Mitchison has been at the heart of Hunter Grinders, an industry leader renowned for its robust, precision-engineered grinding machinery. Hunter Grinders has become synonymous with strength and accuracy in the groundscape market.

Recently revitalised by the acquisition from Howardson Group Ltd in 2022, the brand now benefits from enhanced support and resources alongside other top-tier brands like Dennis, SISIS and Syn-Pro.

With 40 years of experience, David brings unmatched expertise to the field. In the Q&A here, he delves into some of the most frequently asked questions about grinding, sharing his insights and practical knowledge to help professionals make the most of their equipment.

1. What is the difference between spin and relief grinding?

Spin grinding is when you spin the cylinder via an external motor (spin unit). Spinning the cylinder is more like an impact grind where the cylinder is spinning around at variable speeds and the grinding wheel is spinning at 3000rpm. Thus, as the cylinder comes round, it's bouncing off the grinding wheel. As it does, the wheel hits multiple blades at a time - this is called flat grinding. This gives a sharp edge, but also will give more metal to metal as the cylinder wears down.

Relief grinding is when you grind a cylinder by grinding one blade at a time, taking the back of the blade off. This can be ground to a point, where we have found that we get a better cut on a full relieved ground cylinder. The full relief ground cylinder will give you more air in the unit, which as the cylinder rotates keeps things cooler, like the bottom blade which takes a little longer to sharpen. With this method of grinding, we find that the cylinder and bottom blade will stay on cut longer. Back lapping works more efficiently with this type of sharpening.

Spin & relief grinding is as it sounds. Spin the cylinder then take the back of the blade off with the relief grind. Some manufacturers prefer this type of grinding.

2. Is the process the same for grinding the cylinder vs the bottom blade?

Grinding the bottom blade is not the same as grinding cylinders.

Grinding bottom blades is more like surface grinding, but it is very important that the bottom blades are ground parallel, on the top and front faces.

3. Should cylinders and bed knives make contact to achieve a cut?

Cylinders and bottom blades should be set up with no contact, depending on how they are ground.

Spun ground cylinders can be set to no contact but will lose their edge quicker, therefore you end up lowering the units down to cut so you end up with contact. Relief ground cylinders are set with no contact and as the cylinder wears you get contact, but as the blade is relieved the contact is a lot less so the heat buildup is not as great as a spun ground cylinder.

4. What grinding paste options or alternatives are available and do they behave differently depending on different cylinders?

Grinding paste (back lapping) has different grades. This varies greatly as you have different types of cylinders;

Standard cylinders

Tungsten carbide impregnated (super hard)

The grits will make a great difference on different cylinders, this is something I don't use.

5. What is back lapping and how does it affect how often I need to regrind my cylinders?

Back lapping is when you spin the cylinder backward and apply a grinding paste to the cylinder that rubs against the bottom blade.

This method works well with fully relief ground cylinders, spin and relief ground cylinders.

Spun ground cylinders are not as efficient as the back of the blade, it's still there.

So, if you do a lot of back lapping with a spun ground cylinder you will find that the cylinder will start to get sharp on the back of the blade. Also, back lapping kills bottom blades.

6. I've seen people grind the actual bed knife carrier to make sure it's level before even thinking about doing the bed knife. Is this overkill or something you recommend checking?

If the bed knife carrier is twisted this can be reground. The bed

knife carrier, as it goes through its life, can twist as it heats up and then cools down, more so if you have contact with the cylinder.

7. I hear lots of terms from our mechanic when he is grinding; true, centered, dressing, glazing... what do these all mean?

Trueing – straightening up using a dimon dresser to reface the wheel.

Dressing – dressing wheel with starwheel dresser to open up the grinding wheel, so cuts more efficiently.

Glazing – glazing is when the grinding wheel is contaminated with metal from cylinders. It is always good practice to clean a cylinder before grinding as this will help slow the process of glazing the grinding wheel.

8. Is it better to own your own grinder or have someone else do it?

If you have the time to do your own grinding, then yes it is well worth having a grinder or grinders. The advantages are:-

- You can grind when you like
- You are in control of your own quality of cut
- There is a minimum downtime on units

9. What techniques do you use to grind a bed knife to ensure optimal sharpness?

We always advise that you grind your bottom blades to whatever the manufacturers recommend. This way you are grinding the bottom blade to whatever angle the cutting units were when new.

10. How do I know when my mower needs a grind vs or a back lap?

If you back lap and the cylinder isn't sharp after 10-15 minutes, then you need to regrind the cylinder and bottom blade.

11. How often should a cylinder mower be regrinded, is there a difference between spin and relief times?

If you only spin grind you would be looking at a grinding programme of around every 6-8 weeks cutting, dependent on the

top dressing programme.

If you're relief grinding only then you would find that your fairway units would last a season and your greens and tees require grinding twice a year.

12. What are the signs that a cylinder mower is not cutting properly due to a poor regrind?

We have had machines come back from a service that we are unable to set the cut on without heavy contact.

The most common sign is white shoots of grass in the grass box. If you're having problems with set up, for example cutting at both ends and not in the middle, this is more likely to be a coned cylinder. If the cylinder pulls the setting up paper into the cylinder and does not cut at all then this would be down to the wrong angle on the top face of the bottom blades.

13. How do you train new operators on the proper use of cylinder mowers and grinders?

At Hunter Grinders we offer training courses, which teach all methods of grinding. This is a full day course for up to three operators.

14. In your time how much has the technology changed, and where do you see it heading in the future?

I started with Hunter Grinders back in 1980 and grinders have really come a long way since then. Software is now involved which I can see the benefits of, but I must be old school as I still like to be able to use the grinders manually. That's the bonus of a Hunter Grinder, I can use it both manually and automatically.



CUTTING EDGE PIONEERS

For further information or a no obligation demonstration, contact Hunter Grinders on 01332 824 777 or visit www.huntergrinders.com



Fast forward to the future

How does the latest irrigation software change the greenkeeping game?

'Early adopters' are the first to try something new. Trialling early or 'beta' versions of products or features, customers feedback their experiences, helping companies iron out glitches and fine tune what's on offer. Early adopters are often enthusiastic 'super-users' – even if it's risky or moves them out of their comfort zone – because it's exciting and offers a glimpse of the future.

When Rain Bird introduced CirrusPRO in 2019, a small group of UK golf course managers were willing to give a beta version of the next generation of irrigation software a try. Revisiting three, what difference has it made? What's changed, and is the impact measurable?

Andy Ewence is course manager

at St Georges Hill Golf Club and previously course manager at Woking Golf Club. He explains,

"Watering and working the system every day, I'm confident I'm running CirrusPRO at its best. At Woking, by controlling individual rotor heads and adjusting percentages we saved thousands of pounds preventing turf burnout and by not needing to overseed fairways. Turf quality was transformed, and members really noticed the difference.

"What's surprising is how far software has come since I first used it. Rain Bird is very forward-thinking, with new features coming along all the time. Updates are spotlighted and explained in the system so we can scroll back as many times as we need. It's a great

training tool and in my control; I don't have to go on a course or have my team take a day out. Anyone, at any age or level of computer literacy can use it, though they may, of course, run it differently. Now I'm at St George's Hill Golf Club, with 27 holes, we've a much larger system but as it's very easy to transfer what you know from one system to another, I'll be making adjustments over winter to improve what we're doing."

For Barry Neville, course manager at Stanmore Golf Club, and his team, CirrusPRO has been a significant time-saver. Staff can log in on a mobile 'phone, use or check a rotor if passing, without having to hop on and off a mower. Remote access significantly aids weekend work when



Main: Matt Aplin, Goring & Streatley Golf Club **Above:** Andy Ewence, St Georges Hill Golf Club (Formerly Woking) **Below:** Barry Neville, Stanmore Golf Club



only two people are working.

"What you can now do from your mobile device saves so much time. I particularly like the mapping feature which follows you around and allows you to alter times or percentages there and then. Notes can be made which you can revisit in the office and it doesn't have to be head-related either. Updates come directly from Rain Bird, new features are self-explanatory and very easy to use."

Matt Aplin, course manager at Goring & Streatley Golf Club adds, "At the time I didn't consider trialling new software would be a risk. In retrospect, it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. CirrusPRO is pretty much faultless. Everyone can access the system, make instant

adjustments out on the course, flash a head on and off if it's sticking or adjust watering if they spot a dry patch early in the morning or over the weekend. When there's an update, we all have a quick look at lunchtime. If a new person joins, I can set up a test cycle on a spare tee so they can play around with it, learn how it works and I access the system to see how they are getting on. It's so straightforward.

"With the best tools at my disposal, I can now do whatever I like agronomically and guarantee I can deliver performance. CirrusPRO gives us the ability to be enormously responsive.

"We're using about 20% less water, watering all 18 holes, and we haven't overseeded since we got our Rain Bird

system.

"In very hot summers, if it's suddenly wet and hot, you have the flexibility to quickly tackle heat-stressed turf. I can test out different things, irrigate in a flexible way, and know it will work. CirrusPRO is 100% easier, 100% more user-friendly – it is the icing on the cake."

Having explored the earliest version of CirrusPRO and benefitted from updates since, these three early adopters have become proficient, confident users, encouraging and supporting their teams to be the same. All confirmed clear gains – saving masses of time, using a lot less water and a guarantee they can deliver first-class playability and performance on the golf course.



Defining the standard

Baroness comes to the rescue at Calcot Park in the pursuit of winter definition



A trio of pedestrian mowers from Baroness are coming to the rescue at Calcot Park, as the club seeks to maintain course standards through the ever-more challenging winter months. The venue, like many, struggled to get ride-on equipment out over the winter of 23/24 due to increased rainfall and softer ground conditions. However, this problem will be a thing of the past with three LM66 cylinder mowers now ready to take up the task of retaining presentation on the tees and approaches.

Located on the Berkshire border, Calcot Park delivers a picturesque 18-holes in a parkland setting. Course Manager for the last six years Tom Jennings explains how, even outside of the 'playing season', the expectations of the players are high and the standards of the greenkeeping team are even higher! "We're always striving for that

next level of definition and the rain has really been hampering what we can deliver on areas that aren't hand cut. That's why we decided to invest in a fleet of pedestrian mowers specifically for the tees and factored the time to deliver this attention to detail into our programme."

After a comprehensive search, and fantastic advice and service from both Lister Wilder and Luke Collins from Baroness, they decided on three LM66 mowers from the Baroness pedestrian range – delivered in June 2024.

Tom continues, "In my opinion, the cut quality with these LM66's is the best on the market and, not only that, they stay on cut for much longer. We've done some topdressing over the summer and are now starting to see worm casts emerging yet, despite this, the Baroness mowers remain sharp giving us outstanding consistency and a clean, precise cut. The tees and approaches have never presented better."

Along with the slightly smaller LM56 model, the Baroness pedestrian mower design incorporates traditional all-gear

drive – delivering 100% transmission rate with no slippage or lag between the drive to reel rotation ratio. In addition, the durability of this system compared to belt or chain drive is extremely high, providing additional peace of mind that a balanced cut will be achieved with every operation. The renowned cylinder is manufactured from Nickel-Chrome-Molybdenum alloy steel which retains the sharpest cutting edge, helping to promote healthy growth and contributing to surfaces that are less vulnerable to disease. Both the Baroness LM56/66 models also include a 5-year warranty as standard.

"The good thing is that we've all had chance to get used to them and get a real feeling for what can be achieved with these machines." He adds, "We now feel confident going into the wetter months that we can deliver the tees and approaches to the same standard we're delivering in other areas of the course... if not better!"



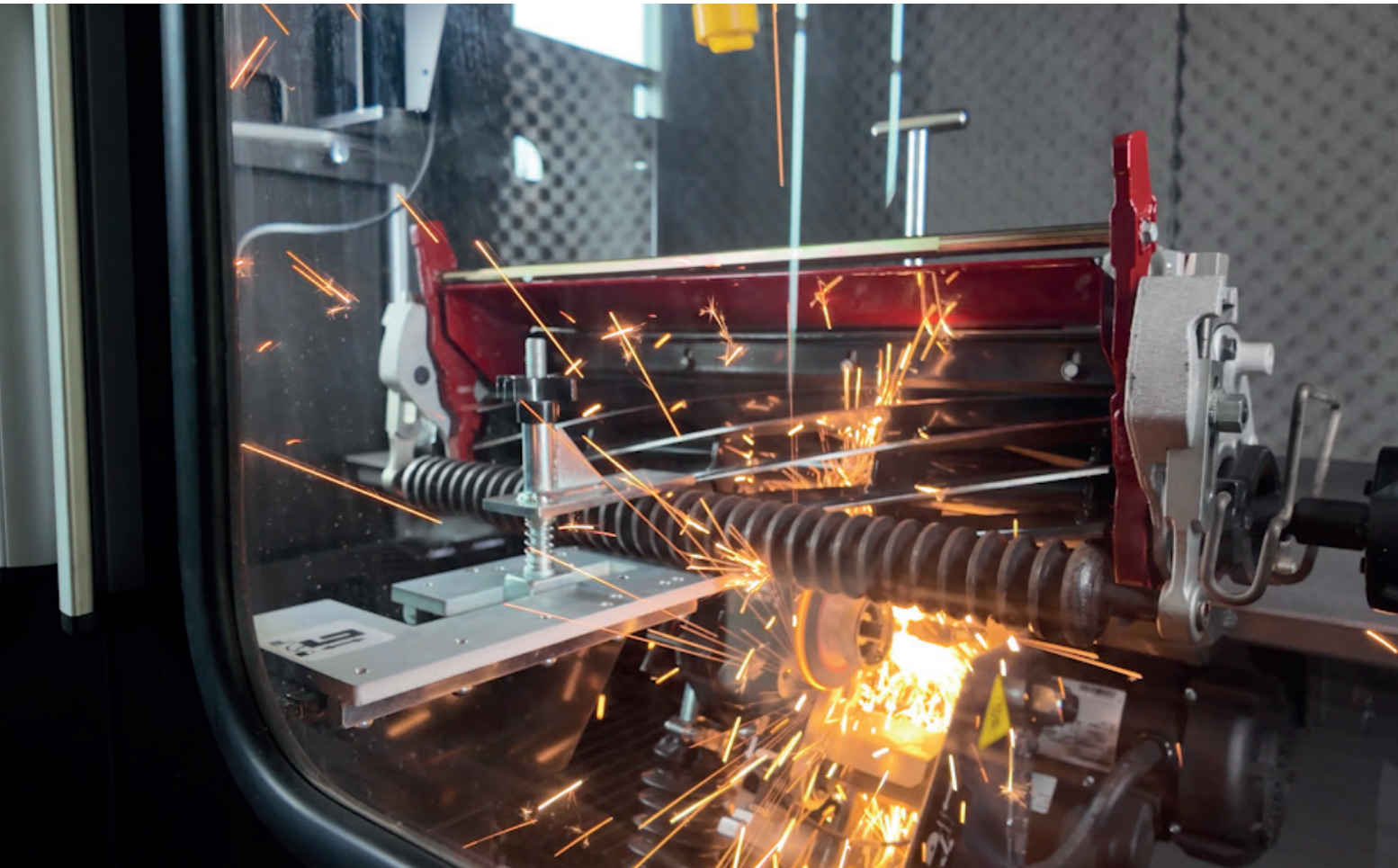


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Perfect repeatability

Foley is the go-to grinders for GTT UK

At GTT UK, consistency is crucial when it comes to grinding, and to get perfection every time the company uses Foley Company grinders.

GTT UK owner Matt Thompson had extensive experience as a mechanic in greenkeeping workshops before he started his professional turf and arboricultural machinery service and repair business four years ago.

Having begun with other grinders that he felt were time-consuming to set up, always involved some guesswork and were never completely accurate, he researched the market and found Foley's UK distributor, ProSport UK.

From there, he found his perfect solution, which was to combine the Foley 633 Accu-Pro Reel Grinder and 672 Bedknife Grinder. Matt explains: "For me, the main thing is the whole repeatability of the package and knowing

that everything is going to be exactly the same. It doesn't matter if you're working on three or seven units they're all going to match.

"With the 633 reel grinder, you can leave it, and it will work on its own while you're doing something else. It is perfect for me because my commercial customers need their machines and they need them out working, so they want quick turn arounds, and they often want them back as quickly as you possibly can.

"And that's the main thing I found with the Foley 633: you quickly get used to it, so it's fast to set up. You just set it, tell the computer what you want it to do and it does it. You know when it's finished because the blue light on the top comes on, and that's it; I know that's a perfect grind, and you set it away again."

Relief grinding has been an important aspect of getting Matt the perfect finish.



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“For me, the main thing is the whole repeatability of the package and knowing that everything is going to be exactly the same.

It doesn't matter if you're working on three or seven units, they're all going to match”

Although he wasn't initially familiar with the process, the 633's automated system made it easy to do, and he has received positive customer feedback since introducing it.

“I've been doing a lot of research into the proper specifications of how cylinder mowers work, how they are supposed to be set up, and also what manufacturer's state, and that's where I've come across relief grinding,” Matt explains.

“You're taking the cylinder back to exactly how it came out of the factory, and they seem to stay on cut a lot longer, which is one of the main benefits of relief grinding.

“Customers have commented their units stay on cut longer, and the general sharpness is better.

“They're also saying it's not as tricky on the setup, which I think is more

to do with the 633 and 672 grinding everything perfectly straight.”

For Matt, getting that perfectly straight grind on the 672 bedknife grinder comes from being able to set it at his own true zero. From there, it's simply setting his angles, doing a scratch test and knowing that every blade will come out the same.

The ability to produce uniform, factory-precise grinds has not only accelerated turnaround times but also enhanced customer satisfaction through longer-lasting, sharper cuts. This commitment to excellence and to continuous improvement underscores GTT UK's dedication to providing a top-tier service to their clients, and Foley's ability to provide the tools to do it.

For more information please visit www.prosportukltd.com



ProSportUK is operated by managing director, Ian Robson, who has over 20 years experience in the sports turf industry, with a refined knowledge of grinders.

He has worked extensively with head greenkeepers, where his wealth of knowledge helped to enhance their grinding operations. His expertise is backed by the high-profile venues he has worked with over the years, including Open Championship courses.

ProSportUK are proud to be the UK and Ireland importer and distributor for Foley Company, True Surface and a UK distributor of AQUA-AID.

We are all facing many of the same challenges



James Walker is assistant championship agronomist at The R&A

What are the major challenges facing your golf course? Take the time to look at the bigger picture and you might surprise yourself with what you find

As a greenkeeper, my focus was on daily course maintenance tasks, so it was difficult to have time to see the bigger picture and how our course fitted into that plan. In my first few months at The R&A, visiting multiple courses provided the opportunity to see the bigger picture regarding course maintenance plans and how sustainably maintained courses are essential for the game to be thriving in 50 years' time.

It is a privilege to see R&A Championship venues deliver exceptional surfaces, in challenging

climate and geographical location. But whether yours is a venue that receives high amounts of rainfall and an acidic soil profile, a parkland course based on clay, or a links based on sand, there are some core agronomic principles to ensure your course not only survives the challenges but thrives when tested.

My immediate learnings can be focussed on three key areas to ensure surfaces are playable and sustainable as much as possible and can cope with the challenges ahead while maintaining optimum performance.

is an essential part of the process to identify any issues and compare results against defined targets. A good soil profile leads to healthy rooting and a firm surface to challenge the best players in the world.

Wider Sustainability Initiatives

Electric mowers are becoming more widely used to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and the climatic impact of golf course maintenance. Electric greens mowers have been widely used at R&A Championships in recent years, but further advancement was made this year at the Women's Amateur at Portmarnock. Each morning, the entire machinery fleet was electric. In another industry first, Carnoustie hosted the inaugural 24-hour Bioblitz, a community-based biodiversity project that saw the public surveying the golf course for species of plant, animal and fungi.

Seeing the breadth of courses facing the same challenges and having the opportunity to visit many, rather than focus on one as a greenkeeper, it is fascinating to see such commonality. Rest assured, sustainable agronomy is being practised all over the UK & Ireland in ways that are tailored to meet specific challenges, and some of these challenges might just be the same as yours. **GI**

“Sustainable agronomy is being practised all over the UK & Ireland in ways that are tailored to meet specific challenges”

conditions, using the very best sustainable management practices. These venues are some of the very best courses in the world but all British and Irish courses have similar collective challenges. Weather systems are changing, and we are experiencing more adverse weather than ever before. Regulations around use of chemicals and water are tightening and pressure to manage out-of-play areas for the benefit of nature are rightly increasing. These steps should generally be considered positive and embracing them further highlights golf as a positive land use.

R&A Championship venues are leading the industry by illustrating a clear path forward by combining excellence in performance with sustainable methods. They vary in terms of course type, soil texture,

Sward Composition

Ensuring the right grasses are being promoted within the sward of your greens. Fine-grass-dominant surfaces offer more predictability, less volatility and more consistent performance and require less input of fertiliser, pesticide and water. At the AIG Women's Open this year, the greenkeeping team at St Andrews Links Trust were able to deliver four days of uninterrupted play, despite 40mph winds, because of a strong, robust and healthy sward.

A Healthy Soil Profile

Creating a soil profile that supports fine grasses and delivers the desired level of surface firmness. A good soil profile is created or maintained by making informed decisions on aeration, top dressing and renovation work. Annual soil laboratory analysis



Our monthly column from The R&A's Sustainable Golf team shares news and insights on agronomy and sustainability themes. For more information on The R&A's Sustainable Agronomy Service please contact sustainablegolf@randa.org

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