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BIGGA

# Greenkeeper International

## We salute the Toro Student Greenkeepers of the Year 2025

Bradley Taylor takes the main award and Matthew Strutt Donnelly is the Young award winner


**Practical Greenkeeping**
Behind the scenes at Harewood Downs' reservoir project

**Obituaries**
Remembering our friends, colleagues and fellow members

**From Your Association**
The industry salutes your work on #ThankaGreenkeeperDay

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October 2025

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BIGGA

**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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**We are committed to the continual professional development of our members, working with the leading bodies in golf for the good of the game.**

BIGGA's activities on a national and regional level are underpinned by the generosity of our industry partners and supporters. BIGGA's various member benefits, learning and development opportunities and other activities are made possible due to the ongoing commitment shown by these companies, organisations and individual donors. From our supporters through to our national patrons and partners, our thanks go to them all for their dedication to BIGGA and its members.

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# First Cut

**All you need to know from around our industry**

- Glenn Kirby joins STRI Group as new research director
- What's on in October: all the important industry dates for your diary

## Turf industry comes together at GroundFest 2025

**GroundsFest 2025 brought the turf industry together for two days of networking, live demonstrations and education.**

BIGGA was proud to be part of the event for the first time following the announcement of a new partnership between GroundsFest and BTME.

The collaboration will see the two organisations work together to enhance opportunities for turf professionals, with a combined approach to education, training and cross-promotion.

The Worcestershire's deputy course manager, Clive Jones, attended the September show for the first time.

"It's been great to look at all the new machinery and technology on the stands and in the demonstration areas," he said. "I found the seminars to be the best bit for me as it really helped to grow my knowledge about issues we face in the industry.

"Overall, my first visit to GroundsFest was brilliant and I look forward to attending again next year."

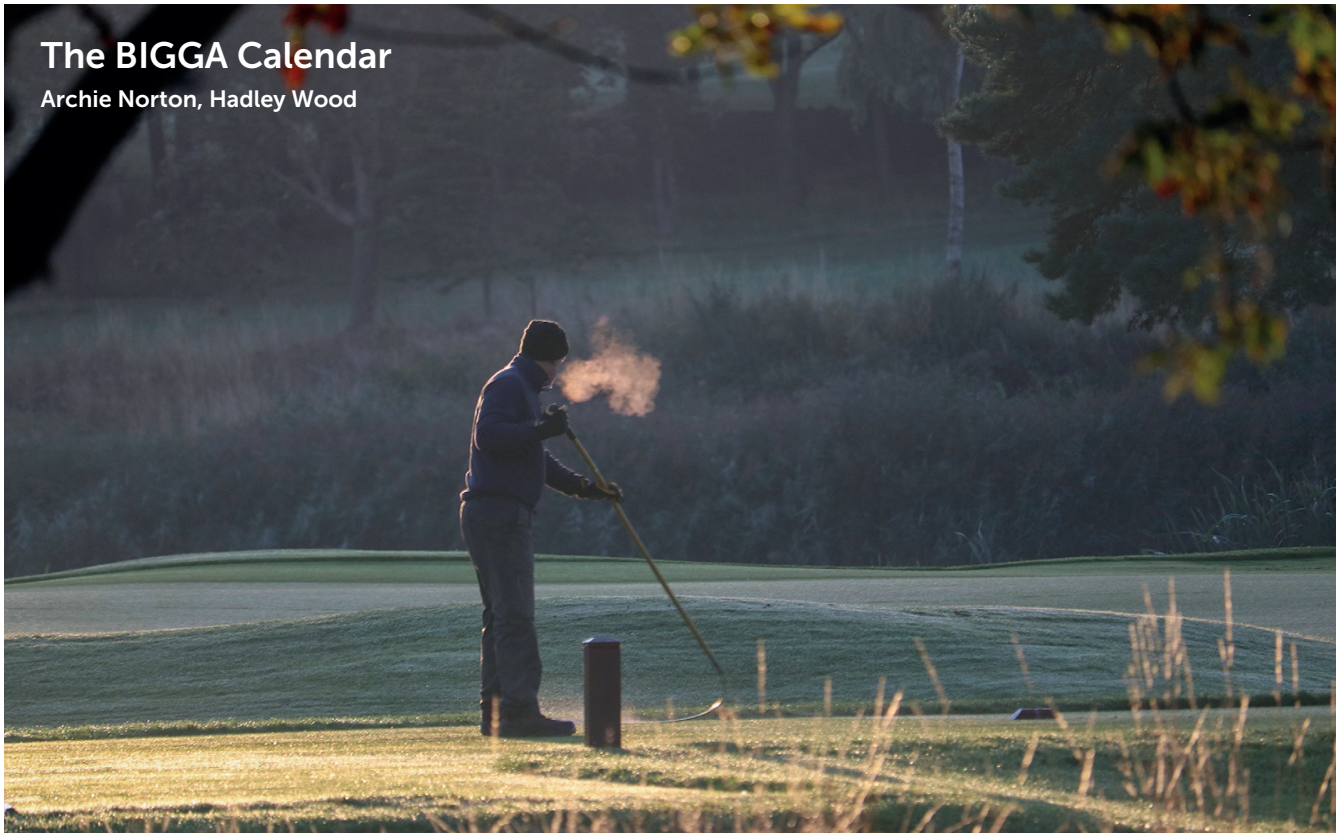
BTME remains the industry's flagship gathering in January, offering greenkeepers professional development and a chance to reset at a crucial moment in the calendar. GroundsFest complements this by providing a late-summer opportunity for hands-on experience in an outdoor setting.

By working together, the two events can encourage greater crossover between golf, grounds maintenance and landscaping sectors, in a move that promises to benefit the industry as a whole.

BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said: "GroundsFest gives us a fantastic chance to connect with members at a different time of year and in a completely new environment."

GroundsFest is one of the most innovative dates on the turf calendar, blending indoor business and education with outdoor demonstrations and a festival atmosphere. With profits reinvested into the industry to support education, it is designed to deliver lasting value.

We hope to see even more BIGGA members in attendance next year. GI



**The BIGGA Calendar**
**Archie Norton, Hadley Wood**

# Glenn Kirby joins STRI as research director

**STRI has announced the appointment of Glenn Kirby as its new research director, a move that marks a significant step in the organisation's continued drive to deliver industry-leading research and innovation for the turf sector.**

With more than 30 years' experience across turf management, technical services and digital innovation, Glenn brings a wealth of expertise that will help shape the future direction of STRI's research programmes.

His remit will include spearheading new initiatives in sustainability, digital transformation and applied research, as well as strengthening partnerships with clients and industry stakeholders.

Glenn joins STRI from Syngenta, where he held the role of technical services manager for turf across Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

During his time there, he was instrumental in developing digital strategy, introducing artificial intelligence into trial management, and leading a range of market support trials that helped advance sustainable turf practices on a global scale.

Reflecting on his new role, Glenn said: "I think this is one of the most exciting periods for turf management in the UK and across Europe that we've ever seen.

"The challenges we face around climate, sustainability and increasing expectations make this a pivotal time – and I'm looking forward to playing my part in shaping the future of our industry with STRI Group. Here's to new beginnings, collaboration and pushing the boundaries of turf research."

Richard Stuttard, STRI group director, welcomed the new hire to the team: "With Glenn's unique blend of technical expertise, digital innovation and industry leadership experience, he'll be instrumental in driving STRI's research proposition for the future, pioneering new solutions for clients and supporting the team. We're delighted to have him on board."

With research and innovation embedded in its DNA, STRI sees Glenn's appointment as a key moment in its mission to deliver practical, science-led solutions. His leadership will ensure the group continues to play a pivotal role in helping the turf industry navigate the challenges of sustainability, climate change and technological transformation. **GI**

## What's on this month

**Dates for your diary**

**2 October**
Campey Bert Cross Memorial Trophy – Wilmslow

**6 October**
Mental Health First Aid: 2-day course – Goring & Streatley

**7 October**
Basic Machinery Maintenance – Moortown

**8 October**
Cutting Unit Set Up and Sharpening Techniques – Moortown

**9 October**
BIGGA Sheffield Section Autumn Golf Day – Hickleton
BIGGA East Anglia Section Golf Day @ Heacham Manor GC

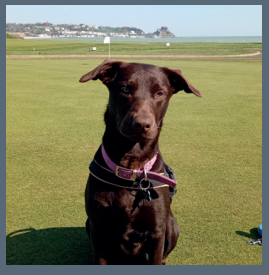
**16 October**
BIGGA Central Scotland Golf Day – Kinghorn
BIGGA South Coast Turkey Trot 2025 – Isle of Purbeck

**20 October**
BIGGA National Championship 2025 – Royal Liverpool & Wallasey

**21 October**
Fundamentals of Turfcare Mechanics – Level 1 – Moortown
BIGGA East of Scotland Members Gathering – Easter Road Stadium

**28 October**
Unlocking proven techniques for leading change Bernhard Academy - online

## A greenkeeper's best friend – Skye



**Owner:** David Boydens, deputy course manager
**Course:** Royal Jersey
**Age:** One
**Breed:** Labrador x Kelpie
**Favourite treat:** Chicken
**Favourite spot on the course:** Anywhere she can run around chasing a ball and there are people and other dogs to meet
**Naughtiest moment:** She is generally very good but does tend to go deaf when playing with other dogs walking on the course
**My dog is happiest:** When meeting the lads in the morning and running next to the truck around the course

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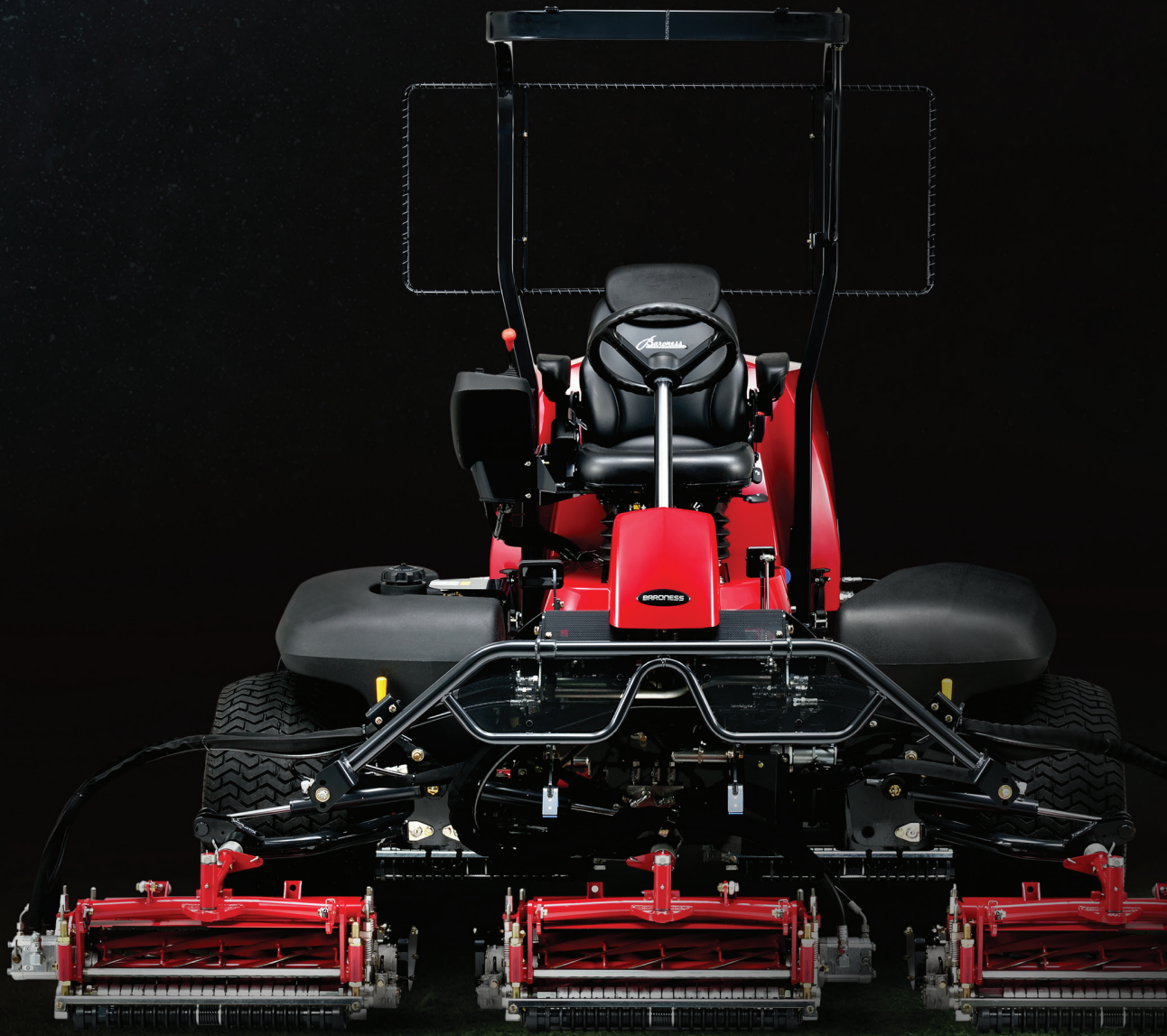

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# From your Association

**Representing the greenkeeping community**

- Meet the speakers lined up to share their knowledge at Continue to Learn
- BIGGA's President celebrates the Toro Student Greenkeepers of the Year

### The 2025 BMW PGA Volunteer Support Team

Ian Briggs, Woodhall Spa; Miles Burnett, Trump International; Danny Carter, Golf at Goodwood; James Thomas Edward Cornforth, Easingwold; Brent Merrill Downs, Otter Creek; Sam Ewing, Crane Valley; Luke Fitzpatrick, The Buckinghamshire; Darren Foster, The Belfry Hotel & Resort; Matthew Kent, Surbiton; Cameron Keith Lea, QPR FC; Craig Littlejohn, Douglas Park; Chris Low, Coventry Hearsall; Cameron Levi Macken, JCB G&CC; Shay McQueen, Romford; Joe Robertson, The Renaissance; Lucy Elizabeth Rogers, King's Lynn; Andrew Ritchie, St Andrews; Stephen van Rhyn, Beaverbrook; Craig Surgeon, Fairmont St Andrews; Adam Stone, The Grove; Liam Watson, Walton Heath

## A 'phenomenal' experience at the BMW PGA Championship

**The BMW PGA Championship provided a memorable experience for the Volunteer Support Team, including one member who travelled all the way from America.**

BIGGA members from far and wide joined the Wentworth home team for the flagship DP World Tour event at the Surrey venue in September.

From challenging weather conditions to an inside-the-ropes view of a thrilling play-off finale, the volunteers were immersed in top-tier tournament preparations.

Master Greenkeeper Brent Downs, director of agronomy for Otter Creek and Harrison Lake in Columbus, Indiana, was thrilled to be involved.

"Having been to BTME this year, and with all the things I learned from that, I wanted another opportunity. I didn't think it would come this quickly, but lo and behold, BIGGA gave me the chance to be part of the Wentworth support team," he said.

"I felt like a member of the team since the day I arrived. Just to be part of this team, to see the tournament, to experience it from a different perspective and to learn all sorts of new things while I've been here – it's been phenomenal."

Sam Ewing, first assistant at Crane Valley, added: "I was here back in 2018, when the event was played in May, so it's nice to experience it at a different time of year, with a new crew and different equipment.

"It's a fantastic support team, and despite the conditions, we've had a good laugh together and kept morale high." **GI**

**The BIGGA National Board comprises the following members who volunteer their time to support the association:**
Kevin Fish, Antony Kirwan, Gordon McKie, Peter Moore, Jonny Roberts, Lucy Sellick and Andy Smith
**BIGGA President** Ronnie Myles, **BIGGA Chairperson** Steven Lloyd

# Stars out in force to support #ThankAGreenkeeper Day

> “Your hard work and dedication make the game we love possible”

**Ryder Cup stars Tommy Fleetwood and Justin Rose led the tributes to your hard work on this year’s Thank A Greenkeeper Day as the initiative made waves on social media and around the world.**

The annual celebration, led by BIGGA and the GCSAA, returned on 9 September, inviting golf lovers to show their appreciation for the dedicated professionals who make the sport possible.

The hashtags #ThankAGreenkeeper and #ThankASuper achieved an astonishing reach of 19.6million, up from 13.6m in 2024, with Fleetwood and Rose among the high-profile names lending their support.

“Thank you to all you special, amazing people that make the courses so beautiful for us to play on – we’re very appreciative,” said FedEx Cup winner Fleetwood, speaking at the BMW PGA Pro-Am.

“I love golf, I love playing golf, and you guys make it better, so thank you very much.”

Major winner and Olympic gold medallist Rose echoed those sentiments, as he tweeted: “A huge thank you to all the greenkeepers around the world who work tirelessly – early mornings, long days, and in all kinds of weather – to keep our golf courses in such amazing condition.

“Your hard work and dedication make the game we love possible, and it doesn’t go unnoticed.”

Rose, who was joined in his praise for greenkeepers by Team Europe captain Luke Donald, also gave a special shout-out to the team at North Hants, where he learned to play.

Tennis legend Andy Murray, England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and comedian Michael McIntyre provided an added sprinkling of stardust to the tributes.

Thank A Greenkeeper Day is a fun initiative that places you and your efforts centre-stage for 24 hours – but one day each year is not enough, which is why BIGGA works tirelessly to champion greenkeepers every day. **GI**

**In numbers: During #ThankAGreenkeeper Day 2025...**

**#ThankASuper**
**12m** (up from 10.5m in 2024)

**#ThankAGreenkeeper**
**7.6m** (up from 3.1m in 2024)

**Total reach:**
**19.6m** (up from 13.6m in 2024)

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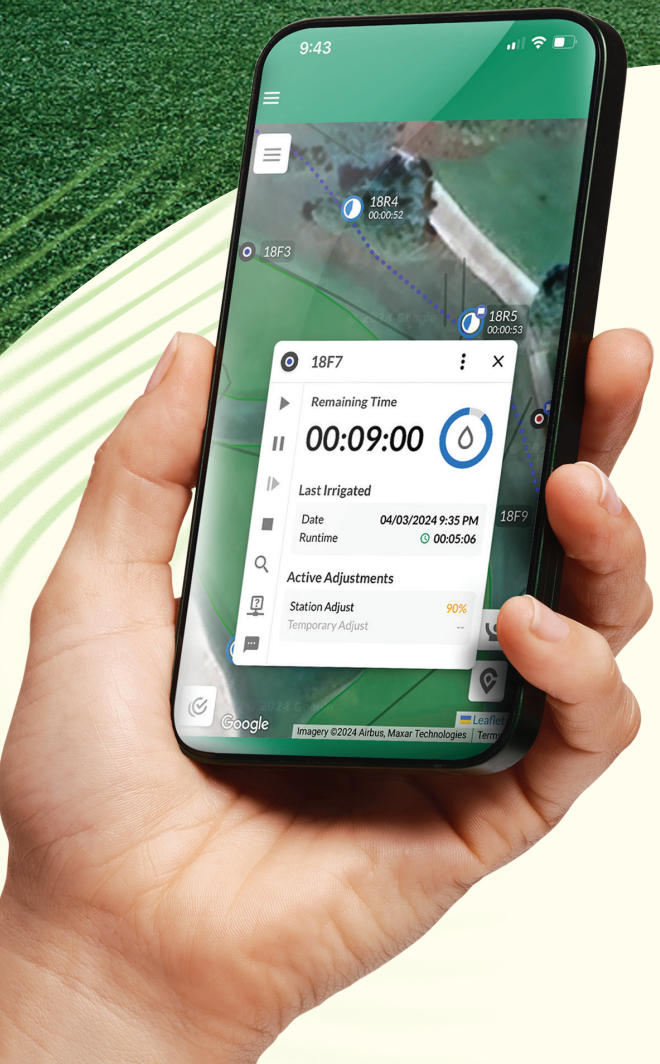


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BIGGA Partner

# Continue to Learn at BTME 2026

The comprehensive educational programme at BTME 2026 represents Europe's largest learning opportunity within sports turf

**Harrogate Convention Centre in North Yorkshire will once again play host to Continue to Learn at the BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition (BTME) in 2026.**

Held from Sunday 18 January to Thursday 22 January, with seminars running on the final day for the first time, Continue to Learn boasts an array of expert speakers and unrivalled professional development opportunities.

The education programme is the largest of its kind in Europe and welcomes greenkeepers, course managers and turf professionals from across the world.

"BIGGA exists to make the world a better place for greenkeepers," said CEO Jim Croxton. "One of our key strategies for that is making sure they have the best education they can. The Continue to Learn programme at BTME is our absolute centrepiece.

"We deliver hundreds of hours of education. Over 1,000 greenkeepers will engage with the Continue to Learn programme, meaning more than two hours for every golf club in the UK and beyond will be taken across a packed schedule in Harrogate."

As well as the two-day conference programme, there are classes held across full or half days from Sunday to Wednesday, covering topics relevant to greenkeepers at all stages of their career journey.

The seminars, held on Tuesday, Wednesday and now also the Thursday, are offered free to all attendees on a first-come, first-served basis.

This year's programme is bolstered by The R&A Clubhouse; a Wednesday morning breakfast session; a General Manager and Course Manager Symposium in association with GCMA; and the Turf Equipment Technicians' Conference.

BTME itself runs from Tuesday to Thursday, with plenty of networking opportunities, while the winners of the BIGGA Awards 2026 will also be revealed.

For information on how to book tickets and the discounts available to BIGGA members, see the enclosed Continue to Learn brochure. International members can view the brochure online.

Members are encouraged to book now to avoid disappointment. **GI**

### The R&A Clubhouse

As part of its commitment to deliver outstanding educational opportunities accessible to all, The R&A is proud to be collaborating with BIGGA to deliver The R&A Clubhouse at Continue to Learn. Each day, as part of the BTME exhibition, The R&A are collaborating with leaders in the industry to discuss the most important topics for golf course management, covering excellence in agronomy, international insights on sustainability and championing leadership.

# Meet the speakers at Continue to Learn

With such a breadth and depth of coverage, there is something for everyone, from experienced golf course managers to apprentices taking their first steps in the industry

**Continue to Learn's stellar list of speakers includes world-renowned experts, professional educators and BIGGA members eager to share their learning and experiences.**
The three delivery streams – classes, conferences and seminars – are designed to cover a broad range of topics, including management, wellbeing, mechanics and agronomy. Here, we put 10 of our esteemed speakers in the spotlight.

### Rhett Evans, GCSAA CEO

Having successfully summitted Mount Everest, Rhett draws from the lessons he learned from his incredible journey. Learn how these same principles of purpose, passion, positivity and perseverance can help you overcome difficulties you may encounter and lead to greater personal and professional growth.

### Andrew Wilson, Bethpage State Park

Andrew shares how Bethpage State Park, home to five golf courses, including the 2025 Ryder Cup venue, has created pollinator gardens, monitored wildlife and engaged the community for 30 years, showcasing golf's wider value as greenspace for nature and people.

### Dr Thom Nikolai, Michigan State University

Thom is known worldwide in the industry as 'The Doctor of Green Speed' due to his research focussing on golf course putting green mechanical and cultural practices, which increase both turfgrass health and customer satisfaction.

### Daniel Lightfoot & Glenn Kirby

Daniel (R&A) and Glenn (STRI) tell the story of their journeys from greenkeeping to leadership roles, exploring career development, industry challenges and the future of turfgrass management, offering insights on how clubs and managers can adapt over the next 50 years.

### Kevin Fish, CCL

A former club manager at Glen GC in North Berwick, Kevin was named UK Golf Club Manager of the Year 2004 and was in the first group of Europeans to be awarded the CCM (Certified Club Manager) qualification in 2008. Now a BIGGA board member, he delivers training, consultancy and global education in governance, planning and leadership.

### Ross Wilson, Constantiam

Ross explores the mindset and psychological attributes of a sniper – discipline, focus, resilience under pressure, continuous improvement, and how these can translate directly to maintaining a golf course and managing a team.

### Mark Hunt, Prodata Weather Systems

With nearly 40 years working in the amenity market, in product development and agronomic support, Mark's main area of interest is dovetailing the effect of our changing climate on agronomic processes such as disease development, grass growth and plant nutrition.

### Bob Taylor & Sophie Olejnik

Leading ecologists Bob and Sophie explore heathland habitats on golf courses, their components and conservation management, contrasting lowland and upland heath, outlining cost-effective techniques that balance wildlife benefits, habitat preservation, and the golfing experience.

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# Knowledgeable, passionate and destined for great things

**Ronnie Myles,** President

The calibre of the finalists at Rudding Park gave me tremendous confidence that the future is bright

**The recent finals of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards once again reminded me the future of the greenkeeping industry is in safe hands.**

I've been involved in greenkeeping since 1971, when the role was often dismissed as little more than cutting grass. Half a century later, to sit on a judging panel alongside experts and see the standard of knowledge, professionalism and passion displayed by the finalists makes me immensely proud to be part of this industry.

This year's group of eight finalists – and indeed the many others who came close to selection – were a real credit to themselves, their clubs, BIGGA and our sponsors.

I've had the privilege of working with some of them before, and it's clear that the next generation is ready to push standards ever higher. To those who narrowly missed out, I would say don't be discouraged. Reaching that stage is itself a tremendous achievement, and perseverance will bring opportunities.

Mentorship is something that underpins our profession. Even after more than 50 years, I am still learning. Greenkeeping is a community where you can always pick up the phone and find advice from a colleague.

> "Opportunities in greenkeeping today are phenomenal"

We in Scotland have even set up a Legacy Club of greenkeepers with 25-plus years' experience who make themselves available to share knowledge. It's that openness which helps young professionals thrive, and those who succeed in awards like these will soon become the role models others look up to.

The BIGGA Awards are another chance to celebrate excellence. Too often, people hesitate to nominate themselves or their teams for fear of appearing boastful. My message is simple: step forward. Promoting yourself and your work is not arrogance – it's recognising achievement, and it ensures the wider industry can share in your success.

These awards shine a light on the innovation, dedication and teamwork that might otherwise go unnoticed, and they inspire others to raise their standards.

Opportunities in greenkeeping today are phenomenal. Whether you're starting out or many years into your career, my advice is the same: grasp them with both hands.

This profession offers rewards, experiences and friendships that last a lifetime – and we should never shy away from celebrating them. **GI**

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# First Green: Changing perceptions, one field trip at a time

Workforce Project Manager Jenny Bledge reveals how First Green is transforming people's understanding of greenkeeping.

**Ask anyone in greenkeeping and they'll tell you the same thing – people outside the industry often don't really know what it is.**

To those who don't work in or play golf, the role of a greenkeeper is often misunderstood or undervalued. Too often, it's reduced to cutting grass, but anyone in turf management knows that couldn't be further from the truth. Greenkeeping is science, technology, creativity, engineering, sustainability and problem-solving rolled into one. Now, thanks to First Green, those perceptions are changing – and our members are leading the way.

First Green is BIGGA's STEM learning initiative that brings students out of the classroom and onto the golf course for hands-on activities in maths, science, ecology and more. The tasks may look simple, but the real impact comes when students see, perhaps for the first time, the expertise and pride behind the work of a skilled greenkeeping team.

For parents and teachers, the experience is equally eye-opening. Many arrive with little knowledge of the profession, yet leave with a new respect for its potential.

Careers advisers have told us how valuable it is to see firsthand the opportunities greenkeeping offers to young people who want to combine science, sustainability and a love of the outdoors. Crucially, it helps students realise these careers aren't far away – they exist right on their doorstep.

Hosting a First Green event gives members the chance to share their pride in what they do. Those who've taken part say it's rewarding to see the perception shift in real time. It's a chance to show the depth of the role and promote their club as part of the community.

This is more than an outreach programme – it's a platform to tell the story of greenkeeping and inspire the next generation, one field trip at a time.

- *Get involved by scanning the QR code*

FIRST GREEN
GCSAA BIGGA

INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION

Scan Me to find out more

"My favourite part was about the machines and learning about the parts and what they do. Now I want to be a greenkeeper so I can use the same machinery and technology"

**– Pupil, Y5, Stanton Primary School**

"It opened the children's eyes to employment opportunities as well as understanding what happens at a golf course which is right on our doorstep"

**– Naomi Cooke, year group leader, Elvetham Heath Primary School**

"I enjoyed seeing the students take great interest in the things we do in our jobs. They had many questions which were great to answer and share my knowledge"

**– Jamie Beattie, assistant greenkeeper, Royal Liverpool Golf Club**

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# Welcome to our new members

Monifieth

## International

**Steve Sibbald (I)**
Hidden Lake, Canada

**Stuart Hackwell (P)**
Rain Bird Europe

## Scotland

**Andrew Harkness (APP)**
West Kilbride

**Hugh Dawson (AGK)**
Kingsknowe

**Lee Simpson (APP)**
**David Guthrie (GK)**
**Fraser Robertson (GK)**
Inverurie

**Andrew Hayter (GK)**
St Andrews Links Trust

**Scott Laurence (GK)**
Old Ranfurly

**Gordon Wood (GK)**
Monifieth Golf Links

**Scott Bennett (HGK)**
West Linton

**Morris Martin (HGK)**
Trump Turnberry

## Northern

**Joseph Regan (APP)**
Rother Valley Golf Centre

**Harry Horsley (AGK)**
Hollins Hall CC

**Conor Grayson (AGK)**
Alwoodley

**Roger Cairns (AGK)**
Kendal

**Reiss Harrison (AGK)**
Abbeydale

**Dylan Wilson (AGK)**
Heworth

**Ozzy Mullin (AGK)**
Stockport

**Eddy Reveley (AGK)**
Heaton Moor

**Bobby Kay (AGK)**
Astbury

**Adam Carr (GK)**
Filey

**Dillon Abbott (GK)**
Wilmslow

**Warren Pritchard (GK)**
Ganton

**Jonathan Agnew (GK)**
Chorlton-cum-Hardy

**John Saunders (GK)**
Morpeth

**Thomas Bissett (GK)**
Turnberry

**Key**

| | |
|---|---|
| **A** | Affiliate Member |
| **AGK** | Assistant Greenkeeper |
| **APP** | Apprentice |
| **ATP** | Approved Training Provider |
| **CA** | College Assessor |
| **CM** | Course Manager |
| **DCM** | Deputy Course Manager |
| **DHGK** | Deputy Head Greenkeeper |
| **FA** | First Assistant |
| **GK** | Greenkeeper |
| **G** | Groundsperson |
| **HGK** | Head Greenkeeper |
| **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 |

**Craig Callwood (GK)**
Wychwood Park

**Steven Maxted (GK)**
Cookridge Hall

**Ryan Smith (GK)**
Silkstone

**Paul Peacock (G)**
Sharpley Springs

### Central

**Craig Brown (A)**
Stratford-on-Avon

**Olly Pollard (AGK)**
Lingdale

**Louise Walker (AGK)**
**Phillip Gibson (CM)**
Addlethorpe

**James Waters (AGK)**
Tadmarton Heath

**Jack Christy (AGK)**
Southwell

**Brad Staff (AGK)**
Essendon CC

**Thomas Wood (AGK)**
Llanymynech

**Daniel Watts (GK)**
Woking

**Duncan Brooks (GK)**
The Belfry

**Stuart Swift (GK)**
Stoke Park

**Sam Williams (GK)**
Queenwood

### South East

**Franky Smith (APP)**
**Josh Ghafur (APP)**
**Tom Hubbard (CM)**
Eltham Warren

**Lee Martin (APP)**
Crondon Park

**Jack Savage (APP)**
Westerham

**Kumar Starkie (AGK)**
Aldenham G&CC

**Alexander Garrod (AGK)**
**Callan Barber (AGK)**
Grims Dyke

**Joseph Staines (AGK)**
Orsett

**Robert Slack (AGK)**
South Herts

**Simon Allen (GK)**
Queenwood

**Ben Vassell (GK)**
Sunningdale

**Lee Amos (GK)**
Old Fold Manor

**Paul Holloway (GK)**
Douglas Eyre Sports Centre

**Alan Southey (GK)**
Woking

**Sam Devlin (GK)**
Meyrick Park

**Harvey Bates (G)**
Walmer & Kingsdown

**Lawrence Jones (CA)**
BCA (Windsor Forest Colleges Group)

**Jonathan Hewer (CA)**
Myerscough College

### South West & South Wales

**Danny Hickey (APP)**
The Players Club

**Dave Bennet (AGK)**
Avisford Park

**Timothy Swanepoel (AGK)**
Tavistock

**Gary Tester (GK)**
The Goodwood Club

**Elliott Mulready (GK)**
Wells

## BIGGA CPD
Continuing Professional Development

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

Jonathan Dykes, Harleyford

Dominic Wright, Fulford

Paul Farthing, Knaresborough

Duncan Sieling, Richmond

Harleyford

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

Gordon McKie, St Andrews Links Trust

Dominic Wright, Fulford

Steven Connolly, Ansty Golf Centre

Paul Legg, Cardigan

Kyle Gauld, Whitecraigs

Cardigan

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# Members & Careers

**Where we meet your fellow turf professionals and share their stories**

- Meet the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award winners
- Scott Gardner on his new role as course manager at Berkhamsted

L-R Marcus, Nathan and Rob

## Singing from the same hymn sheet at Bognor Regis

**Greenkeepers often work quietly behind the scenes, but at Bognor Regis, two of them are just as comfortable in the spotlight.**

Brothers Nathan and Marcus Smithers, assistant greenkeepers with more than 20 years' combined service, are also talented musicians. Having once performed in a Jon Bon Jovi tribute band, they're now turning their skills to Bryan Adams numbers, and even bring their act into the clubhouse to entertain members.

The crossover between their day job and their passion for music was highlighted when industry consultant Kevin Fish delivered a customer service training day at the club. His message was clear: greenkeepers are part of the front-line of service, and their impact extends beyond turf.

Head Greenkeeper Rob Brown, together with Nathan and Marcus, embraced the chance to explore how their work contributes to the club's wider culture.

"Greenkeepers play a vital role in shaping the members' experience," said Rob. "The golf course itself is the main reason they come to play, and the quality of that experience greatly influences their overall enjoyment. Adding a friendly face out on the course to greet members also provides a valuable personal touch."

For Nathan and Marcus, the session reinforced how their role is as much about people as it is about agronomy.

"We have a significant impact on the day-to-day experience of our members," they said. "While they ultimately come to play, it's equally important that they feel a sense of belonging and a warm welcome. By also performing in the clubhouse, we feel we can further enhance the overall experience here at Bognor."

Rob has long admired their talents, recalling how they surprised his wife by performing at their wedding.

"That was extra special since she's a big Bon Jovi fan," he said. "Nathan's voice and Marcus on the keyboard make a brilliant combination."

As for whether Rob will be joining the band, he couldn't rule it out, adding: "Music is not my strength, but I've occasionally joined them on the mic at our Christmas staff parties – usually after a drink or two." GI

# Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards

The winners of the prestigious Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards were crowned at a spectacular event at Rudding Park in North Yorkshire

**Two talented greenkeepers were rewarded at the 36th Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards, cementing their place among an illustrious list of past winners.**

Bradley Taylor and Matthew Strutt Donnelly emerged victorious after impressing judges across a series of assessments designed to test their knowledge, skill and passion for greenkeeping.

Bradley, first assistant at Beau Desert Golf Club, in Staffordshire, was awarded the main Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year prize, while Matthew, an apprentice at Stoneham Golf Club, in Hampshire, secured the Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year award.

Following regional judging earlier in the year, eight finalists were selected to compete in the finals at Rudding Park, near Harrogate.

Over two days, they undertook a range of practical and theoretical tests, from seed and grass identification to presentations and interviews, giving them a platform to showcase their expertise and enthusiasm for the industry.

Jamie Beattie, assistant greenkeeper at Royal Liverpool, was the runner-up for the main award, with fellow Myerscough College student and Parkstone apprentice Oli Badger claiming that spot in the Young category.

The nomination period for the 2026 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards will open on 1 March 2026.

**About the awards**

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award was introduced in 1989, with the Young category added in 2016.

Previous winners and finalists have gone on to become some of the most influential characters in the greenkeeping industry, helping shape the sport of golf in the UK and further afield.

The awards offer greenkeepers of all ages, backgrounds and experience levels a chance to excel, with winners afforded once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to further their career and network with influential industry leaders.

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year winner's benefits include enrolment in an internationally recognised 10-week turf management remote study course, The Winter Turf School at the University of Massachusetts, and a one-week work placement at a prestigious UK or overseas golf course.

Both winners will head to the USA to visit Toro HQ, R&D and manufacturing, with the Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year also enjoying a one-week work placement, as well as a trip to Continue to Learn at BTME, including four days of education, five nights' accommodation, travel and £125 expenses.

**Myerscough College student Bradley Taylor has never been shy about putting himself forward for an opportunity.**

Alongside his work at Beau Desert, Bradley has immersed himself in a wide range of initiatives, including The R&A Championship Agronomy Programme. Here, he reflects on winning one of the industry's most sought-after honours, the support he has received along the way and what advice he would offer to fellow greenkeepers looking to emulate his achievement.

## Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year:

# Bradley Taylor

> Everybody who reached the final is a winner in their own right"

**How did it feel when you found out you had won?**
Extremely surprised – totally astounded, in fact. Each of the candidates who got to the final were all worthy winners in themselves. They're great people, they know their trade and I honestly thought it was never going to be me. When the announcement came, I was absolutely thrilled.

**Who was the first person you celebrated with?**
I was straight on the phone to my girlfriend. I shed a little tear when I spoke to her; it was just a moment of realisation setting in. I'd been carrying that trophy around, it's so heavy, and I was still all tensed up. Speaking to her was like, 'I've done this now, the hard work has paid off'. I was also lucky to have a few people I know up here to share it with too.

**What was the overall experience of the final like?**
Tuesday was about settling in. We had lunch, did some axe throwing and archery, which helped us relax. Then we had a look around the course with Rob Clare and Dan Millar, the course manager and deputy. That was really good, seeing the project they're working on and asking questions made me feel more at home out on the course.

Later we got started on our projects before enjoying a barbecue. We had lots of conversations with the BIGGA team, fellow candidates and people from the industry, talking about life, greenkeeping, putting the world to rights. Just being with like-minded, passionate people has been great.

Then Wednesday was business time: knowledge tests, seed and grass identifications, interviews, presentations. That was the moment when you saw the exam papers on the desk and thought, 'Right, this is real. You've got to turn up and do your best'. I'm absolutely delighted to have come out on top, but honestly, everybody who reached the final is a winner in their own right.

**Who would you like to thank for supporting you on this journey?**
My girlfriend, without a doubt, I couldn't do anything without her. The last three weeks she's probably thought she's been a single woman because I've been glued to the course or the computer preparing! My family too, for their constant support.

At work, my boss Luke Sheldon and the board of management at Beau Desert have been fantastic. They support me when I apply for opportunities, and I try to give back by pushing the course forward. I've also had great mentors, like my college tutor Adam Shoesmith at Myerscough, who's taught me a huge amount.

**Have you had time to think about how this award might shape your future?**
When the realisation of this achievement hits, I can think more about it, but I see real longevity at Beau Desert. It's a course I can grow into and develop alongside, with a fantastic team and supportive club. For me, it'll be about keeping on pushing, working hard, being willing to learn and just going from there.

**Student Greenkeeper of the Year judges** - Steve Bryne, Jon Cole, Scott Reeves

**"A wealth of talent" – Jon Cole, divisional business manager at Reesink Turfcare and main award judge**

"This year's finalists all brought something different to the competition, making being a judge a tough job. The range of perspectives, qualities and strengths on display were of a very high standard. Bradley though had the edge. He demonstrated a wealth of talent, delivered a fantastic presentation and showed us an in-depth knowledge of the field in his interview. It was interesting and gratifying to see how dedicated he is and his passion for the industry. Well done, Bradley!"

**Bradley's advice to SGOTY hopefuls**

Nothing's ever out of reach. If you put yourself forward, believe in yourself, trust your knowledge and instincts, then go for it. There are so many great people in the industry, and BIGGA provides so many opportunities. If you want to learn something, there will always be someone willing to share their experience. Work hard, enjoy what you do, be passionate, determined and surround yourself with good people – that's how you'll go far.

**The Strutt name is well established in the turf industry, but now Matthew Strutt Donnelly is carving out his own path.**

An apprentice greenkeeper at Stoneham Golf Club and a student at Berkshire College of Agriculture (Windsor Forest), Matthew is already making an impression and is keen to seize the opportunities available through BIGGA and its partners. Here, he reflects on his award-winning experience and where the journey might take him.

## Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year:

# Matthew Strutt Donnelly

**Matt on why SGOTY matters**

It's so nice to have the opportunities to go for things like this because in a lot of other industries they're not as common. BIGGA really push you and guide you, almost like a helpline. If you want to do something, they'll say, 'You could go for this, or this'. Having that support is brilliant and I'm very grateful to BIGGA, Toro and Reesink Turfcare for making these awards possible.

## "I've had that encouragement to spread my wings"

**What was your reaction to winning the award?**
I was really shocked. After all the tests and everything we'd gone through on the day, I wasn't feeling too confident about myself. But clearly, I did better than I thought. I'm ecstatic.

**How was the experience of being at the finals and mixing with others in the industry?**
Everywhere you go nowadays you meet people who want to push you on. They're in the same boat, they want to improve themselves and it's almost contagious. Because they're so motivated, it makes you more motivated and I think it brings the whole industry up together. I've got that at home too, with the lads at work, and it gave me the confidence to apply for this.

**Who was the first person you shared the news with?**
My girlfriend. She's been my rock through this and such a great support. It felt right that she was the first to know.

**When did you first think about entering the competition?**
The first time I went to BTME, I went to the Young Greenkeepers' Conference and there was a segment about Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year with previous winners talking about it. I remember thinking, 'I could do something like that, I want to put myself forward'. So I did, and here we are.

**Who has supported you along the way?**
So many people, my girlfriend in particular. She even wrote little flash cards for me so I could revise after work. My dad's been great with advice. At work, everyone has been so supportive. My boss, Matt Plested, has given me the opportunity to go for things like this, which not everyone gets. Some clubs don't allow the time, but I've had that encouragement to spread my wings.

**What is it about greenkeeping that appeals to you so much?**
Before I joined the industry, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. Then the job at Stoneham came up, and I've loved it ever since. Being outside every day and the sense of community with the lads at work, the banter, it's great. Pretty much all aspects of it have worked in my favour and made me fall in love with the job.

**Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year judges** - Ronnie Myles, David Timms, Rob Phillips

**"A fantastic ambassador" – David Timms, national accounts manager for Reesink Turfcare and Young award judge**

"Matthew is a deserving winner. He shone on the course walk, with his personal project and in the exam and grass identification, but what gave him the edge was his confidence. He's hungry for it and that made all the judges really excited for his future and what he might achieve. He's a fantastic ambassador for young greenkeepers and his club, and we're excited to watch him progress in the industry."

## "An inspirational occasion"

**- Jim Croxton, BIGGA CEO**

"Congratulations to Bradley Taylor and Matthew Strutt Donnelly, two very worthy winners among an exceptionally strong list of finalists. The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards have again proven to be an inspirational occasion, and I would like to thank our friends at Reesink Turfcare and Toro for a memorable event. Seeing the calibre of the finalists fills me with optimism for the future of our industry."

# Latest job vacancies

From trainee vacancies to senior management roles, new greenkeeping job opportunities are added daily to BIGGA's online recruitment pages. Our website receives 1.6m page views per year and 55% of those are to our careers pages. Visit bigga.org.uk/careers to see our latest opportunities and find out more about advertising your position. Call 01347 833 800 or email info@bigga.co.uk

## Assistant Greenkeeper

### Mid Kent Golf Club, Kent

Mid Kent Golf Club, a Willie Park Jnr designed course, is looking to recruit an Assistant Greenkeeper to work as part of the team under the direction of a highly regarded Course Manager.

**The ideal candidate will need to have:**

- 2 years' experience and minimum NVQ level 2 in sports turf management (or equivalent)

**Preferred but not essential:**

- Spraying certificates PA1, PA2 and PA6 & First Aid Certificate
- Basic knowledge of Health and Safety regulations

Salary range offered is from £29,000 to £35,000 plus overtime, all negotiable depending on experience/qualifications.

**Applications, including covering letter and CV should be emailed to: secretary@mkgc.co.uk** or by post to The Secretary, Mid Kent Golf Club, Singlewell Road, Gravesend, Kent, DA11 7RB

**Deadline:** 31st October, 2025.

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My New Job

# Scott Gardner

The former Heswall course manager returned from Down Under to take up the role at Berkhamsted in March

**Scott Gardner was on the other side of the world when the role of course manager came up at Berkhamsted.** The position appealed to him and, in a recruitment process that started in Australia and ended in Hertfordshire, he landed the job. We caught up with the Myerscough College graduate and R&A Greenkeeping Scholar to discuss how he's been getting on.

**Can you describe the process involved in getting this job?**
I initially did my first interview via Teams while working in Australia. I then did a presentation and a final interview when I arrived back in the UK. I was fortunate to have options and Berkhamsted seemed like a great fit and challenge for me.

**What were your main priorities on arrival?**
Our initial focus was greens health. On average, our moisture readings were sub 10-15% with shallow rooting and cold temperatures. We introduced clip volume and growth ratio monitoring for our nitrogen inputs, along with an irrigation audit. This enabled us to refine our surfaces once we got the health and recovery back.

**How well have your team adapted to your methods?**
The team have enjoyed the change in working practices, with the implementation of SOPs, data monitoring, introduction of radios and some changes in presentation standards such as wider run-off areas, tighter lies around greens and increased refinement in all areas, as well as the FootJoy uniform. You are only as good as your team, and I have huge respect for mine.

**How have the opening months of the role gone?**
It has been incredibly challenging. Up until the start of September, we had only seen 200mm of rain all year with evapotranspiration rates at 760mm for the year, meaning a huge deficit in moisture. Greens and tees have been fine. We did sacrifice somewhere, and generally it was the approaches that suffered a little. However, we've almost fully recovered after multiple renovations on approaches.

**What are your top three core values as a course manager?**
The non-negotiables for me and my team are effort, respect and attitude. There's nothing worse than working with a disrespectful team member who lacks any kind of effort and has a poor attitude towards work or life in general. I have no time for that type of negativity! **GI**

# Obituaries

Winter 2025

We include an Obituaries section in Greenkeeper International on a periodic basis to pay our respects to BIGGA members and those close to the association who have recently passed away.

If you would like to inform us of a member's passing, please contact us by emailing membership@bigga.co.uk

# Paul Bullen

1938-2025

**BIGGA life member Paul gave 42 years of dedicated service to Newquay Golf Club and retired in 2004, having made an indelible impact on the Cornwall course.**

Paul showed a love of the outdoors from an early age. After working in a market garden and on a local farm, he joined Newquay in 1962 as deputy head greenkeeper under Phillip Arthur, becoming head greenkeeper in 1965. He remained in post until retirement and was later made an honorary life member.

Paul married Heather Roberts in 1965, and they had two sons, Jonathan and David. He and Heather would have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary this November.

Paul always took immense pride in his work, shaping the course with skill and vision. He hand-crafted tees, bunkers and greens, and much of Newquay's landscape today still reflects his efforts. Despite limited resources, he maintained machinery himself, nurtured strong relationships with suppliers and upheld the highest standards, ensuring the club regularly hosted county championships.

A founding member of the South West division of the BGGA (later BIGGA), Paul also enjoyed playing golf, especially with his sons. His legacy endures in both his family and the course he cared for so devotedly.

# Ian Cureton

1975-2025

**Ian Cureton, deputy course manager at Elderslie Golf Club for 12 years, passed away peacefully at home in June after a brave battle with metastatic testicular cancer. He faced his illness with courage and determination, inspiring admiration from all who knew him.**

Ian's passion for greenkeeping was sparked by work experience at The Belfry, where he began as a trainee in 1991. Rising to acting head greenkeeper of the Derby Course, he became respected for his skill, dedication and attention to detail. After leaving in 1998 to travel, he worked at New South Wales Golf Club in Australia, an experience he cherished. Returning in 1999, he held posts at Sutton Coldfield and Stourbridge golf clubs before taking the opportunity in 2003 to work on the expansion of Son Parc in Menorca, where he met his future wife, Izzy.

On returning to the UK, Ian rejoined Stourbridge, later moving to Rowallan Castle in Ayrshire, before securing his long-term role at Elderslie in 2013. Izzy described the club as "the very best employers" who supported him throughout his illness.

Kind, caring and respected, Ian lived life to the full. His legacy will endure in the greenkeeping community he inspired.

# Donald Major

1930-2025

**BIGGA life member Don passed away peacefully aged 94, leaving his wife of 68 years, Gill, daughter Sheena and grandsons Ollie and Max.**

His greenkeeping career spanned decades, with roles at Flackwell Heath, Beaconsfield and Camberley Heath, before nearly 30 years as head greenkeeper at Betchworth Park in Surrey, retiring in 1985. Dedicated and forward-thinking, Don took pride in improving the course for members and embraced the industry's many changes, from hand-mowing to ride-on machinery.

Golf was his lifelong passion. A scratch golfer, he recorded three holes-in-one and enjoyed success in countless greenkeeper tournaments, often with his family by his side at annual gatherings. Widely travelled, he played more than 140 courses, including Wentworth, Sunningdale, Walton Heath and The Belfry, and in later years delighted in ticking off new venues from his golf club guide. During National Service, his talent even caught the eye of his wing commander, who arranged games at local clubs.

Using the same skill he brought to golf courses, his lawn at home in Dorking was said to be the finest in the area. Don will be remembered as a dedicated professional, gifted golfer and family man who gave so much to the game.

# Adrian Masters

1962-2025

**A much-loved and highly respected member of the Origin Amenity Solutions team, Ade dedicated almost 19 years to the business.**

During that time, he built strong relationships with many customers and colleagues, always upholding his values of trust, professionalism and care.

His contribution to the sportsturf industry encompassed working with Whitemoss, Maxicrop and Countrywide Amenity, after which he became an integral part of the Headland Amenity Sales team, later transitioning into OAS.

As technical sales manager, Ade brought real understanding and experience to his role, but also humour, warmth and an unmistakable passion for people. Whether working with colleagues, customers or industry partners, he developed friendships that went far beyond business. He always took the time to connect, support and brighten the day of those around him.

Andy Russell, commercial director at OAS, said: "Ade had a special gift for connecting with people. He could walk into a room and light it up with his warmth, energy and humour. He was a valued colleague, a trusted friend and someone you always looked forward to seeing. It's incomprehensible that he has been taken from us so soon and will be missed more than words can express."

# John Nudds

1935-2025

**In the words of the Norfolk County Golf Union, John was a greenkeeper, champion golfer, caddy, family man and a true gentleman.**

His lifelong connection with golf began after the Second World War, when he caddied at Royal West Norfolk and joined Brancaster Village. After National Service, he became a greenkeeper at Brancaster in his early 20s before moving on to head greenkeeper at Hunstanton in 1960.

In 1972, he took up the same position at Gerrards Cross in Buckinghamshire, where he remained for 26 years until his retirement. He was honoured with membership at all three clubs, as well as honorary life membership of the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Artisans Golf Union.

Alongside his career, John was a highly successful golfer. He represented both Norfolk and Berks, Bucks & Oxon, won the Norfolk Artisan Championship 10 times between 1957 and 2000, and captured the Norfolk Amateur crown in 1964 and 1969. His proudest achievement came in 1970 when he claimed the Norfolk Open with a record score.

A natural leader, John captained county and artisan teams and later became president of Norfolk Golf Union.

He was also a loving father to Debbie and grandfather to Luke and Jake.

# Neil Thompson

1974-2025

**A long-standing exhibitor at BTME, Neil was a familiar face to many in the industry.**

He served as company director of Border Sports Services for 24 years after taking over the family business from his father, Bill Thompson.

Neil loved football and was a passionate supporter of Newcastle United, while he was also a motor racing fanatic. In his later years, he developed a keen interest in building Lego.

A tribute from Border Sports Services read: "Neil was a dedicated, gentle giant who put everyone else first and would do anything for anyone. He really would go above and beyond."

## In Memoriam

**Julian Sykes**

1965-2025

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# Practical Greenkeeping

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## Course Manager Calum Forsyth will be able to take a breath and switch focus after a busy year to date

### What we do in... October

Club: Elgin, Moray

**By the time October arrives at Elgin, the main playing season is all but over. We still have the odd open or club event early in the month, but after that the schedule clears, and our focus changes.**

It's a welcome shift after six months of relentless activity, and it gives us the chance to address areas that have been under constant stress from golfers.

We completed our main greens maintenance programme back in August, which is earlier than many other clubs, so October is less about disruptive renovation and more about targeted recovery work.

The priority will be hollow-coring and overseeding tees, approaches and other high-traffic areas. These parts of the course carry the greatest wear through the season, and dedicating this month to improving their condition sets us up well for the following spring.

The change of pace is one I always appreciate. From April right through to October, the course is exceptionally busy. With around 850–900 playing members, the footfall is consistently high.

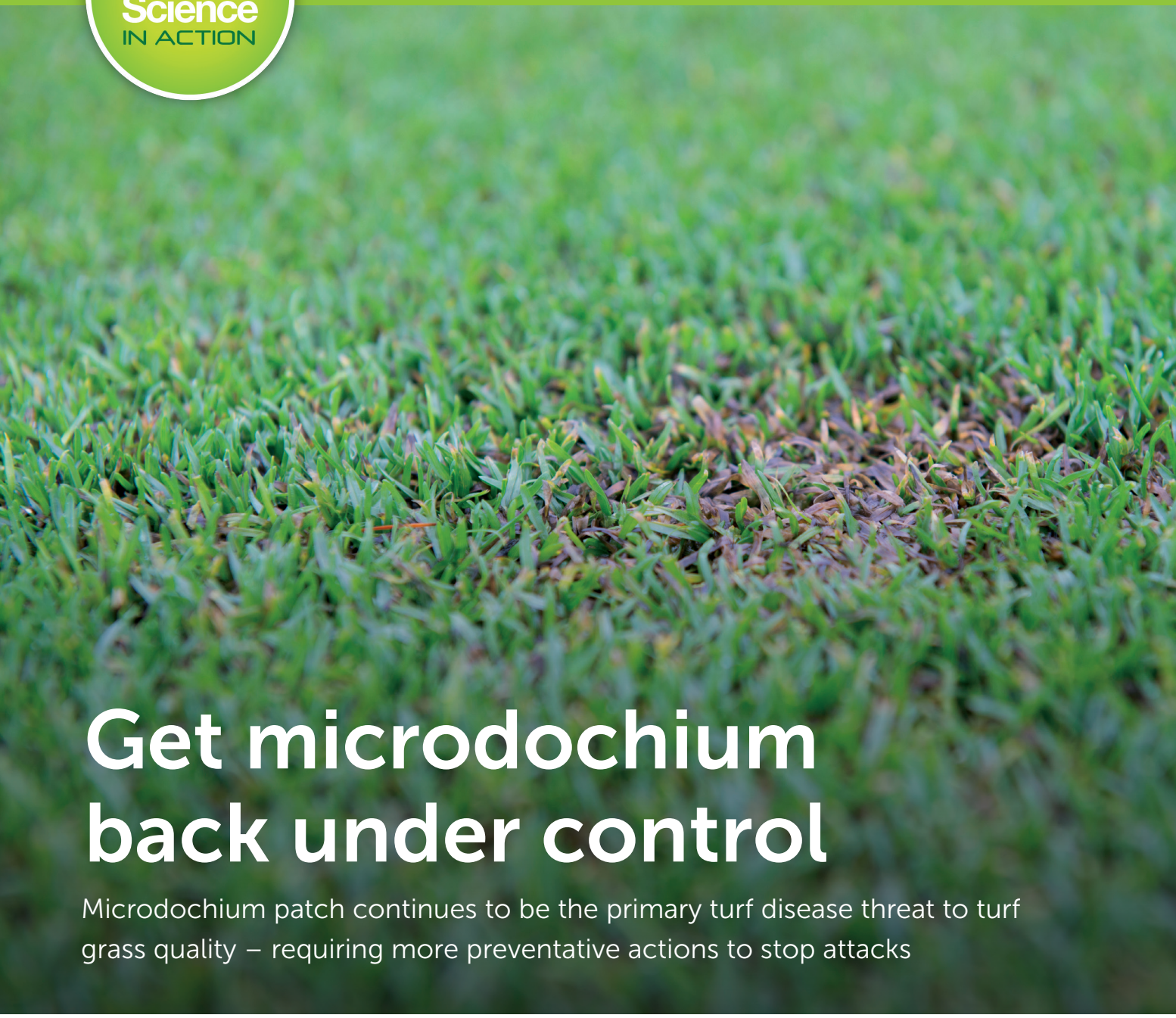
That intensity requires daily preparation of the course and little room for anything else. October offers the breathing space to put down the mowers, pick up the tools and invest time in projects and construction work that are impossible in peak season.

This year has been shaped by the extreme dry weather we've faced. In my time as a greenkeeper, I can't recall a drier spell. Irrigation on greens, tees and approaches has kept those surfaces healthy, but fairways and some approaches have burned out. We've tackled recovery with scarification, seaweed applications, wetting agents and careful spraying schedules, and we've seen encouraging responses when rain has arrived.

Water management has been another focus. Our borehole, more than 25 years old, has struggled at times, and while we can top up from mains, we've worked hard to manage demand. The dry conditions have tested us, but overall the greens have performed well and the course has played consistently.

So, October is our time to repair, rebuild and look ahead, with less pressure on presenting the course for the next competition. After a long, hard season, it's satisfying to change the focus and give the course the attention it needs. GI

> "It's a welcome shift after six months of relentless activity"



# Get microdochium back under control

Microdochium patch continues to be the primary turf disease threat to turf grass quality – requiring more preventative actions to stop attacks

Author: Sean Loakes, Syngenta Technical Manager UK & Ireland

**Just 3% of greenkeepers consider that they have control of microdochium patch completely nailed on their courses, according to a survey of turf disease perceptions at BTME earlier this year. While over 70% believed they had some degree of reasonable control, more than a quarter still feel they have no adequate measures to manage outbreaks.**

Risks of microdochium outbreaks have been further exacerbated this season on turf that has been excessively stressed by prolonged drought and high temperatures, with reduced plant reserves and lower capability to fight disease infection.

And it is getting worse, with changing climatic conditions that are more favourable to the fungi pathogen. Warmer temperatures into late autumn, and typically through the whole winter, are conducive to faster disease development. Combined with longer periods of leaf wetness and heavy dew, it's the perfect scenario for disease development.

Most UK golf courses now experience at least 10% fewer days or hours below $2^0$C, compared to a decade ago. Crucially that's the temperature considered to stop disease and provide a respite from development. As those sub $2^0$C hours decline, so the relentless pressure increases.

Where disease pressure threatens to overwhelm the plant's natural ability to withstand disease or grow away from infection, well-timed fungicide applica-

Microdochium patch

> “Predicting disease enables positive proactive decisions”

tions are essential to give protection.

Over recent years turf research has repeatedly shown that preventative application during periods of disease activity is most successful at minimising damaging effects – targeting the pathogen before it has the chance to penetrate and affect the plant.

That has been further refined with the creation of the AIM programme, utilising three different fungicides and modes of action, selected to be the most appropriate for weather conditions going into the winter.

It starts the strategy with the highly systemic Ascernity whilst the turf is actively growing. It’s a treatment often aimed at dollar spot, but where the control of that is also conferring an excellent clean start to the microdochium season. Where pressure really builds in autumn, the acclaimed Instrata Elite is then well positioned as both systemic and contact to work on the leaf and within the plant. And that leaves the only truly contact fungicide, Medallion, for protection through the slower growing periods of the winter.

The aim throughout is to keep turf clean of disease in the high-pressure periods, so that it is best placed with cultural controls to naturally resist infection and remain disease free during lower pressure periods.

Development trials results with a new Syngenta fungicide, currently in the UK registration pipeline, also showed that, in high-risk situations designed to maximise the disease pressure, well-timed preventative applications provided 92% disease control. That compared to an 87% reduction in scarring with applications at the first signs of disease and 80% reduction in damage when applied after disease had already broken out.

Key to the application timing is understanding exactly when pressure will be at its highest. The microdochium model, built into the Syngenta Turf Adviser App, uses temperature and rainfall forecast data to predict conditions conducive to disease, and help guide decision making.

With the top-tier of the ITM disease triangle control strategy planned (Fig 1.), all other integrated cultural controls will be best placed to reduce disease pressure and minimise both the frequency and severity of microdochium.

Since moisture is essential for the pathogen to develop, keeping leaves dry will immediately reduce the population build-up and pressure, using a combination of techniques.

With winter mowing, it’s worth noting that damage to the leaf tip when cutting creates the easiest entry point for disease pathogen hyphae when spores germinate on the surface. Sharp blades that slice the leaf cleanly reduce the threat, compared to the tear of a blunt knife.

Even though turf growth is slowing over the autumn, extending a Primo Maxx II PGR programme, albeit at lower rates and longer intervals, can help to minimise mowing effects by enabling more rolling with less damage, as well as creating a more turgid leaf that is cleaner to cut.

Aeration damage and heavy top-dressing during conditions of high disease pressure will also increase the risk of infection. Since maintenance is too often governed by the club calendar and operations in a high-pressure time may be unavoidable, it may be necessary to review fungicide application timing to cover this period.

As we move into autumn, fertiliser programmes will also typically be coming to an end. Previous correlation of microdochium damage and nutrient use does indicate there is still the need to provide adequate nutrition for turf recovery from any damage, but avoiding excessive use that could lead to soft growth more susceptible to attack.

Using as many cultural controls as practical will reduce the disease pressure and the susceptibility of a specific course’s surfaces to infection. Local knowledge of your course and the likelihood of outbreaks is essential to interpret risk warnings and make informed decisions for optimum fungicide timing and consistently manage microdochium to stay ahead of outbreaks this season.

Follow the conversation

# Data-driven greenkeeping – how Ganton is raising the bar

Course Manager Simon Olver shares how he combines traditional greenkeeping expertise with modern data collection

**As the world continues to evolve, greenkeeping and agronomy closely follow suit. Golfer expectations are now through the roof, golf economics are challenging, and the climate continues to surprise us year on year.**

Looking back at my early years in greenkeeping, I worked tirelessly to gain as much knowledge as possible and to achieve a foothold in the industry, and it was definitely more an art driven by eye and experience.

I think it's fair to say we all accept that the standards we now produce simply were not achievable back then. If you are yet to embrace your own data-based management journey, there has never been a better time to jump on board.

Similar to anything else in life, it may take some time to become fully comfortable, but persevere and soon it will feel natural and become a key strategic tool and process in your own agronomy strategy.

Trust me, it will be worth it, and this industry progression will positively impact any golf course and go a long way to offset the majority of current pillars of pressure within golf course management and agronomy.

In this article, I hope to create a little interest and curiosity for everyone to look a little deeper. Greenkeeping experience will always remain pivotal, but combined with quantifiable data, the results can be simply mind-blowing.

## How it all started

Back at the beginning of my career, we still did a very basic form of data collection. As I finished cutting greens each day, my Head Greenkeeper Ken would always ask me how many boxes I had taken off. Fast forward 27 years and what we are doing now is exactly the same principle, with just more structure, focus and much more advanced technology.

It was 10 years ago at my old club, Whitley Bay, while chatting at length with my colleague, Mark Hollingsworth, that we came to the conclusion that sourcing quantifiable data has the potential to improve both our own personal knowledge and development, as well as improving the performance of the golf course.

We started off on Amazon, buying cheap equipment like a moisture meter, soil thermometer, and using the most reliable free weather app we could find. We focused on one green to start with, then expanded to three greens, which at the time was the maximum we could achieve with the size of the team and workload.

At that time, the technology we use today either simply was not there or was totally unachievable financially. As we had not used anything else really, we had nothing to compare it to and looked past any negatives around accuracy, etc. Over the next few years, our findings were eye-opening, allowing us to improve standards and lower costs year-on-year. Fast forward to today at Ganton and what we are doing is exactly the same, just with a little more focus, knowledge and accuracy.

### You don't have to do it alone

One of the greatest strengths of our industry continues to be the willingness to help others. There are a huge number of greenkeepers around the world who are now fully integrated into data-driven management.

There are many different ways to build a greater understanding, learn useful techniques and see how you can incorporate this successfully into your setup. Micah Woods of Pace Turf has some great videos looking in depth into Turf GvX. Darren McLachlan, course manager at Turnberry, is leading the way here in the UK and often has lots of interesting stuff on his socials.

There are also lots of articles aimed at different levels of experience. If you like the look of something that someone is currently doing, drop them a message and make contact. I am sure most of us out there in the industry would be more than happy to help.

A great example supporting this movement is The R&A Sustainable Agronomy department. Data-based management now plays a pivotal role to support trusted agronomic advice delivered throughout the organisation, allowing successful delivery of championships while driving the ongoing development of golf courses at all levels all around the world.

## Our key areas of data collection

### Weather

The first thing I would look at if you don't already track it is the weather. There are many weather stations out there which produce automated weather data that can then be copied and pasted into our management system. We use a Davis Pro weather station which runs with the Pro Data software, providing all we need such as rainfall, temperature, ET, GDD and disease pressure. If you are interested in this system, Mark Hunt is your man – he will take away all the stress and fully install everything you need. If an onsite weather station is not an option, try the free Syngenta Turf Adviser app, which also provides accurate environmental information that can still be used in your data system.

### Clip Volume/Turf GvX

Measuring clippings daily provides us with the most decisive real-time data, both across the entire course and highlighting differences between individual greens.

With this information, we are able to gauge performance and consistency on a day-to-day basis across various target ranges for optimum standards and delivery. This information is used to decide on factors such as the application of growth regulators or nutrition, along with irrigation.

It is amazing how many different areas of data are linked and all contribute. If one area is out of the desired target range, this can significantly impact performance characteristics. Only by collecting clipping data can we achieve this. Historic data is also our friend – the ability to look at old trends from previous years helps us understand what is happening and deal with situations today.

While out mowing, the operator empties their grass boxes into a clear bucket after each green, measuring the yield in litres. They then use the team clipping data app to input their findings. This information arrives back at the office and is inputted into our management system.

Formulas in the system know the size of each green and automatically convert this information into ml per $m^2$. Armed with your daily clipping yield, this can then be inputted into a separate formula sheet which combines this with daily growth potential information to produce the all-important growth ratio figure. We can then work out how much our grass is actually growing against how much the weather data shows it should be. We can then be speeded up or slowed down accordingly.

$$GvX = \frac{ClipVol}{20 \times GP} \times 100$$

### Performance

We have recently switched over to the new USGA GS3 and Deacon system to manage all our performance testing. New technology allows the operator to simply roll a ball full of technology down a stimp meter for speed, trueness and smoothness. A drop test is undertaken with the same hardware to distinguish levels of firmness. Live data is then

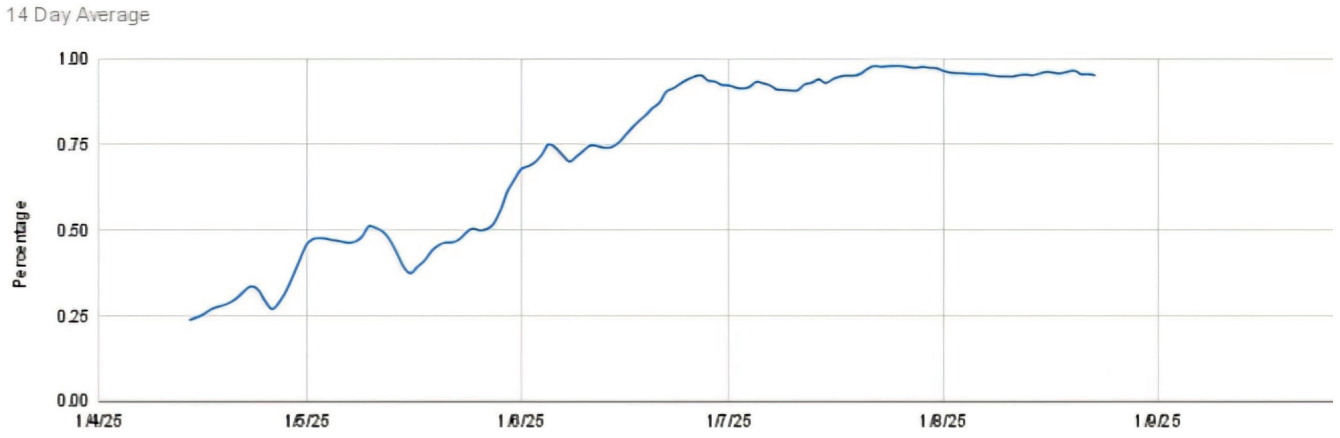
### Get started – it's easier than you think

At Ganton, we now collect data across a wide range of different areas using Google Sheets as a management hub, which is complemented by various apps. If you haven't used Google Sheets and you are not an expert on Excel, give it a go – it's a lot more user-friendly and can be used alongside Google Forms and Documents, and it is free, which is always nice.

If you're unsure of where to start, looking at the areas which are the most important to you is always advisable to ensure that time can be allocated, results are seen as valuable as possible, and resources are available to adopt any changes that come about from your findings. For us, this will always remain our greens. This focus now allows us to produce Championship playing conditions for routine day-to-day play. One of the most time-consuming and challenging parts to start with is building and setting up your data storage sheet. Joe Tiplady, Ganton's deputy course manager, and I have worked closely to develop ours, and Joe can take most of the credit as he continually improves what we have in order to maximise its performance. Find someone established with a good functioning system which looks easy to navigate, and ask them to share a blank template with you. This will save you hours and hours. If anyone is interested and would like me to send you over a blank template including formulas, don't hesitate to get in touch via email **coursemanager@gantongolfclub.com**

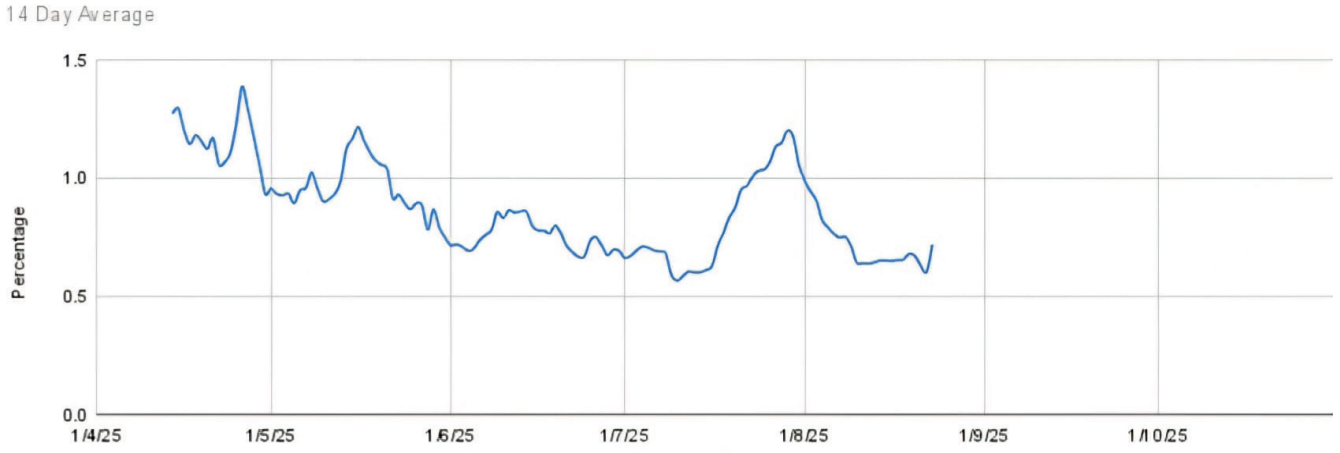
## Growth potential

This illustrates how much grass/plant should be growing against environmental conditions. This is determined and driven by average temperatures over a 24-hour period. A number is allocated between (0-100%) – this is your growth potential. Cool-season grasses reach 100% at around 20 degrees.




## Turf GvX

This links actual rates of grass growth against key environmental factors such as temperature. With your Turf GvX number (0-20) you can then establish where your growth rates are against against your own targets. Informed decisions are then made around Important areas such as mowing frequency, fertilising, growth regulator application and topdressing application, to name a few.




## Yearly rainfall

A very simple but valuable chart clearly illustrating comparisons and differences year-to-year. A great one for members' presentations or on reports to be easily understood by all. If tracked alongside evapotranspiration and deficits or surplus, this gives the team important information to support challenging period of course management.

"The results can be simply mind-blowing"

sent immediately to both our phones and the central system back in the office.

A great way to start is simply with the traditional stimpmeter and golf balls. Until recently, we used the STRI visual smoothness scale, which might not be as accurate but is still relatively reliable and produces some very thought-provoking data.

## Moisture

Moisture meters are used daily throughout the summer months. Each morning, around 20 samples are taken from each green during course setup. Information is then instantly available to staff members who are out hand watering, allowing them to target specific areas. Combining the average moisture from each green with the projected level of evapotranspiration for a specific day gives us a more accurate picture when planning volumes using the automated system.

Hopefully, I have been able to give you a very broad overview of our data collection techniques at Ganton. It is very difficult to go into depth about each area; I could write a full article about each discipline. If anyone would like any further information, please get in touch.

If funds are not available for expensive tech, don't be put off. Start off simple with low-cost tools and evolve over time. This is our fifth year at Ganton, and personally my 10th making data-driven decisions. This technique works and is infectious. Once you start operating using data-based management, there is no going back. **GI**

## Communication with members

A huge win for us has been communicating both our processes and the data with our committee and members. I can honestly say when we did our last members' walkaround at the agronomy facility, they were blown away with the level of focus and detail we now use in our profession. One of our board members stated: "Wow, you cannot unsee what you have seen – simply unbelievable".

From a course management and task scheduling perspective, we have always struggled to get a window to apply our light sand dressing throughout the busy summer period. Using the GS3 technology we produced data showing the speed, trueness and smoothness are not negatively influenced by this operation. We now have full approval if we get out early to apply sand whenever it is required, even on busy members days.

The greenkeeping industry is now operating with a tremendously high level of technical expertise, but unfortunately we sometimes don't get the recognition we should. Use every opportunity you can to communicate what you're doing, how and why – the data will support you. Data-driven management certainly provided me with the most decisive way of achieving this in my career so far.

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# 'Last year we had six months without rain'

As UK greenkeepers battled through an exceptionally dry spring and summer, Chris Furneaux knew exactly what they were going through – he faces it every year.

**With no rainfall between May and October, summer temperatures pushing 45°C and water shortages that demand constant vigilance, managing a golf course in Cyprus poses multiple challenges.**

Golf Course Superintendent Chris Furneaux is familiar with them all, having been leading the team at the Mediterranean island's Minthis Golf Club since 2008. Originally from the Cornwall-Devon border, Chris cut his teeth at Guildford and Merrist Wood before his career took him overseas for grow-in projects in Cyprus and Mallorca.

When the opportunity arose to return to Cyprus permanently, he seized it, and over the past 17 years Chris has overseen the transformation of Minthis into one of the island's leading golf destinations.

Set in the hills above Paphos, Minthis is a resort-style course surrounded by vineyards, olive groves and a 12th-century monastery. But beneath its picture-postcard setting lies a unique set of agronomic pressures that demand careful planning and innovative solutions.

In this Q&A, Chris shares how he and his team respond to those challenges – from water management and overseeding, to pest control and renovation projects – and what lessons UK greenkeepers might take from his experience.

### What was the situation and your priorities on arrival at Minthis?

When I arrived in 2008, the course was owned by the

Church at the time, so I was interviewed at the local bishopric by the course manager and priests. Fortunately, I managed to outline my goals without committing blasphemy!

The Church was in the process of selling the course and surrounding land to a local real estate company. The course, built in 1994 by inexperienced contractors to a Donald Steel design, had been poorly constructed. Despite an upgrade a few years earlier, it was clear corners had been cut and the course needed a lot of care.

The greens were SR1119 creeping bent, clay push-ups, suffering from crabgrass and prone to Dollar Spot. Irrigation was limited to two unevenly spaced lines along the fairways, and drainage was poor, with storm water running into bunkers rather than around them. The fairways, sown with cool-season grasses (Tall Fescue, Kentucky Bluegrass and Italian Ryegrass), struggled badly in the hot summers. With little rough due to poor irrigation, wayward shots often finished on bare soil or stone.

On the plus side, the location was stunning, with phenomenal views of the Troodos mountains and a 12th-century monastery on site. Vineyards, fruit and nut trees gave the course real charm and potential.

My priorities were to improve grass coverage, particularly the roughs, to make them fair and consistent. We added irrigation lines to bare areas, burned off the cool-season grasses everywhere except the greens, and replanted with warm-season species.

In 2010, with architect Tom Mackenzie, we began redesigning the course, starting with a new island green on the 15th. In 2018–19 we rebuilt holes 10 and 13, plus the practice facilities, and in 2020–21 we rebuilt all greens complexes and bunkers to USGA specification, seeding the greens with 007 creeping bentgrass.

> "This year the UK has experienced a summer more like ours"

**How would you describe the facilities now?**

Minthis has transformed over the past 15 years from an 18-hole parkland course into a high-end resort with its own hotel, spa and luxury accommodation. It sits 450 metres above sea level in the Cypriot hills, 10km east of Paphos. Opened in 1994, it is an 18-hole, 6,300-metre course with a driving range, three practice greens, a turf nursery and a three-hole academy.

When I arrived, the greenkeeping team was just eight. Today we have 13, including myself, Deputy Superintendent Frank Meppem, mechanic George Neophytou, and irrigation technician Petros Almaizides.

**What is the playing season there and how many rounds do you do at peak times?**

Cyprus has two peak seasons, when the temperature is in the mid-20s: late February to early June, and late September to early December. During these periods, we can have up to 150 rounds a day. We also have 160 members who keep the business steady during quieter months.

**Can you give us an idea of how the climate impacts your practices and how that might differ from the UK?**

This year the UK has experienced a summer more like ours, and I sympathise with anyone trying to manage turf without a reliable irrigation system. Here in Cyprus, we have no rainfall from mid-May until October, with temperatures reaching 45°C. Last year we had six months without rain.

Controlling dry patch is a constant battle. We use moisture meters and wetting agents both preventatively and curatively. Greens are syringed daily in summer, depending on moisture readings, and all closely mown areas are sprayed with wetting agents every three weeks. The irrigation system and pump station are checked daily, as faults must be fixed immediately or we risk losing turf within days.

High humidity combined with heat can also be problematic. Growth surges in bent and warm-season grasses, so balancing nitrogen inputs and growth regulators is crucial to maintain consistency and avoid thatch build-up.

Fertiliser and irrigation programmes are constantly adjusted based on humidity.

Winters can bring frosts and even the occasional snowfall. We average about 15 frost delays a year.

### Are there particular agronomic techniques or innovations you've adopted at Minthis that UK greenkeepers might find interesting?

Because of our extreme soil temperature fluctuations, we overseed each winter to avoid the course turning yellow when warm-season grasses go dormant. Each November we overseed tees, fairways and aprons with a mix of annual and perennial ryegrass. It establishes quickly and provides a dark green contrast to dormant roughs. By May, it naturally burns off and is outcompeted by the warm-season grasses.

Minthis has been GEO certified since 2019, and we continue to adopt best practices wherever possible. Out-of-play areas are used as vineyards, olive groves and natural grasslands. We keep bee hives, maintain a herb garden for the resort kitchens, and harvest produce from our carob, pecan, walnut and fig trees. We even sell our own branded wine and honey.

### How much of a factor is water management and what is your approach?

Water management is a huge issue in Cyprus. At the time of writing in late August, we are in severe drought, with reservoirs at just 15% capacity. Another poor winter could be disastrous.

Minthis built its own reservoir in 2004, holding 130,000m$^3$. Storm drainage across the resort channels rainwater into it, and we typically harvest around 35,000m$^3$ annually. We also use effluent grey water from Paphos, processed through two sewage treatment plants, as a recycled irrigation source.

This year the water authorities cut our supply in May, so I've reduced irrigation by 20%. Greens and tees still get what

they need, but we've cut back on fairways and roughs. The savings on water have allowed us to reinvest in wetting agents and plant protection products, which has helped us survive this summer relatively unscathed.

> Water management is a huge issue in Cyprus"

**What are the main pest and disease pressures you face, and how do they compare with those in the UK?**

Mole crickets and cutworm are our biggest insect problems. Mole crickets burrow deep into the soil, leaving large casts, and foxes and crows dig for them, leaving holes across the course. Cutworm season runs from September to October, and like leatherjackets, they can cause significant turf damage if untreated.

We don't get Fusarium here, but Dollar Spot can be an issue in hot, humid conditions. This year, after correcting a soil potassium deficiency, we've avoided significant outbreaks despite the weather. Pythium is another disease we always need to watch for.

In winter we occasionally see brown patch or fairy ring, but these are mainly aesthetic issues that grow out in spring.

**What are your main priorities or projects at Minthis now?**

Our irrigation system is nearly 25 years old and badly needs replacing. Poorly spaced heads, low pressure on higher ground, and an ageing hydraulic network mean we suffer bare patches and frequent leaks. Our pump station is outdated, and at peak summer our watering window lasts an unsustainable 21 hours. The course looks great in May but worn out by September, which hurts our autumn season.

We are working with Irritech UK on a new, top-spec system, which will be phased in over the coming years. The first phase, beginning this December, will replace the pump station and mainline pipe.

Upgrading irrigation will be a game-changer, helping Minthis reach the standard of a top Mediterranean resort – and allowing me to sleep more easily during the summer months. **GI**

## About Chris

Chris got into golf at the age of 11, when his grandad gave him a half set of clubs for Christmas. Growing up on the Cornwall-Devon border, he spent his school holidays at Launceston Golf Club, where junior membership was just £40 a year. Days of 36 holes, ball-hunting in the gorse, and endless putting competitions cemented his passion for the game.

By the end of his A Levels, Chris was focused on a career in golf. After completing a Golf Studies Diploma at Merrist Wood, he began greenkeeping at Guildford Golf Club in 1998, relishing the outdoor work and the variety of tasks. A move to Merrist Wood Golf Club followed, where he became deputy head greenkeeper under Gareth Rogers, completing his NVQs and spray training along the way.

In 2002, Chris took a life-changing opportunity in Cyprus, assisting with the grow-in of Aphrodite Hills. He stayed for three years before moving to Mallorca to work on another grow-in at Golf Park Puntiro. In 2008, he returned to Cyprus to become superintendent at Minthis. He remains in post, some 17 years on, still thriving in the Mediterranean sun.

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# 'It's about sustainability as well as water security'

Simon Freshwater explains how Harewood Downs is tackling water challenges with a new reservoir project and long-term sustainability in mind

**Many greenkeepers will argue that water management is the most pressing issue facing the golf industry today, and Harewood Downs Golf Club is taking a proactive approach to the challenge.**

**The Buckinghamshire venue has plans in place to install a trio of water storage ponds that will reduce – and eventually eliminate - its current reliance on mains supply.**

While the project will boost the facility's water security, reduce its carbon footprint, and go a long way to safeguarding its future, it also promises a wealth of other benefits for Course Manager Simon Freshwater.

With work scheduled to begin in spring 2026, access to a sustainable water supply will allow Simon and his team to plan with confidence as he leads Harewood Downs into an important new chapter.

The reservoirs will eventually hold 19,500m$^3$ of water, collected from rainfall and drainage across the course. Once operational, they will enable irrigation of greens, tees, approaches and – in time – fairways.

In this Q&A, Simon discusses the potentially transformative impact of the project at the Buckinghamshire course.

### Can you outline what this reservoir project involves and why it was necessary?

Being built on chalkland, Harewood Downs drains well but dries out just as quickly. We've always known we needed to secure water storage. We currently utilise mains water and a borehole, but, because of our location near to HS2 and the River Misbourne, we'll never be permitted to abstract more than 20 cubic metres a day from the borehole.

The plan is to create three cascading ponds (A, B and C). Reservoir A will be the largest at around 9500m$^3$, and could one day be used for fairway irrigation. Reservoirs B and C will hold 10,000m$^3$ between them, fed daily by the borehole and supplemented by rainfall and surface water that we plan to harvest. Together, this should reduce any necessity and reliance on using mains water to cover the critical 100-day period when irrigation demand is highest.

### Once the reservoirs are in place, how much more confidence will you have in your water security and planning?

This will be huge for us. The reservoirs won't guarantee lush fairways, but they should stop them going brown in prolonged dry spells.

Crucially, we'll come off mains water, saving money that can be put into other projects.

It gives me confidence knowing we'll have a secure supply stored through the winter to carry us into dry spells.

### Where on the course will the reservoirs be located, and will construction cause disruption?

We're fortunate to have a 1.5-hectare area of long ecological rough, between the second and ninth holes. Currently, it's not utilised, and there is good access for machinery, so disruption will be minimal. It's also close to our existing irrigation tank and pumps, which is ideal.

### Have you worked on a project like this before?

No, this is the first. At Celtic Manor they already had lakes and reservoirs when I arrived, as well as a dedicated irrigation team, so I wasn't directly involved.

This is a big learning curve, but I'm working closely with

"As a golf club and as a business, we have a responsibility to do everything in our power to preserve and protect the environment, and one of the biggest areas any golf club should look at to do so is their water consumption. Investing in building these reservoirs is a huge step for us, but it will result in a major reduction in our resource usage and carbon footprint. We're excited to make the switch to recycled water and play our part in this crucial moment for the industry."

**- Matt Mayfield, general manager at Harewood Downs**

## About Simon

Originally from Northampton, Simon developed a passion for golf as a child and was happiest out on the course. After undertaking work experience at Northampton Golf Club, he pursued horticulture at college before returning there full-time as a greenkeeper. In 2008 he joined Celtic Manor, later spending a year in Australia working at a club in Melbourne before returning to Celtic Manor. Simon secured his first deputy course manager role at Wycombe Heights in 2013, moving to Harewood Downs in 2015. Simon was promoted to course manager at Harewood Downs in February 2024.

### Simon on navigating an exceptionally dry 2025

The worst I've seen was 2018, when we had six months of drought. This year has been close. At the moment, we only irrigate greens, tees and approaches. We're constantly monitoring moisture, hand-watering where needed, and fixing leaks as they occur. One of my team has really taken to irrigation work, which has helped a lot. The fairways are more of a challenge. We bought a travelling sprinkler, but you can only do one fairway a day. During the worst of the drought, we sprayed wetting agent and irrigated one fairway at a time, rotating through them. It's stressful, but everyone's been in the same boat. The recent rain has helped a lot. Our ongoing programme of scarifying, feeding and wetting agent has meant the turf responds well when the rain does come. Greens, tees and approaches had their maintenance in early August – drainage, scarifying, solid-tining, then about 60 tonnes of sand. We then did the fairways in September, scarifying, solid-tining and overseeding worn areas.

> "This will be huge for us"

the club and our irrigation consultant. Contractors will carry out the work itself, allowing us to focus on the playing surfaces.

**Do you have a vision for how the course might perform once the system is in place?**

It'll really help with recovery after drought. We won't always have the capacity for lush fairways, but we'll be able to keep them greener and healthier. Overseeding and wetting agents will be more effective when we can water them in properly across all fairways rather than just one at a time. Ultimately, it should improve playability, giving golfers a bit of grass to play off rather than baked concrete. It'll also help us keep pace with neighbouring clubs that already have fairway irrigation.

**How important is the environmental aspect to you?**

Very important. We're working with ecologists on planting around the reservoirs and looking at what wildlife we can encourage – birds, newts, aquatic plants. Because the reservoirs will involve cut and fill, there'll be banking where we can plant to improve habitats. It's about sustainability as well as water security. **GI**

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# Moisture management and the role of soil wetting agents in turf care

Soil wetting agents can form a vital part of our integrated turf management plans during the autumn and winter months

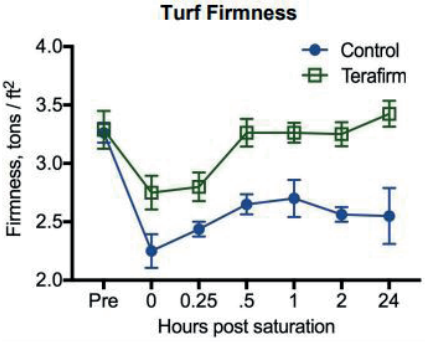
Author: Kelly-Marie Clack, Origin Amenity Solutions

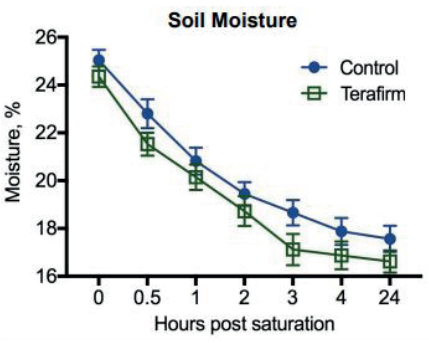
**Soil penetrants reduce surface tension and facilitate downward movement of water. This technology improves the speed at which water infiltrates from the soil surface into the soil profile.**

It is important to note that non-ionic soil surfactants do not change the soil's physical properties. It enables water to move as quickly as the soil's physical properties will allow. Primary and secondary drainage systems will improve the soil's physical properties and form a key part of managing soil moisture. Primary drainage removes excess water from the profile, whilst secondary drainage creates the connectivity of the surface to the primary drainage system. Drainage infiltration should also be supported with an adequate aeration plan for your soil type, as well as a top-dressing strategy. Aeration should only be carried out in conducive conditions to avoid deformation of the surface by machinery tracks and additional compaction in saturated conditions. Altering the soil's drainage ability will maximise the benefit of soil penetrants.

During periods of prolonged wetness, our soils will become saturated, and turf health will start to deteriorate. Turfgrass and soil microbes are aerobic, which means it is vital we manage the air-to-water ratio in our soils. Visual symptoms of saturation stress can include a decline in sward density, reduced rooting and plant health (chlorosis) and an increase in thatch due to lack of decomposition. Turfgrass stress can then lead to disease outbreaks, surface algae, weed and moss invasion in a thinning sward, and potential PPN damage.

Penetrants form an integral part of our integrated turf management plans



> Moisture management should be considered all year round, as soil moisture balance is essential for a healthy soil and sward"

by keeping our surfaces drier and can be supported using appropriate dew management technologies. By reducing surface moisture and increasing soil infiltration, we can improve air-to-water ratios in the soil, optimising soil health and supporting organic matter decomposition. In turn, we will see a denser sward coverage, less susceptible to surface algae, weed and moss invasion, and a stronger and healthier turfgrass and root system. This will improve playing conditions throughout the year as well as overall surface performance.

A field study was conducted to evaluate the effect of Terafirm on the surface firmness and soil moisture of managed amenity turf at Rutgers University.

Soil moisture and firmness readings were taken on the untreated control and the Terafirm-treated plots, followed by a simulated rainfall event of 50mm. The measurements were then taken at intervals over a 24-hour period.

The Terafirm-treated plots returned to pre-saturated firmness within 30 minutes of the rainfall event. The untreated plots took 5 days to regain their pre-saturated firmness. This technology is an essential tool for moisture management in the wetter months to improve play and surface performance as well as soil and plant health. Terifirm is also helpful during tournaments to ensure playing conditions remain consistent during a tournament when high rainfall is expected.

Moisture management should be considered all year round, as soil moisture balance is essential for a strong and healthy soil and sward. Following the weather forecast and evapotranspiration data to help you build your wetting agent strategy is key. Some wetting agents such as Tricure are multifunctional and help to move water vertically and horizontally through the soil profile to give consistent soil moisture, reduce surface tension and reduce the risk of dry patch. Add Terafirm to support the vertical movement of water promoting improved infiltration and reduced surface tension (reducing water in the canopy will also help to reduce disease risk.) Always remember that when your soil is saturated, you can only move that water if it has somewhere to go, and that is why drainage and good aeration strategies are imperative.

For more information on soil wetting agents, moisture management strategies, and how Terafirm and Tricure can support your turf management programme, contact Origin Amenity Solutions on **0800 138 7222** or email **sales@originamenity.com**

# From concept to course

## How Aspley Guise transformed operations with Kress robotic mowers

**An interview with Paul Lancaster (General Manager) and Andy Copeland (Golf Course Manager) reveals the strategic thinking behind a comprehensive robotic revolution**

When Andy Copeland first brought the idea of robotic mowers to the management table at Aspley Guise and Woburn Sands Golf Club, it wasn't just about replacing machinery – it was about reimagining how a forward-thinking golf club could optimise operations for the future.

"Robot mowers were everywhere on social media, and I was reading extensively about sustainability and adapting to staff shortages in our industry," explains Copeland. "In my world, the only way to achieve what we wanted was by redeploying my team's hours into more detailed work around the golf course."

General Manager Paul Lancaster embraced the collaborative approach. "It started as a concept from Andy, and then between us we looked at the benefits – both agronomically and from a business case perspective," Lancaster recalls. "We had to sell the idea to our board of directors and get member buy-in."

### Redefining resource utilisation

The most persistent misconception about robotic mowing concerns staffing implications. "The first question is always 'how many greenkeepers are we losing?'" says Lancaster. "Definitely not the case. We simply want to redeploy our manpower to utilise the skills and knowledge of our team in the best way we can."

Copeland's team consists of qualified greenkeepers – minimum Level 2 – whose expertise extends far beyond operating mowing equipment. "I need to lean on their agronomic background to identify turf diseases, pests and disorders," he explains. "They can refine our cutting regimes, reduce diesel emissions, and present the golf course to a much better level."

Lancaster estimates the robots will free up approximately 20 hours per week. "That time can focus on the detailed side of the course – mowing around sprinkler heads, keeping steps tidy, walk-off areas. The areas that get forgotten when you're focused on: just keep mowing, just keep mowing."

This addresses a specific improvement area the club identified. "Our greens are good, but our detailing around the rest of the course had room for improvement," Lancaster acknowledges. "Members want a course they can be proud of."

### Technical excellence in challenging conditions

The selection of Kress KR237e mowers addressed unique site challenges. "We trialled other robotic mowers that rely on localised masts, but with changes in elevation and being heavily tree-

lined, we'd often lose signal," explains Lancaster.

Copeland concurs: "We tried other brands, but none had the same output that the Kress GPS system had, and the mobile app was particularly useful."

The recent hardware upgrade introducing digitally controlled height adjustment proved pivotal. "It enabled us to put robots onto fairways, which in CAPEX terms has extended the life of our fairway mower by two to three years," notes Copeland.

## Agronomic and operational advantages

The continuous cutting approach delivers multiple turf benefits. "We're taking a little-and-often approach," explains Lancaster. "Taking small amounts of grass off regularly helps increase density of the sward. It's almost like grass cycling within the turf, which strengthens the grass plant."

Weight reduction provides additional advantages. "Having less weight going across fairways reduces compaction. If we're reducing compaction, the soil profile remains better for drainage."

Scheduling optimisation minimises player impact. "Ideally we'll be mowing the fairways overnight and the rough during the day, which is only possible with robots" says Lancaster. "We don't want mowing to impact the golfer's experience – we want to improve it."

Winter operations provide particular advantages. "There are periods when the course is too wet for traditional ride-on mowers," Lancaster notes. "The lightweight robots can continue cutting into winter months."

The robots address specific challenges like worm casting. "With daily operation, they should scatter worm casts every night instead of allowing buildup," explains Copeland. "We can't spray for worms anymore due to EU legislation."

## Strategic capital management

Perhaps the most significant business impact involves capital expenditure optimisation. Lancaster operates a rolling machinery replacement scheme, with their fairway mower due for replacement within two to three years. "With reduced use following robot introduction, the machine's lifespan increases. Capital I'd spend on a new mower can be redeployed to other club improvements."

The financial analysis required comprehensive data compilation. "I had to compile diesel usage and man-hours for cutting specific areas," explains Copeland. "Paul managed everything in Excel format for our financial director."

Beyond machinery longevity, operational savings compound. "We'll heavily reduce fuel consumption from fairway mowing, rough mowing and blowers that follow around to clear grass clippings," notes Lancaster.

## Sustainability and future vision

Environmental considerations align with business objectives. "Reducing fuel means reducing emissions," says Lancaster. "We're custodians of our golf course. Sustainability is huge in the industry, but it has to stack up from a business perspective as well."

As the club pursues GEO certification, chemical reduction represents another potential benefit. "If grass is stronger and healthier from regular mowing, we may see herbicide reduction," suggests Copeland.

Implementation involves mapping with a simple and accurate mapping cart and then the setup, which has had strong support from local dealer Fleetmech and the Kress technical team. The club encourages member involvement, asking them to suggest robot names rather than numerical designations.

Copeland envisions consistent daily presentation: "Knowing we can leave site and the operations continue provides me with incredible peace of mind. The golf course is presented optimally at all times."

At Aspley Guise, the seven Kress KR237e mowers represent strategic resource optimisation that enhances both agronomic outcomes and business sustainability.

As the industry grapples with labour challenges and environmental responsibilities, their comprehensive approach offers a roadmap for clubs who are ready to embrace the robotic revolution.

**Scan Me** to find out more

# Making a big difference in club efficiencies

## Toro's autonomous mowing solutions arrive at UK clubs

**Toro's new autonomous mowing solutions, which launched at BTME 2025, are now being seen in golf clubs across the UK.**

The first – Thonock Park in Lincolnshire – was so impressed with Toro's Turf Pro 500 mowers that it bought five.

The mowers are being used to cut both the fairways and rough of 18 of the club's 36 holes and according to General Manager Benjamin Hatch the club is "exceptionally pleased with their quality of cut and the definition between fairway and rough grasses."

Before we delve further into Thonock Park's experience, let's just consider the technology behind the all-electric, self-charging Turf Pro 500, which enables it to make such a difference to club productivity and efficiencies.

Featuring Real Time Kinematic (RTK) geo-positioning technology – which comes from a GPS based satellite system – these mowers allow for areas to be mapped, setting specific boundaries in which the machines can operate autonomously. When the mower reaches the edge of the predefined work zone based on satellite positioning, it intelligently keeps within it.

Thonock Park Course Manager Rob Acheson, centre, with Mason Sleight, left, and Glen Sawyer both from Toro dealer Russells Groundcare. Joined by Thonock Park General Manager Benjamin Hatch in image on right

There are no boundary wires, the mowers can follow a consistent pattern with minimal overlap and are accurate to two centimetres.

Operation is straightforward: wireless monitoring and control of the units is through a computer or mobile phone where it is possible to customise working perimeters, no-go zones, mowing patterns, cutting height, transport paths – and then control it remotely through the mobile app. The machine can be started or stopped at any time from anywhere, and the operator will receive alerts, can create schedules, and automate certain processes.

The Turf Pro 500 with its five cutting heads can mow up to 18.5 acres (75,000m2), has a cutting height range of 20-100mm and adjustable mowing patterns can be utilised to achieve multiple aesthetics.

Thonock Park and its local Toro dealer, Russells Groundcare, have had two comprehensive training sessions post-install from Lee Rowbotham, GeoLink and Digital Specialist at Reesink UK.

Lee explains the process: "We were there at the point of delivery to install the chargers and base station. The mowers are blind out of the box, so training involves telling them everything they need to know, like where the charging station is, the route to the fairways, what the safe areas, and not safe areas are. And of course, for the team to understand the operation and the terminology involved."

Once set up, Course Manager Rob Acheson was shown how to control all five mowers through the Smart App. Operation is something Lee likens to how irrigation sprinklers are controlled.

"They are controlled individually, one at a time, and can be set up in advance," he says. "Just like you can set a sprinkler to come on at 5am, you can set the Turf Pros to start mowing at 10pm once everyone has gone home."

This provides a big advantage in getting course maintenance ahead of play. All fairway mowing can be completed before the course opens, supported by "the almost non-existent noise levels" as confirmed by Benjamin.

Another added benefit of these mowers comes from how the club has been able to redefine the job requirements of the team and can guarantee all-year round value.

"Very importantly, these mowers have enabled us to reassign some of our skilled greenkeeping team to other tasks on the course that require more specialist work," Benjamin says.

"During the wetter months, we expect to keep using these mowers, when ordinarily we would struggle to use the heavier diesel machines. All in all, it has been a very positive investment for us and one that we believe we will continue to benefit from year after year."

**Scan Me** to find out more

Scan the QR code to view a video of the mowers in action at Thonock Park. It's well worth a watch.

# Maximising Overseeding Success

Jaey Goodchild is an Agronomist at The R&A

Following a punishing summer, many fine turf surfaces have suffered significant decline due to prolonged drought and heat stress. Drawing on lessons from previous extreme seasons, here are some key considerations to maximise success during overseeding

**With autumn upon us, turf managers across the country are preparing for extensive overseeding operations to restore playing quality and surface resilience.**

Making the most of your overseeding programme begins with selecting the right species. Consider the specific demands of your working areas and the known pressures of your site, such as shade, wear or the incidence of drought. Fescue can offer drought tolerance and fine texture, bentgrass can provide excellent surface stability and recovery from drought, and ryegrass can deliver rapid establishment and wear resistance. Matching species to site conditions ensures long-term sustainability and performance.

Seed germination and seedling establishment are highly dependent on the consistent provision of soil moisture. Before overseeding, ensure that soil moisture levels are adequate to support germination. Access to ongoing moisture – whether through irrigation systems or favourable weather conditions – is essential, without it, even the best seed will not meet your expectations.

Seed-to-soil contact is a non-negotiable factor in successful overseeding. Placement within the thatch is insufficient and often leads to poor establishment. Equipment must be configured to place seed below the thatch layer, where it sits protected with access to moisture and soil nutrition.

> Correct seeding depth is crucial and varies by species, our leading seed breeders would recommend the following:
>
> • Bentgrass: Rootzone contact
> • Fescue: 8-12mm
> • Ryegrass: 10-15mm

Depending on your equipment, you may opt for pot-seeding, which creates space for seedlings and reduces competition through establishment, disc seeding, which offers high placement accuracy but less space for new growth and establishment or dimple seeding which will provide high productivity and is preferred for seeding into bare soil. All methods have merit, and the choice should reflect your equipment availability, surface conditions and renovation goals.

> “Making the most of your overseeding programme begins with selecting the right species. Matching species to site conditions ensures long-term sustainability and performance”

Phosphorus plays a vital role in root development and early growth. In many cases there will be sufficient phosphorous in the soil bank to support seedling germination, but if you are in a very sandy environment and the nutrient has not been applied for a long time a supplementary application should not be ruled out. Applying a fertiliser containing phosphorus either as a pre-seed treatment or shortly after germination can significantly enhance establishment. Additionally, raising mowing heights slightly and increasing overall fertility will support young seedlings as they develop into a robust sward.

## Final Thoughts

Overseeding will be a vital recovery tool on many sites, especially after a season of extreme stress. Success hinges on attention to detail, from species selection and moisture management to seed placement and fertility. By ensuring that all fundamental resources are present and are supported by adequate nutrition, greenkeeping teams can give new seedlings the best possible start. With careful planning and execution, overseeding this autumn can help restore surfaces and place golf courses back on the front foot before winter. **GI**

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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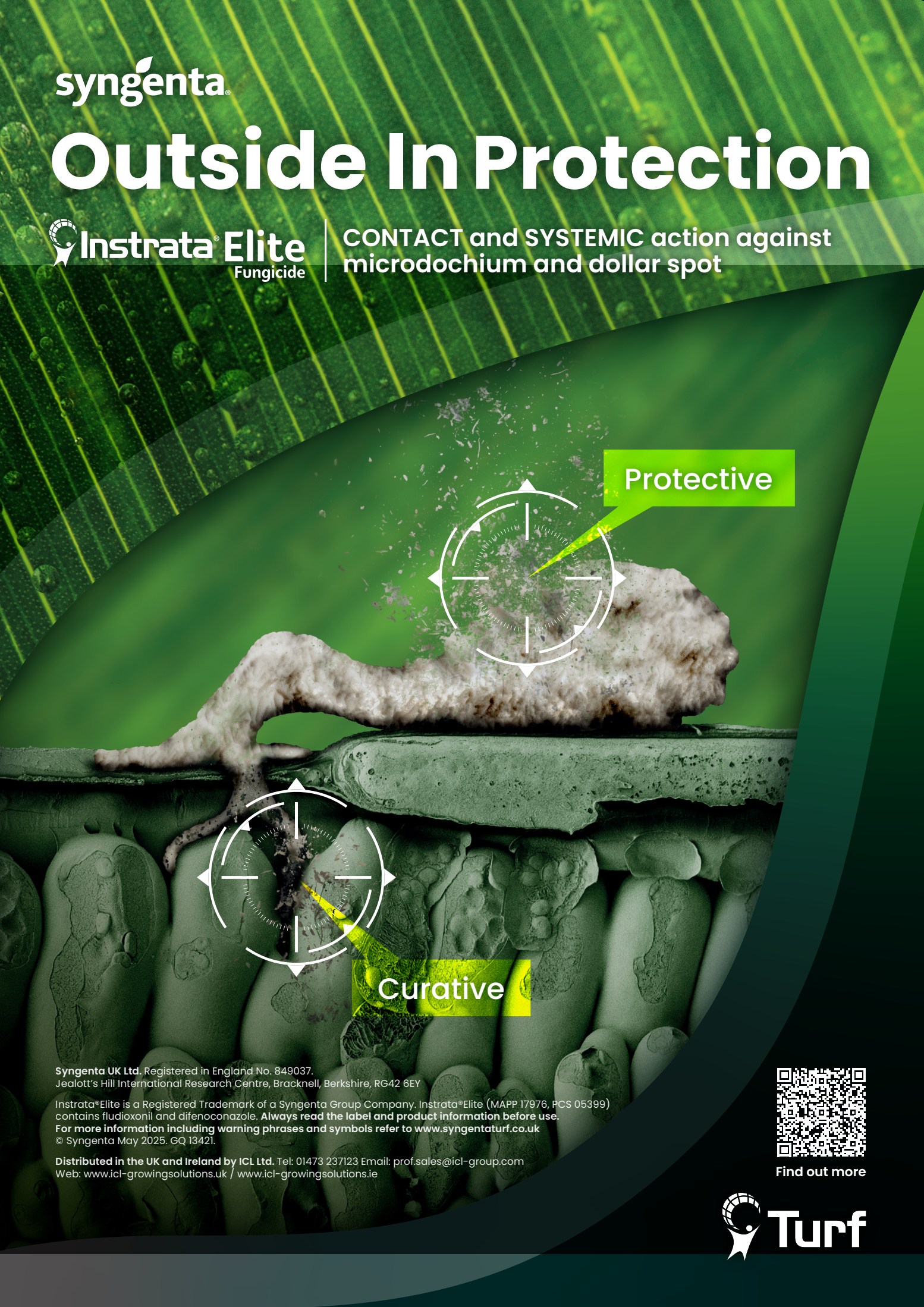


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