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Greenkeeper International

John Millen

Our former chairman is duly recognised for his lifetime's work in greenkeeping



■ From Your Association

Reflecting on a busy week at BTME

■ Practical Greenkeeping

The challenges of turf management in Iceland

■ Members & Careers

Obituary: We remember Ian Kinley

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March 2026



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.

Contact us Email

Membership enquiries, including changes of address
membership@bigga.co.uk
Letters and editorial enquiries
info@bigga.co.uk

Post

BIGGA, Coxwold House, Easingwold
Business Park, Stillington Road,
Easingwold, York YO61 3FB

Phone

Membership services 01347 833 800

Social

[f golfgreenkeepers](#)
[X @BIGGALtd](#)
[@bigga_hq](#)

The BIGGA team

Chief Executive Officer Jim Croxton
Chief Financial Officer Steve Wragg
Head of Membership Scott Reeves
Editorial Assistant Lorna Taylor
Design & Brand Executive
Libbie Waddleton
Head of Commercial & Marketing
Lauren Frazer
Commercial Manager Gavin Rees

Publishers

Greenkeeper International is published on BIGGA's behalf by 18Players.
For editorial enquiries, email Dan Murphy: d.murphy@18players.com

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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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JOHN DEERE

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First Cut

All you need to know from around our industry

- Greenkeepers take part in early morning fundraising 5k run at BTME
- What's on this month - all the key dates for your diary in March



Jack Percival completes 300-mile BTME run with emotional Royal Hall finish

Jack Percival completed his incredible 300-mile endurance challenge by running onto the stage to a standing ovation at BTME.

The senior greenkeeper at Royal Automobile Club set off from Surrey on a seven-day mission to reach Harrogate for the BIGGA Celebration.

Jack was raising funds for two causes close to his heart – Percy's Homeless Hub and the Greenkeepers Benevolent Fund – and promoting awareness around mental health.

He has been open about his own struggles and has used extreme physical challenges as a platform to encourage more honest conversations.

His latest feat follows a 450-mile

walk from Epsom to Glasgow in 2024, which raised more than £11,000 and marked a turning point in Jack's life after he attempted to take his own life.

"This industry means everything to me," an emotional Jack told the audience at the Royal Hall.

He also spoke candidly about stepping away from greenkeeping during his recovery and the importance of being welcomed back with understanding and support, highlighting the role colleagues and employers can play in protecting mental wellbeing.

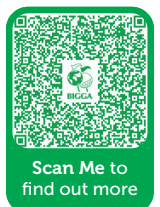
"If there's an industry that looks after people, it's this one," he said. "Being back at the Royal Automobile Club, and being supported on bad days as

well as good ones, has meant more than I can say."

Funds raised will support Percy's Homeless Hub, which delivers weekly meals to people sleeping rough across south-east London and Croydon, and the Greenkeepers Benevolent Fund, which provides practical and financial help to greenkeepers and their families during difficult times.

Jack urged everyone to look out for one another and offer support and kindness to those around them.

"Be there for each other and care for each other. That's how we make this industry stronger," he said. **GI**



The BIGGA Calendar

Adam Mitchell, Tehidy Park



Fleet-footed greenkeepers raise money for Benevolent Fund with early morning 5k

Around 70 runners took part in the Syngenta 5K Early Bird Run at BTME in Harrogate - raising hundreds of pounds for the Greenkeepers Benevolent Fund.

No strangers to an early morning, the participants – mostly, though not exclusively, greenkeepers – met outside Harrogate Convention Centre for a 6:30am start as they pounded the pavements around the North Yorkshire town.

Syngenta pledged £10 to the Fund for every participant, with a fantastic number of willing athletes lacing up their shoes to take on the challenge.

Intended to encourage everybody to benefit from the health enhancements and stress relief of regular exercise, especially through the dark winter months, the Syngenta Early Bird Run has become one of BTME's main events.

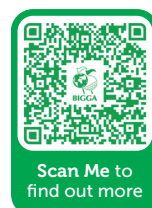
BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said: "I am grateful to Syngenta for continuing to support the BTME 5K Run in aid of our Greenkeepers Benevolent Fund.

"The run provides a wonderful opportunity during an intense week to clear minds, gain fresh air and exercise and raise money for what is an



excellent cause. It's always a joy to see so many people up early to enjoy the camaraderie of the run and we know that exercise, especially with other people, is an excellent method of combatting the stresses and strains of modern life."

The Early Bird Run has previously helped to raise over £4,750, and this year's event saw around another £1,000 added to the total. **GI**





What's on this month

Dates for your diary

3 March

BIGGA Sectional Education Day, Yorkshire & Sheffield – Darrington GC

4 March

BIGGA Sectional Education Day, North West & North Wales – Vicar's Cross GC
Southern Conference sponsored by Kress – St Mary's Stadium, Southampton FC

10 March

BIGGA Scotland Professional Leadership Programme, Five Pillars of Management Workshop – Auchterarder GC

18 March

BIGGA Sectional Education Day, North East & Cleveland – Ramside Hall GC



A greenkeeper's best friend – Toby

Owner: Ilkley Golf Club

Age: Six

Favourite treat: Biscuits

Favourite spot: In his bed in the greenkeepers' shed under the heater in winter. In summer he likes to sit on the seats of the parked machinery in the shed.

Naughtiest moment: Playing with a golfer's ball on the green

My cat is happiest: When he is in bed



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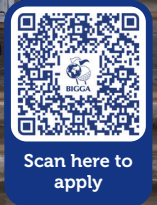
From your Association

Representing the greenkeeping community

- Jenny Bledge on the impact of First Green so far and plans for the future
- We provide an in-depth review of the resounding successes of BTME 2026



“Nothing is ever out of your reach”



Could you be the next Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year?

Entries for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Awards 2026 are now open.

The process affords ambitious BIGGA members the opportunity to compete with the best greenkeeping students in the UK for one of two prestigious titles.

The annual awards are committed to offering greenkeepers of all ages, backgrounds and experience levels a chance to excel.

Both the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year and the Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Toro HQ in the

USA and a one-week work placement at a golf course in the UK or overseas.

The Student winner will also receive enrolment in a turf management remote study course at the University of Massachusetts Winter School, while the Young winner will benefit from a trip to Continue to Learn at BTME.

The 2025 Student winner, Bradley Taylor, encouraged others to enter.

“Nothing is ever out of your reach,” said the Beau Desert first assistant. “Believe in yourself, trust your knowledge and instincts, then go for it.”

Former BIGGA President Ronnie

Myles added: “My message is simple: step forward. Promoting yourself and your work is not arrogance – it’s recognising achievement.”

Entries close on 10 April, with interviews between 11-15 and 18-22 May. The National Finals will take place from 8-10 September at Rockcliffe Hall, in County Durham.

Please scan the QR code above for more information about who can apply and more details of the prizes on offer to the winners and runners up, or contact education@bigga.co.uk with any queries. **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 John Wells BIGGA Chairperson Steven Lloyd



'Every event leaves a legacy'

Workforce Project Manager Jenny Bledge reflects on the growing impact of First Green and looks ahead to the future



First Green has always been about encouraging the initial step that can create a lasting impact. The

feedback we get from participants is crucial – we want to keep evolving and improving the programme with every event.

Schools and clubs have been brilliant in sharing their experiences, and it's incredibly rewarding when they come back and ask to host future events. One of the things that really stands out is seeing young people's perceptions shift.

Walking through a golf club for the first time can be daunting for some students, but we've seen firsthand how they're surprised by the range of

opportunities available – from greenkeeping to hospitality, marketing and ecology. Even if a student doesn't want to be a greenkeeper, they might

“The energy from the young people is infectious”

realise they could work in social media or catering at a golf club, which opens doors they hadn't considered before.

The programme works because it's flexible. Clubs can tailor activities to suit their teams and the students, whether that's working on a bunker, exploring machinery, or learning about ecology. The key message for greenkeepers is to get stuck in and make it hands-on.

It's normal to feel nervous at first, but the natural flow of the day quickly puts everyone at ease.

Over 20 events later, no greenkeeper has ever come away saying they won't do it again – the energy from the young people is infectious.

Looking ahead, we're expanding First Green to reach more schools and clubs and to include ex-military and second career opportunities. Social media and networking play a huge part in spreading the message, and we're also seeking donors to help fund bursaries and resources, so schools can participate regardless of cost.

Every event leaves a legacy: follow-up worksheets and certificates mean learning continues after the visit, and schools and clubs can build ongoing relationships with students interested in careers in golf.

Ultimately, the success of First Green isn't just in a single day – it's seeing young people inspired, conversations started at home and, in some cases, real employment opportunities emerge.

If we can open the door to a career that's exciting, varied and hands-on, then we've done our job. **GI**



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A Toro turfRad vehicle, a red and white utility vehicle with a canopy, is shown from a rear three-quarter view. It is parked on a green lawn. The vehicle has 'turfRad' and 'TORO' branding. A person is seated in the driver's seat. The background shows a golf course with trees and a building.

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The **BIGGA** Picture



With
Jim Croxton, CEO

An overwhelmingly positive BTME – thanks to you

The atmosphere around Harrogate Convention Centre during BTME was infectiously positive

I will remember BTME 2026 primarily for the sense of positivity that ran through the week. From the exhibition halls to the education programme and the BIGGA Celebration, it was an optimism that felt grounded in genuine progress.

Education sat firmly at the heart of that mood. Record numbers engaging with Continue to Learn highlighted a growing appetite across the industry to invest in skills, knowledge and professional development. That momentum is now being further supported by BIGGA's approval as a Lantra Customised Training Provider, strengthening our ability to deliver training that is relevant, responsive and aligned with the realities of modern greenkeeping.

That focus was reflected powerfully during the BIGGA Celebration, where John Millen was recognised for a career dedicated to education. His influence has shaped generations of greenkeepers, and seeing that contribution acknowledged served as a reminder of the long-term value of sustained investment in learning and people.

There was also a strong sense of togetherness at BTME, with the event carrying a genuine family feel as greenkeepers and exhibitors were united by a shared purpose to deliver better golf courses.

That collaborative atmosphere extended beyond Harrogate, with many greenkeepers and exhibitors who later attended the GCSAA

“BTME remains a place where people come to share solutions and solve problems”

Conference and Trade Show in Orlando speaking positively about their BTME experience and the value it continues to offer.

Despite the challenges facing the profession – from increasingly demanding weather patterns to rising expectations on course performance – BTME remains a place where people come to share solutions and

solve problems. Whether through education, shared experience or face-to-face discussion, the event continues to act as a catalyst for progress.

Elsewhere, the launch of BIGGA Elevates marked an important step in supporting women within the industry, while also underlining the broader need to cultivate greater diversity across the profession. The event was well attended, brilliantly received and marks the beginning of something much bigger.

Sustainability was another clear priority, with BIGGA taking on management of the Golf Environment Awards, recognising the leadership greenkeepers continue to show in this area, with thanks to STRI for their support during the transition. Work is also ongoing to broaden BIGGA's membership offering, with further developments to be shared on that in due course.

Above all, BTME demonstrated that, even in challenging times, the greenkeeping industry is better prepared than ever to face the future.

GI



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Paul McAuley (GK)
Adam Davis (DCM)
Marc McKenna (FA)
Royal Belfast

International

Iraklis Dimitriou (A)
Costa Navarino – Troon Golf

Lukasz Stasiak (A)
Organiczne Nawożenie
Trawników

Peter-Frank Holtman (I)
Golf Club St Leon-Rot

Ryan Williams (I)
The Country Club

Eric McGuinness (I)
The Island

Miles Carlson (I)
Clifton Willis (I)
Blessings

Edvin Buna (I)
Magyar

Pavel Krsiak (I)
Aphrodite Hills Resort

Haraldur Mar Stefansson (I)
Borgarnes

Jason Eberhard (A)
Plant Food Company

James Connolly (A)
Planet Turf

Margeir Vilhjalmsón (I)
Ondverðarnes Golf Course

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Thomas Anderson (AGK)
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Scott Campbell (GK)
Charles Davidson (GK)
Royal Dornoch

Graham Rowe (ET)
Murcar Links

Jamie Moffat (ET)
Gullane

Tony Smith (GK)
Nairn Dunbar Golf Links

Steven Harris (GK)
Crail Golfing Society

Joe Clark (GK)
George Wareing (GK)
Trump Turnberry

Jamie McElheron (GK)
Ralston

Northern

Lewis Marshall (APP)
Lancaster

Tony Hanson (AGK)
Tomas Laszkowicz (AGK)
Owston Hall

Key

A Affiliate Member

AGK Assistant Greenkeeper

APP Apprentice

ATP Approved Training Provider

CA College Assessor

CM Course Manager

DCM Deputy Course Manager

DH GK 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

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Richard Coulson (DHGK)
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Oulton Hall

Paul Gibson (GK)
Tynemouth

Adam Walker (HGK)
Longley Park

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West Hill

Steve Bird (AGK)
Mathew Ruffinato (AGK)
Kidderminster

Charlie Green (AGK)
Woburn

Joshua Wilmot (AGK)
Ormonde Fields

Benjamin Watson (AGK)
Lutterworth

Oliver Wyllie (ET)
Notts

Benjamin Brooks (GK)
Moor Hall

Gavin Atkin-Shaw (GK)
Breadsall Priory Hotel,
G&CC

Alfie Shenton (AGK)
Louee Marsh (AGK)
Archie Forrester (AGK)
Liam Povey (AGK)
Matthew Salmon (G)
John-Paul Jakes (GK)

Peter Lawrence (GK)
Reece Glover (GK)
JCB G&CC

Paul Suttling (GK)
Ramsey Golf & Bowls Club

South East

Joe Choularton (AGK)
Tom Radford (GK)
Hankley Common

Alex Main (AGK)
Brendan Searle (GK)
Foxhills

Jamie Blagden (FA)
Abridge G&CC

Harry Chapman (GK)
Hainault

Samual Gage (GK)
Roehampton Club

Richard Southall (GK)
Barkway Park

South West & South Wales

James Bastian (A)
East Horton

Simon Aspital (A)
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Matthew Manners (AGK)
Wrag Barn G&CC

Niamh Edwards (AGK)
Lola Gibbs (AGK)
Saunton

Craig Gardiner (G)
Launceston

Aimee-Jade Davey (P)
ICL

Scott Taylor (S)
Clere Golf



BIGGA

CPD

Continuing Professional Development

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

Angus Smythe, Woodbridge

Matthew Plested, Stoneham

Kai Appleby, Chestfield

Chris Szoradi, Manchester

John Gubb, Bedfordshire

Toby Smith, Redlibbets

Cameron Redden, JCB G&CC

David Langheim MG, Hartley Wintney

George Pitts MG, Sunningdale

Jack Hall, Kilworth Springs

Kyle Adams, Muswell Hill

Michael Russell, Hurlston Hall G&CC

Patrick Brown, Royal Wimbledon

Richard Johnstone MG, Royal Aberdeen

William Moore, Kilworth Springs



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

John Thornton, Copt Heath

Roger Barrett, Aldwark Manor Hotel

Patrick Brown, Royal Wimbledon

Toby Long, Broadstone

Adrian Adascalitei, Roehampton Club

BTME 2026 in review

The resounding success of BTME 2026 proved that it remains a cornerstone of the golf and turf management calendar

4,567

Visitors to Harrogate Convention Centre across three show days

1.60

Average duration of visit in days, up from 1.56 last year

8.7%

Increase in visitors on the 2025 total

12.5%

The percentage of visitors who came to BTME from overseas

1,093

Number of those registered who said they had never been to BTME before

1,030

Exhibitors across each of the halls, up from 1,013 in 2025

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#BTME2027
26-28-JANUARY 2027

HARROGATE CONVENTION CENTRE

Save the date

BTME will be one week later in 2027, so save the date and book your accommodation quickly to make the most of the date change.





Continue to Learn

The popularity of Continue to Learn solidifies its importance in the development of the greenkeeping and wider turf management community

1,403

People took part in the education programme

6,127

Hours of education delivered, an 8.8% increase on 2025

60

Bookings taken for one class, making it the largest put on in at least the past 12 years

27

Classes sold out before the event



Another fantastic few days. Lots of education, networking, brainstorming and heading home with lots of new methods. Thanks again to everyone at BIGGA and ICL Group for the continued support and further education opportunities"

- Gary Morrison, deputy course manager at Bruntsfield Links



Having the opportunity to network with such experienced people was invaluable. The sessions I attended were excellent for my progression, and I was able to choose classes that were practical, relevant and directly applicable to what I deal with day-to-day in my role. It was also a great opportunity to share ideas with other greenkeepers I've met over the past 18 months, as well as new contacts I made at this year's event"

- Darren Foster, greenkeeper, The Belfry



It's a great experience because you meet greenkeepers from all over – Swedes, Norwegians, Scots, English. It's always good fun to catch up with people you know in the industry. I try to get over there every couple of years if I can, because it's always good fun and you learn a lot"

- Holmar Freyr Christiansson, head greenkeeper at Reykjavik



Inaugural BIGGA Elevates paves way for initiative to grow



The launch of BIGGA Elevates at BTME marked a significant and positive step forward in supporting women working across golf and turf, with the inaugural event drawing more than 50 attendees.

Delivered in collaboration with The R&A and Syngenta, BIGGA Elevates took place in The R&A Clubhouse area at the Harrogate Convention Centre and brought together women from a wide range of roles and career stages.

The focus was firmly on visibility, connection and shared experience, creating an open and welcoming environment for discussion and networking within a traditionally male-dominated industry.

A panel featuring Sarah Stirk, Jackie Davidson, of The R&A, and Wendy O'Brien formed the centrepiece of the session, with speakers sharing personal journeys, professional insight and reflections on opportunity, confidence and progression. Audience engagement was strong throughout,

“This is very much the beginning for BIGGA Elevates”

with discussion continuing long after the formal panel had concluded.

The appetite for continued connection was underlined by the immediate take-up of the BIGGA Elevates WhatsApp community, which more than 35 participants joined following the event. That ongoing dialogue reflects the wider ambition of the initiative: to build a supportive, visible network that continues to develop throughout the year.

Lauren Frazer, BIGGA's head of commercial and marketing, said the response highlighted both momentum and opportunity for what comes next.

“The turnout and engagement were hugely encouraging,” she said. “We heard inspiring stories, made valuable connections and opened up important conversations. This is

very much the beginning for BIGGA Elevates, and we are already working on what comes next as the initiative continues to evolve alongside the support of the wider industry.”

Industry backing was a key element of the event's success. Syngenta, alongside The R&A, played a central role in supporting the launch, reinforcing a shared commitment to diversity and inclusion within golf and turfcare.

Sarah Hughes, SPS Business Manager UK & Ireland at Syngenta, said the company was proud to support the event alongside The R&A, describing it as a valuable opportunity to recognise the important contributions women make across the sector and to help build the community and support networks that enable individuals to thrive. **GI**



BIGGA Delegates make memories to last a lifetime

The BIGGA Delegation returned from their trip to the United States with memories to last a lifetime and experiences that will shape the future of their careers.

For more than two decades, BIGGA and Bernhard and Company have selected 10 members of the association to fly out to the Golf Course Superintendent Association of America's (GCSAA) Conference and Trade Show and access the incredible education and networking opportunities presented by the event.

The BIGGA Delegation is among the most respected initiatives in the greenkeeping profession, and

the latest beneficiaries certainly made the most of their experience.

“The stand-out for me was the visit to TPC Sawgrass”

Delegates soaked up a week-long educational trip featuring site visits, seminars, networking events and demonstrations, having enjoyed a meet-up in Harrogate before jetting off.

“Being part of this year's BIGGA Delegation was a privilege and

something I will look back on with great memories,” said Dan Kendle, head greenkeeper at Newquay. “The initial meet-up with the rest of the delegation at BTME really started the whole process off and made it feel real.

“To be able to take part in education, networking events and site visits to world-class golf facilities alongside my fellow delegates was an invaluable experience. The stand-out for me was the visit to TPC Sawgrass – the facility as a whole is out of this world.”

As well as experiencing the host venue of The Players Championship, delegates also took in Bella Collina and Lake Nona Golf and Country Club, while Hazeltine's Chris Tritabaugh delivered a seminar.

Michael Gibbons, greenkeeper at The Wilmslow, added: “From meeting at BTME, you could tell the BIGGA Delegation would offer way more than professional growth. It became clear, with it being a celebration of Steven Bernhard's life and the 100-year anniversary of the GCSAA, that this trip would be a special one.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, with a special group of friends and it will have profound effects on my career moving forward.” **GI**

Ruth Etches, first assistant, Trentham
Stuart Fergusson, deputy course manager, Trump Turnberry
Ryan Gall, greenkeeper, Loch Lomond
Andrew Gibbs, deputy head greenkeeper, Sunningdale
Michael Gibbons, greenkeeper, The Wilmslow
Dan Kendle, head greenkeeper, Newquay
Ian Kirwan, course manager, Bramhall
Michael Sage, head greenkeeper, Knowle
John Stewart, course manager, Minchinhampton
Jack Wellings, deputy course manager, JCB Golf & Country Club

'A career-shaping experience' – FTMI delegates reap the benefits



The FTMI class of 2025 concluded their journeys in Harrogate as they each collected their certificates and reflected on a "career-shaping experience".

Seeing the graduates, who represent some of the brightest and best burgeoning talent in the industry, gather to mark the culmination of a process designed to enrich their professional development is certainly one of the highlights of BTME.

The initiative is centred on management and leadership skills, providing the tools for graduates to move up the career ladder.

Chris Keeler, deputy course manager at Prestbury, found value in every aspect of the programme, including the networking opportunities it provided.

"From an educational perspective, FTMI has been the most valuable development opportunity of my career so far," he said. "The programme offers a strong real-world focus, providing an excellent platform for those looking to progress into management roles.

"Our mentors – Ben Williams (Royal Cinque Ports), Leigh Powell (Windlesham Golf Club) and James

Parker (Machrihanish Dunes) – were incredibly supportive, offering honest insight and sharing their industry experience, and it is reassuring to know they remain approachable for guidance.

"Our leadership coach, Vicky Elliott-Potter, was brilliant and very focused on getting us out of our comfort zones, which was vital for our growth.

"FTMI also created a fantastic networking opportunity. The relationships formed with fellow delegates have developed into a strong and a professional support network for the future.

"I am very grateful to BIGGA and Jacobsen for delivering such a positive and career-shaping experience."

Fellow graduate John Thornton, irrigation technician at Copt Heath, added: "The insight from each of the mentors and having them at hand to ask relevant questions during each subject is invaluable.

"While the learning was intense, it instilled a confidence in the group that we're not alone in the challenges we face and there are ways around them when you get to those top positions."

Applications for the FTMI class of 2026 open 1 May. [GI](#)

The class of 2025

- Callum Atkinson, first assistant greenkeeper, The Wilmslow Golf Club
- Tod Bannerman, senior greenkeeper, Taymouth Castle Golf Club
- Patrick Brown, senior greenkeeper & spray technician, Fulwell Golf Club
- George Edwards, deputy head greenkeeper, Walton Heath Golf Club
- Alistair Hogg, senior greenkeeper, A&M Fife Golf Club
- Alex Hudson, assistant greenkeeper, Sharpley Golf Club
- Chris Keeler, deputy course manager, Prestbury Golf Club
- Ronan Latham, senior greenkeeper, JCB Golf & Country Club
- Toby Long, first assistant, Broadstone Golf Club
- Carl Moore, deputy head greenkeeper, Kings Norton Golf Club
- William Moore, deputy course manager, Kilworth Springs Golf Club
- Euan Polson, first assistant, Royal Aberdeen Golf Club
- Phillip Shields, first assistant, The Blackwood Golf Club
- Greg Smith, first assistant, The Berkshire Golf Club
- John Thornton, irrigation technician, Copt Heath Golf Club

 FTMI has
been the most
valuable development
opportunity of my
career so far"



L-R: Ed Carter (ICL); Jack Hetherington (ICL); Gary Morrison; Ryan Gall; Ethan Walker; Darren Foster; Adam Mitchell

ICL Scholarship provides memorable BTME experience for five BIGGA members

The value of the ICL Continue to Learn Scholarship was once again evident at BTME 2026, as five BIGGA members gained access to education and networking opportunities designed to support long-term professional development.

Each year, BIGGA Premium Partner ICL Turf & Landscape selects five members to attend the Continue to Learn programme at BTME, acknowledging that the combined costs of education, travel and accommodation can prevent some greenkeepers from taking part.

By removing those barriers, the scholarship helps ensure that ambitious members are not excluded from one of the industry's most significant learning events.

Ethan Walker, a greenkeeper at Enville, was among this year's recipients and highlighted the breadth of opportunities on offer.

"I had a fantastic time at BTME 2026,"

The ICL Scholars class of 2026

- Adam Mitchell, course manager, Tehidy Park
- Darren Foster, greenkeeper, The Belfry
- Ethan Walker, greenkeeper, Enville
- Gary Morrison, deputy course manager, Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society
- Ryan Gall, greenkeeper, Loch Lomond

he said. "Arriving on the Sunday meant I could get stuck in straight away with a full Continue to Learn programme thanks to the ICL Scholarship.

"I was exposed to a number of outstanding education opportunities.

"Alongside the education, I was

also able to do a lot of networking with people from across the industry and the trade, helping me build relationships I hope to strengthen over the coming years."

Fellow scholar Ryan Gall, a greenkeeper at Loch Lomond, also praised the experience.

"It was a highly rewarding experience," he said.

"I would thoroughly recommend applying for the ICL Scholarship to anyone who is looking to take the next steps in their career."

The ICL Continue to Learn Scholarship provides successful applicants with three nights' accommodation and a comprehensive

education package worth approximately £500, enabling them to fully engage with Continue to Learn and BTME. **GI**



TPC Sawgrass volunteers raring to go after Harrogate meet-up

The five BIGGA members selected for the John Deere TPC Sawgrass Volunteer Programme met at BTME ahead of the trip of a lifetime in March.

Each year the PGA Tour headquarters plays host to The Players Championship, where a top-class field battles it out for one of the most lucrative prizes in the sport.

With its famous island green and stunning Florida setting, the Stadium Course is considered among the most spectacular golfing challenges on the planet. And to prepare the course for what is considered the sport's unofficial fifth major, the home greenkeeping team are supported by a multi-national group of volunteers, including representatives from each of BIGGA's five regions and one international delegate.

Tiffany Mills, greenkeeper at Ryston Park, said: "It was great to meet up

with the other Sawgrass volunteers at BTME and it really started to make the whole trip seem real.

"I'm sure we'll learn a lot more about each other and our respective courses over the nine days we're away.

"I still can't quite believe I'm going. From talking to others that have been, it sounds unbelievable. The attention to detail will be on another level. I'm looking forward to getting out there and getting stuck into the task I'll have been given. I'm sure it's going to be hard work and an amazing experience.

"I can't thank John Deere and BIGGA enough for giving me this opportunity."

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

While in Florida, the greenkeepers are fully immersed into the TPC Sawgrass agronomy team, joining more than 100 turf professionals from across the globe and gaining experience of elite championship agronomy, which they bring back to their home venues. **GI**

TPC Sawgrass Volunteers 2026

- Tiffany Mills, Ryston Park Golf Club
- Stephen van Rhyn, Beaverbrook Golf Club
- Andrea Sozio, Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle
- Paul Gater, Caldry Golf Club
- Adam Matthews, Minchinhampton Golf Club



Ian Norman
from Whitby
Golf Club won
a ClearWater
recycling
system in the
ClearWater
prize draw

Jim Croxton (left) and Clearwater Director Matthew Mears (right)

Revealed: The exhibitors who won your vote for best BTME stand

Each year, the BIGGA stand awards are given to stands at BTME who have impressed our visitors and association members.

Votes are gathered via the BIGGA app across three categories covering small, medium and large exhibition stands.

With over 150 exhibitors at this year's show, the competition was fierce. After totting up your votes, three deserving winners were crowned. **GI**



Les Howkins of The Richmond GC won the Kress BTME registration prize draw, claiming a Kress KR161E Robotic Lawnmower with installation worth £2,299

"Kress has massively exceeded my expectations. We're relatively new users, but in the spring and summer we've just experienced, the impact has been huge."

Les Howkins MG,
The Richmond Golf Club, UK



Jim Kirkwood, Product Director at Kress (left) and Jim Croxton (right)

**BIGGA
TURF
MANAGEMENT
EXHIBITION**

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR AT
#BTME2027
26-28 JANUARY 2027



HARROGATE CONVENTION CENTRE



Members & Careers

Where we meet your fellow turf professionals and share their stories

- BIGGA Awards: Congratulations to this year's winners and nominees
- We remember the life of Ian Kinley, course manager at Royal Porthcawl



The one-club man leaving Ellesborough in safe hands

After 45 years at Ellesborough Golf Club, David Goodchild signed off at the end of August 2025 as a true one-club man.

From apprentice in June 1980 to head greenkeeper for the past 27 years, his career was dedicated to caring for a course which, by the end of his time, had been faithfully restored to its chalk downland roots.

A member of BIGGA since its formation, David has supported the association throughout his working life and takes pride in the impact he has had in helping to shape the careers of others in the industry.

Crucially, he was determined that when the time came to step away from the Aylesbury course, it would be left in safe hands. Deputy Matt

Mackenzie has now taken on the role, providing the continuity David was looking for.

"I'm immensely proud to have worked at the club for 45 years," he said. "It's been a privilege to serve. I've trained various greenkeepers who have gone on to better things – head greenkeepers at courses in Cyprus, Germany, England and Wales.

"I'm so pleased that my former deputy, Matt, is now the head greenkeeper – it's been nice to see him come through the ranks."

David oversaw a major tree removal project from 2016, which restored playing corridors and encouraged fine fescues, orchids and cowslips to flourish once more, while investment in a Rain Bird irrigation system and

the use of detailed weather data modernised decision-making without losing sight of the club's heritage.

Despite the technological advances, it was the fundamentals of the job that sustained him – lessons David revealed were first instilled by his early mentor, Seve Schmitz MG. That grounding underpinned a career he looks back on with huge affection.

"In 45 years, there were probably only half a dozen times when I went home thinking it had been a bad day," he said. "I threw my body and soul into the job and it was a great life."

For David, that enjoyment, alongside education, camaraderie and playing the game itself, is the best advert for others who may be considering greenkeeping as a career. **GI**



BERNHARD
ACADEMY

The BIGGA Celebration

**A memorable evening dedicated to
celebrating excellence in our industry**

The BIGGA Celebration welcomed BTME attendees to gather in the grand surroundings of Harrogate's Royal Hall to recognise the achievements of greenkeepers across the country and beyond.

Hosted by Sky Sports presenter Sarah Stirk and in association with Bernhard Academy, the event provided an opportunity to celebrate everything that is good about the greenkeeping industry.

Central to the evening was the BIGGA Awards, shining a light on the exceptional work of greenkeepers across the industry, from innovative projects to outstanding tournament delivery.

Each of the three headline categories crowned clubs, teams and individuals with fascinating stories to tell.

Many congratulations to all the winners and indeed the nominees, who were worthy and gracious finalists. **GI**



Welcome to the
BIG
on...
CELEBRATING
YOUR
SUCCESS

BERNHARD
ACADEMY



BIGGA

www.bigga.org.uk

Please welcome our host

**SARAH
STIRK**



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on...
CELEBRATING
YOUR
SUCCESS

BERNHARD
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www.bigga.org.uk

Greenkeeping Project of the Year with 

Royal Aberdeen

Key works delivered:

- Contingency 1st hole
- 2,500 one-ton geotextile sandbags installed behind 1st green
- New 3rd green and tee complex
 - New 4th tee
- New walkway linking 2nd and 4th holes



When Richard Johnstone arrived at Royal Aberdeen two years ago, he was braced for the challenge of continuing the club's fight against the threat of coastal erosion.

The Balgownie links, one of the most historic and celebrated links courses in the world, was already seeing large chunks lost to the unforgiving North Sea each year.

Richard and his team have embraced the challenge head on, and their commitment and ingenuity was recognised with the Greenkeeping Project of the Year title.

The honour is recognition of a wide-ranging, multi-year programme designed to protect the future playability of the course while respecting its heritage. Richard is quick to stress that the work predates him, but recognises the responsibility of leading it going forward.

"I'm absolutely delighted for the whole team involved – not just the greenkeeping staff," he said. "This has been a massive project undertaken by the club over a number of years, with a clear plan in place to try and save our historic links from coastal erosion."

The most immediate concern has been the 1st hole, where decades of land loss have left the green perilously close to the dune edge.

"I've only been here two years, so it's quite fresh to me, but erosion has been a historic issue," he said. "The 1st hole was the priority because it was only 13 metres from the dune edge. We had to build a contingency hole so that, if we got a freak storm that damaged the green or approach, we would still have a playable option throughout the season."

Royal Aberdeen has also implemented substantial erosion mitigation measures after consultation with architects, engineers and specialist advisors, JBA Consulting.

"They suggested installing 2,500 one-ton sandbags behind the 1st green to lower the slope and help slow the erosion," Richard explained. "It was a seven-week project to install the bags, bury them in sand and fence the area off. It was a massive undertaking."

The work formed part of a broader reconstruction programme delivered largely in-house, with a new 1st hole, a new 3rd green and tee complex, a

new 4th tee and a walkway between the 2nd and 4th holes constructed by the club over the past two winters.

While contractors were responsible for major shaping and sandbag installation, turfing, preparation and finishing were carried out by the club's own staff, including nearly 12,000m² of imported turf and 2,000m² of lifted and reinstated turf.

Member engagement has been a critical part of the process, with extensive consultation helping to build understanding and support for the changes required.

"The feedback has been really good," said Richard. "Members knew these measures were coming – there were meetings and discussions well in advance. Seeing the finished work and knowing there's a plan in place has been really rewarding."

Erosion planning is ongoing, with more areas under assessment as part of a proactive, long-term approach.

"We're continually looking further down the coast," said Richard. "The 5th and 9th tees are very close to the shoreline, so they may take priority next. We may follow a similar approach to the 1st hole, with either comparable protection or

“It makes me incredibly proud of the team and the club”

contingency measures.”

Royal Aberdeen has drawn on experience from other vulnerable coastal courses and is now contributing to that shared knowledge base.

"Before we carried out the work, we reached out to clubs like St Andrews, North Berwick and Montrose," Richard explained. "Now that we're part of that process, we're in a position to share our experience."

For Richard, the award is a reflection of collective effort and buy-in.

"It makes me incredibly proud of the team and the club," he said. "We're a close-knit group, and the staff have really bought into what we're trying to achieve – not just with erosion, but with overall standards on the course. They're the real heroes in this." **GI**

The Greenkeeping Project of the Year award recognises those greenkeeping teams who have undertaken a specific project, completed within the past year. However, projects can be long term and may include course construction, renovation or rebuild. They particularly award innovative thinking and commitment to the project by the home greenkeeping team.



Championship Greenkeeping
Performance of the Year with  BERNHARD

Burnham & Berrow



Chairman of Greens Adrian Deakins

"The club, and more specifically our greenkeeping team, is thrilled to have been recognised and honoured with this award, as it endorses the marvellous innovation, skills, adversity, investment and hard work put into the management of the land over recent years for the benefit of the membership and the club. Our outgoing Courses Manager, Richard Whyman, retired from his role at the end of July and the award comes as a fitting tribute to his last Championship following 22 years at the club."

Richard Whyman feared his final tournament as courses manager at Burnham & Berrow was going to end in disarray after an act of deliberate chemical vandalism just eight weeks before Final Open Qualifying.

What began as broken flags quickly escalated into offensive markings across multiple putting surfaces, leaving the team racing against time to restore the course to championship standard.

The honour of the Championship Greenkeeping Performance of the Year is recognition for their extraordinary response, as the Somerset links was presented impeccably by the time the event came around.

Reflecting on the award, Richard paid tribute to the collective effort behind the scenes during an emotionally charged final assignment before handing the reins to Liam Pidgen.

"What a job the team did – not only my team, but the whole club," he said. "Twenty of the 27 greens were damaged and it was hard to see the grass dying in front of you.

"With it being my last tournament, it was difficult for me, but I pulled myself together and The R&A were incredibly supportive."

Liam, who now leads the greenkeeping operation, said the award underlined the resilience and professionalism shown by the team during a challenging period.

"As a team, we are absolutely delighted to be recognised for the hard work, determination and passion we put into the course," he said. "After the challenges of the past few years, winning this award makes it all worthwhile and truly reflects the strength and dedication of our exceptional team.

"Our strategy focuses on providing consistent, high-quality playing surfaces year-round whilst respecting the natural links environment. The winter projects we've undertaken, particularly the extensive work on the Channel Course, demonstrate our

“What a job the team did”

ambition to offer two outstanding golf experiences.”

After taking in the extent of the damage caused by the vandalism, the team worked closely with The R&A agronomy team to implement a tightly managed recovery programme. Initial measures included overseeding, light topdressing and continuous monitoring, supported by soil testing and germination checks that confirmed the rootzone remained viable.

Despite early signs of recovery, progressive die-back soon compromised ball-roll performance. With just four weeks remaining, the decision was taken to remove and

replace all affected turf, which proved a decisive intervention under extreme time pressure.

Standard machinery proved unsuitable for the precision required, prompting the team to engineer its own methods. A CMW repair tool was stabilised, a Classen cutter adapted using controlled rope assistance, and only contaminated turf was lifted before clean material was reinstated using turf sourced from a Channel Course green.

Careful rolling, watering and topdressing ensured the repairs blended seamlessly. Independent testing by The R&A in the final days confirmed championship standards had been achieved, with the course presented in excellent condition for Final Open Qualifying on 2 July, drawing no player complaints. **GI**

The Championship Greenkeeping Performance of the Year award recognises that the success of any tournament depends upon the expertise and dedication of the greenkeeping team. From the lowliest club championship through to golf's professional tours – all are only made possible due to the work of greenkeepers who go above and beyond to present the finest playing surfaces possible.



Outstanding Contribution Award with **Kress** 

John Millen



For a man who was not even sure he would be in Harrogate this year, it is fair to say John Millen was taken rather by surprise when he was announced as the recipient of the Outstanding Contribution Award.

John admitted afterwards that it had only been in the final days before BTME that he knew he would be attending at all, making the moment all the more poignant.

If there had still been any doubt in John's mind as to whether BIGGA President Jim Croxton's glowing tribute was really about him, the appearance of his family, friends and colleagues in a video montage will have driven it home.

Heartfelt messages spoke of decades of service, quiet leadership and an influence that has extended far beyond the clubs and organisations he formally represented. Welcomed

Reflecting on his career and the values that have shaped it, he added: "Through greenkeeping, through our associations and through the game itself, for me it's always been about

 **It's always been about people who are passionate about golf courses"**

onto the stage with a warm ovation, the 85-year-old's reaction was typically understated.

"I really can't believe this," he said. "Only a week ago I didn't even know whether I'd be coming – I've been here virtually every year. I just want to say thank you to everybody."

people who are passionate about golf courses and about working for one another."

John took a somewhat circuitous route into the profession, despite it being a more obvious choice for him than most. The son of a head greenkeeper, he grew up on

The Outstanding Achievement award is presented to a BIGGA member or members who have made an outstanding contribution above and beyond their normal working life. This can be for charity, for the betterment of the greenkeeping profession or association or generally for society.



a golf course but initially chose a different life, going to sea as a sailor and trawlerman before eventually returning to greenkeeping.

His career began at Sutton Valence and West Malling, before an extended period working in Norway, where he spent seven years in two roles. On his return to the UK, he worked at Canterbury before going on to play a central role in the development of The Weald of Kent.

Alongside his work on the course, John served on the boards of the EIGA and BIGGA, later becoming Chairman in 1994, and built a reputation as a thoughtful, principled voice at board level. However, it was

through education that his influence would become most far-reaching.

At a time in life when most would be winding things down or calling it a day on work altogether, John became a driving force in greenkeeper education, challenging established systems and advocating for standards that better reflected the needs of the profession.

Even now, he remains professionally active, completing end-point assessments and continuing site visits in his role with Lantra.

That commitment was reflected in tributes from across the education sector. Anthony Stockwell, himself a former student, spoke on behalf of

hundreds who have benefitted from John's guidance over the years.

"If they had a voice today, they would be saying thank you for your leadership, your guidance and your mentoring," he said. "I would not be working in the education sector or at Hadlow College if it wasn't for you. You've had a huge impact on my life and my role within the sector."

Long-time colleague and friend Graham Royden echoed those sentiments, adding: "I can't think of anyone more worthy than you. We've been friends and associates in the industry for over 40 years, and you were my tutor at Hadlow College as well. You deserve this." **GI**

Life Membership: BIGGA's greatest honour



Life Membership was bestowed upon five deserving recipients.

The distinction is awarded at the discretion of the Board of Management to any full member whose contribution to the association or profession has merited such recognition. This latest cohort to receive BIGGA's greatest honour have between them dedicated centuries to the industry and not only witnessed vast changes and improvements in that time but been pivotal in bringing them about.

Tim Allard

A BIGGA member for more than four decades, Tim has been a constant and supportive presence within the East Midlands section.

Known for his approachability and generosity with time and advice, he has served multiple terms as regional committee chairman, alongside roles as regional board and committee member.

Passionate about mentoring, Tim has always encouraged others to progress, promoting BIGGA and the greenkeeping profession while regularly hosting golf and education days.

Kim Blake

Fulford Course Manager Kim is highly respected in the Midlands Section and beyond. A former committee Secretary, he is renowned for innovation and mentoring aspiring greenkeepers, always on hand to lend advice and support. Valued for his open-minded approach and guidance to teams across the region, Kim has served both section and regional boards with staunch loyalty.

Gerald Bruce

Gerald has devoted decades to the Mid-Anglia section, serving extensively as both Chairperson and Secretary, as well as representing the section on the regional board.

A tireless ambassador for BIGGA and the profession, he has consistently supported members by hosting golf events and education days. His generosity, enthusiasm and willingness to help others have left a lasting impact on the section and wider greenkeeping community.

Adrian Kitchinson

Adrian has been a dependable and respected figure within the East Midlands section for many years. He has supported the committee, contributed thoughtfully to industry discussions and willingly helped organise and host events.

After stepping down as course manager at Lincoln, Adrian has continued to support his club and fellow greenkeepers, offering continuity, guidance and encouragement, and remaining a trusted and steady presence within the section.

Tony Thacker

Now retired, Tony Thacker has been a BIGGA member since 2009 and a pivotal figure within the East Anglian section for the past decade. He has organised and overseen all section golf events, ensuring strong participation and continuity during periods of change.

Tony's commitment, organisation and communication have been central to the section's success, with his efforts widely recognised as vital to maintaining engagement and support among members. **GI**



1



3



2



4

Celebrating success

1. ASOOTY winner Ryan Gall (Right)
2. CPD milestones certificates
3. Photo competition winner Charlie Lacey (Right) with BIGGA's Steve Lloyd
4. Women in Turfcare award winner Lucy Sellick (Right)

Alongside the BIGGA Awards showpiece, a number of other success stories were acknowledged in front of an appreciative crowd.

Loch Lomond's Ryan Gall won the prestigious title of Amenity Sprayer Operator of the Year (ASOOTY). Sponsored by ICL and Syngenta and managed by the Amenity Forum, the award aims to raise the standards of spray application across the amenity industry.

Graduates of the Future Turf Managers Initiative (FTMI), of which Ryan was one, were recognised alongside all those who achieved CPD milestones in 2025.

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Bradley Taylor and Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year Matthew Strutt Donnelly made an appearance, while BIGGA Photographic Competition prize-winner Charlie Lacey was also honoured.

BIGGA's own Lucy Sellick got her moment in the spotlight after receiving the BIGGA-sponsored Women in Turfcare category at the Women in Golf Awards, while John Wells was also formally introduced as BIGGA's new president, succeeding Ronnie Myles. **GI**



Ian Kinley:

The gentle giant

1974 -2026

The news of Ian Kinley's sudden passing came as a profound shock to BIGGA and many across the industry and beyond.

The Royal Porthcawl course manager was a hugely respected and much-loved figure within the profession, and his death has prompted tributes from across the game of golf.

Ian was a proud BIGGA member whose career spanned nearly three decades, defined by a deep passion for links golf, a commitment to thoughtful, sustainable course management and an unwavering generosity towards others.

He led the team that proudly hosted the AIG Women's Open in 2025, an achievement that showcased both the course and the greenkeeping profession at the very highest level.

Only days before his passing, Ian was at BTME 2026 in Harrogate, where he appeared as a panellist at The R&A Breakfast session. Drawing on his experience of preparing playing surfaces for a major championship, he spoke with characteristic insight and humility, leaving a lasting impression on those in attendance.

It was a fitting reflection of a man who was always willing to share knowledge and experience for the benefit of others.

Ian's greenkeeping journey began at St Andrews Links, where he worked on the

Old Course during the formative years of his career. He later held roles at Lahinch in the west of Ireland and took on his first course manager position at The Glen in North Berwick, experiences that helped shape both his professional philosophy and his enduring love of links golf. He eventually settled at Royal Porthcawl, joining as course manager in 2009 and going on to make his most significant and lasting impact.

His approach to course management was rooted in simplicity, respect for the natural environment and a deep understanding of links golf. Biodiversity and the protection of native flora and fauna were central to his thinking, as was the importance of allowing the land to express itself naturally. Ian was also a founding member of the Links Club in the UK, contributing to collaboration and shared learning among those entrusted with managing the country's finest links courses.

Close friend and industry colleague Adrian Mortram reflected on Ian's standing within the profession, describing him as someone who quietly became a leader without ever seeking recognition.

"Whilst he would never like to accept it, he was a figurehead within links golf, a patriarch, someone to look up to and how richly that was deserved," Adrian said.

"His commanding stature was a



recognisable feature for many, a true giant of our profession."

Adrian also spoke of the way Ian's personal values were mirrored in his work at Royal Porthcawl.

"Links golf was his passion and wow he certainly excelled at that," he said.

"The caring nature which was within him as a person was also bestowed upon the management of the links of Royal Porthcawl. The rich diversity of flora and fauna were important to him as was each blade of grass. 'Keep it simple', he would tell me."

Away from the golf course, Ian was known for his warmth, honesty and loyalty. He was an unassuming presence, approachable to all, and a generous host whose hospitality

was legendary among those who visited Royal Porthcawl.

A proud Cumbrian, he also enjoyed lively conversations about rugby, always delivered with good humour and perspective.

Ian is survived by his wife Jo, his daughters Laura and Chloe-Nicole, and his son Cameron. BIGGA extends its deepest sympathies to Ian's family, friends and colleagues at Royal Porthcawl at this incredibly difficult time.

He will of course be remembered for his professional achievements, and also for the kindness, integrity and passion he brought to everything he did. Ian leaves behind a legacy that will be felt for many years within greenkeeping and across the wider game of golf. **GI**



“ Ian was a true gent. Someone I massively looked up to in the greenkeeping industry. He achieved so much at Porthcawl and had so much left to do. Sending love from Royal Liverpool to Ian's family and friends and all of the members. He came up to play here in the autumn and seeing him at Harrogate on top form makes things even harder. I'm very sorry.”

- James Bledge

“ I had the honour of walking a few holes with him at the AIG Women's Open and loved his energy and thinking out of the box. Thoughts are with his family.”

- Anna Nordqvist

“ I had the pleasure of getting to know Ian well over the past year and he was warm and welcoming whenever we spoke. His energy, ideas and support meant a great deal to all of us and he'll be deeply missed.”

- Jonathan Snowball

“ Ian was an extremely talented course manager and an incredible friend and colleague to so many people in the industry and beyond. We were so lucky to witness his skills first hand this year at the Women's Open. We are all deeply saddened by this terrible news and our thoughts go out to his family. Rest in Peace Ian”

- Daniel Lightfoot



“ I went to Myerscough College with Ian 30 years ago – such a lovely bloke. He used to make a 10 mile detour on his way home to drop me off, as I didn't drive. R.I.P. Ian and sincere condolences to the family.”

- Nick Horner

“ I am absolutely heart broken. I was so fortunate to be one of Ian's closest friends. We shared countless weekend golfing battles that I'll always treasure.”

- Alex Tucker

“ Sending my deepest condolences.”

- Justin Rose



Mark Carter



“I just felt it was time to spread my wings and see if I could do it on my own”

After spending more than 20 years at Norwood Park, Mark Carter took the step into his first full-time head greenkeeper role at Tapton Park last October.

Released from a football apprenticeship at Mansfield Town in the mid-2000s, Mark entered greenkeeping through an apprenticeship at Norwood, progressing quickly into a long-serving deputy role. Now, with extensive experience behind him, he felt the timing was right to take on the top job.

How do you reflect on your time at Norwood Park?

I loved my time there and it was a great place to learn. I learned everything there – irrigation, drainage, chainsaw work, all the things you need to know. But after 20 years as deputy, I just felt it was time to spread my wings and see if I could do it on my own.

Why did the Tapton Park role appeal to you?

I applied for a few jobs and every time it came back that I needed head greenkeeper experience. I always thought, ‘How do you get that experience if nobody takes a chance on you?’. When I applied for Tapton Park, they rang me back the next day and asked me to come in for an interview. That meant a lot because it showed they were willing to give someone an opportunity.

What did the interview process involve?

There were three interviews. The first was with the general manager Kelvin Wilson, then a second interview with Kelvin and Jared Ellison, who oversees all the head greenkeepers at Link Golf’s seven courses, and that included a course walk and more in-depth questions. The third interview also included Andrew Terry, one of Link Golf’s co-owners. I think they were looking at the person as well as the knowledge. They want people who fit into the team and buy into their approach of providing playable, affordable golf for everyone.

What state was the course in when you arrived?

An irrigation tank had burst earlier in the year and they’d lost a lot of the greens across both courses. It was daunting, but I looked at it as a challenge and thought the only way was up. I started on 6 October, so there was a short window to get seed down before winter. I put over 100kg of seed out across both courses and we worked long days to give it the best chance.

How have things progressed since then?

The 18-hole Markham Course looks fantastic now and has full grass coverage, and the feedback has been really positive. The 9-hole Dobbin Course is improving as well,

Having made the step up to head greenkeeper after a long spell as deputy, Mark's advice to others is to "go for it"



Mark's tips for making the step up from deputy

Go for it and don't be afraid to take the chance, because if you don't try you'll never know. Don't worry about failing – the worst that can happen is you go back to being a deputy. Be prepared for the people side of the job, because dealing with staff and their problems is a big step up. Learn to find solutions, because as head greenkeeper it's on you to fix things. Lead from the front and work alongside your team so they can see you're in it with them.

but it will need more work to get it where it needs to be. Overall, I'm really happy with how the greens have come on.

How have you approached leading a new team?

There are four of us including me, with the rest of the team each having around 20 years experience here. I try to keep spirits up and not be too serious, because people want to work for someone they like. They know the course inside out and have helped me a lot. I ask for their opinions, and if their way is better, I'll go with it. Praising people when they do a good job is important as well.

What does success look like for you in the early stages of the role?

Sorting the greens was the main priority and that's been the focus since I arrived. The owners still expect a very good standard, even though the aim is to provide affordable golf. I'm pleased with where the Markham Course is now and I'm confident we can continue improving things from there. We have ambitions to introduce a buggy path around the course, so that's on the agenda as well. **GI**

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Chislehurst Golf Club, Kent



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Please send an up-to-date CV and covering letter to:
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Head Greenkeeper

Closing Date: Sunday 8th March 2026

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Assistant Greenkeeper

Pyecombe Golf Club, West Sussex



Pyecombe Golf Club, located in the South Downs National Park, is seeking an Assistant Greenkeeper to join their knowledgeable, enthusiastic and hardworking team. The team consists of six staff, together with regular member-volunteers. Required minimum qualifications: NVQ level 2 in sports turf maintenance; driving licence

Full-time contract based on 40 hours per week, plus overtime as required. Competitive salary. Overtime pay / time off in lieu arrangements. All greenstaff are part of the Club's rolling 5-year CPD programme, ensuring the team gain additional skills / qualifications year on year. The successful candidate will carry out all operations in line with the Club's course management plan, H&S and environmental policies.

To apply, please email a covering letter and CV to info@pyecombegolfclub.com with 'Assistant Greenkeeper' in the subject heading. Closing date: Friday 13th March 2026

Assistant Greenkeeper

Royal Wimbledon Golf Club, London



Royal Wimbledon Golf Club are inviting applicants who are qualified to, working towards or wish to work towards level 2 in sports turf. Further qualifications such as Level 3, spraying or chainsaw certificates would be an advantage but not essential as we welcome applications from any experience level.

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Practical Greenkeeping

Refine your skillset and expand your knowledge



Head Greenkeeper Mark Carter is focused on completing key recovery and construction work at Tapton Park as conditions begin to improve after a challenging winter



What we do in... March

Club: Tapton Park,
Derbyshire

After a wet start to the year, the priority in March will be to take any opportunity we get to crack on with key work across both our 18-hole and 9-hole courses when conditions allow.

If the rain eases, one of the big jobs we need to push on with is some remaining groundworks. We've still got levelling to complete, pipework underneath to finalise, and the diggers need to be back in to finish it off properly.

We've had to fix a fair few irrigation leaks over the winter, so I'll be turning the system on earlier than I'd ideally like, purely to check everything before we start filling in and dressing. It's not about irrigating yet, it's about making sure there are no surprises once the golfers are back out in numbers.

Tees are another priority. Most holes have been on mats through the winter, so the plan is to get the tees cleaned up, dressed and ready before traffic increases. If we can get that work done early, it gives us a much better chance of holding quality once play picks up and divots start appearing again.

Bunkers will also take a lot of attention this month. We've got plenty of sand on site, but on many bunkers

it's simply migrated down the faces and needs moving back into position. Some will need topping up, others just reshaping and tidying to get them back where they should be.

On the greens, it's about encouraging growth and recovery. We've kept greens open all winter, which hasn't been easy in these conditions, so getting temperatures up and seeing some life back in the sward is a relief.

We've verti-drained the greens twice and solid-tined and slit them to keep

things moving, but there's some black layer present, so continued aeration and regular topdressing will be essential to keep oxygen flowing and improve soil condition.

Mentally, March does feel like a turning point. When the daffodils start coming out and you can see the course beginning to wake up, it gives everyone a lift. Winter can be a slog, but now is when the hard work starts to turn into visible progress. **GI**



“Mentally, March does feel like a turning point. When the daffodils start coming out and you can see the course beginning to wake up”



“ Growth Potential data can help better time actions to spring growth periods **”**

Growth expectation gap

Syngenta Technical Manager, Pete May, highlights how best to take advantage of any growing opportunities for surface recovery in a variable spring



Author: Pete May, Syngenta Technical Manager

Spring hope and expectations always envisage strong turf growth and rapid recovery after the ravages of winter. In reality, it can prove one of the most challenging seasons for turf management.

And with the climate shift patterns,

recent experiences show that early spring can be unseasonably warm and dry, or exceptionally wet and cold. Or worse still, a combination of both in the same season.

Despite the challenges of huge variations in Growth Potential year-to-year and over the season (see panel GP fluctuations), tracking data and modelled forecasting is still a really good way to plan programmes. As well as assessing turf activity to better time management actions to available recovery periods in the spring.

However, it is important to recognise

that as a data model GP is using temperature as the driver for growth, when in practice moisture, light, nutrition and stress will all impact on the plant health and vigour.

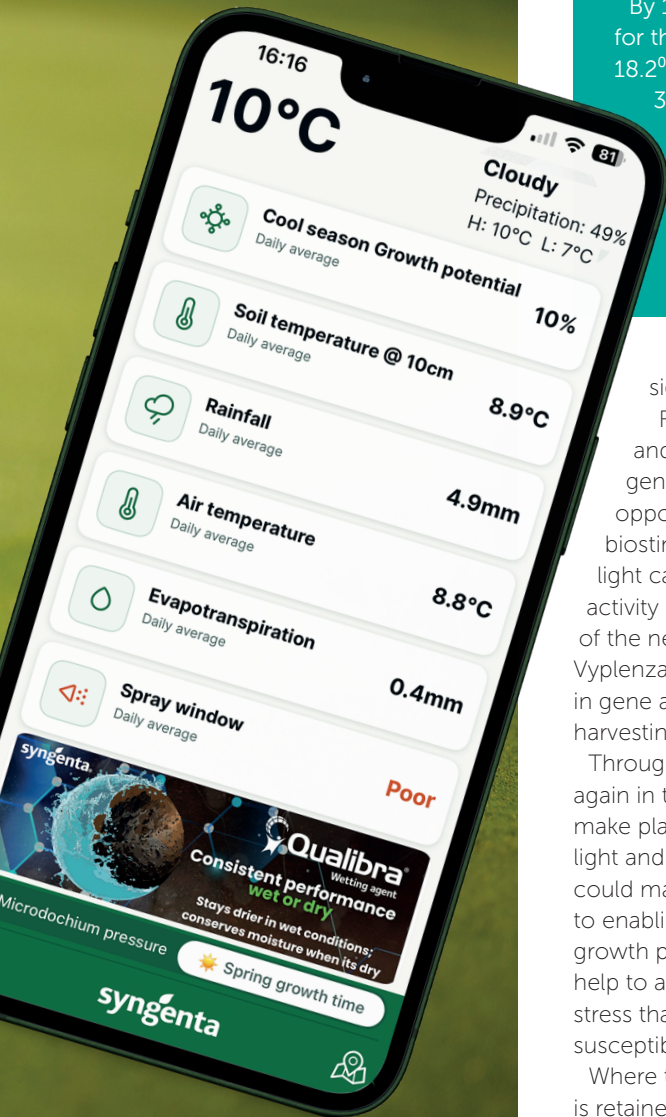
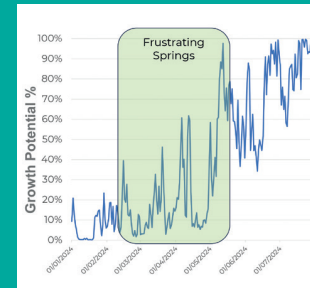
Any actions to mitigate the limitations to plant growth will enable the plant to perform to its full whenever temperatures facilitate growth. The experience of recent years is that there are often periods of good conditions among more difficult times; the key is how to make the most of those recovery opportunities.

GP fluctuations

Analysis of historic Growth Potential data for the past 30 years, on one site in southern England, shows that on the 1 March temperatures have ranged from -1.4°C up to 10.8°C , resulting in GP from 0% to 20%.

By 1 May, the average daily temperature for the same site ranged from 6.6°C to 18.2°C , with the corresponding GP from 3% up to 100%, for the same day in different years.

Pinpointing the same data for just one year, from March to mid-May, in 2024, GP oscillated from 3% in early March, up to 46% by the end of the month and over 60% in early April, only to plummet back to less than 10% for two weeks in the middle of the month; before climbing to 98% in early May.



significantly more light.

Furthermore, new research and understanding of plant genomics has shown the opportunity for selected biostimulants to enhance the light capture and photosynthetic activity of plants. Genome analysis of the new Syngenta biostimulant, Vyplenza, has identified a 53% uplift in gene activity responsible for light harvesting.

Through the spring period, and again in the autumn, this capability to make plants more efficient at utilising light and powering photosynthesis could make a significant contribution to enabling turf to reach its seasonal growth potential. That would also help to alleviate the associated stress that could make plants more susceptible to other damage.

Where the height of cut on greens is retained at winter levels for longer, that might mean utilising rolling more often. In addition to reducing the mechanical damage and stress of daily mowing, many greenkeepers are finding the practice can retain better green speed and consistency between cuts.

Managing moisture

With the variability of rainfall frequently experienced in the spring, greenkeepers have frequently used a penetrant wetting agent in spring to dry soils out for early firmness, but if conditions all too often turn dry, that could exacerbate the issue and prime soils for hydrophobicity early in the season.

That is where the combination wetting agent, Qualibra, can have maximum effect - with a penetrant and retainer action to move water down from the surface, but hold moisture in the all-important lower profile for plant health and to promote strong rooting. Starting wetting agent programmes earlier in the season is now well proven for optimising the use of existing water resources.

Ensuring sufficient nutrition is available to support early spring growth when conditions allow will be essential this season, especially since the heavy winter rainfall will have likely washed any residual nutrients out of the profile, particularly on sand construction greens.

Providing a low level of readily available N in the form of quick uptake and utilisable amino acids, as in the biostimulant, Hicure, for example, can sustain growth until such a period of settled GP at 20%+ justifies the onset of the seasonal nutrition programme.

Many greenkeepers also look to benefit from the warm-up characteristics of Ryder pigment to help kick off early spring growth, as well as ensure the turf looks better for players coming out of the winter.

The combinations of innovative new biostimulant products, targeted at specific stress factors and enhancing turf health, now enable turf managers to better take advantage of limited spring growth opportunities to boost recovery.



Follow the conversation

Light levels

Reviewing the balance of Daily Light Integral (DLI) - the available light for plant photosynthesis - with a typical spring Growth Potential curve, clearly highlights that, for prolonged periods of the spring, plants are in a shortfall of available light.

With light in short supply, it is important to retain as much leaf area as possible at this time of year. While it may be tempting to start squeezing down on mowing height to sharpen things up for the spring, leaving a slightly longer leaf will intercept



Holmar Freyr Christiansson
Reykjavik Golf Club, Iceland



The world of greenkeeping

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

Holmar Freyr Christiansson has spent almost his entire working life at Reykjavik Golf Club, rising from a teenage summer worker to head greenkeeper of one of Iceland's busiest golfing venues. As head greenkeeper, he now oversees 27 holes plus a short nine-hole layout, all under some of the most unique growing conditions in European golf.

In this Q&A, he discusses Iceland's compressed playing season, managing extreme weather and traffic pressure, grass selection, staffing challenges, and what keeps him motivated after more than a decade as head greenkeeper.

Tell us about how you got started in greenkeeping

I started working at our sister course, Grafarholt, in 1998 when I was only 15. I'd already been playing golf since I was eight, became a member at nine, and my father played as well, so I was always around the club. I worked there until 2004, then went away to study at Elmwood, worked at Gleneagles in 2005, spent time in the United States, and came back to Iceland in 2008 as an irrigation technician. I became assistant head greenkeeper in 2012 and head greenkeeper at the Korpa course in 2014, and I've been here ever since.

How influential were your experiences in the UK and United States?

Gleneagles was the best greenkeeping school I've ever had. Tournament golf teaches you so much, and being there for European Tour events and the G8 Summit was a unique experience.

In the US, through the Toro programme in Minnesota, I got responsibility early and learned fast. Seeing different climates really shapes how you think.

For readers unfamiliar with Icelandic golf, how popular is the game?

It's hugely popular. Golf is the second biggest sport in Iceland after football. There are around 27,000 golfers in a population of about 400,000. Every club in the Reykjavik area has a waiting list, sometimes 500 to over 3,000 people. That gives you an idea of the demand we're dealing with.

How does the climate shape your season?

A normal season is about five months, from May to the end of October. Some years it's a bit longer or shorter. A few years ago we closed on December 2 because it was so mild. Temperatures are generally between minus 15 and plus



15, and it rarely gets hotter than 20. The bigger factor is daylight – from late May to mid-July it never really gets dark.

What does that mean operationally during the playing season?

Golf is played around the clock. We start work at 6am, with first tee times at seven, but people are often still finishing when we arrive. During the five-month season we see around 36,000 rounds on the 18-hole course and close to 44,000 on the 9-hole. You can't stay out of the golfers' way all the time, so it's about managing around them.

What grasses perform best in those conditions?

Fescue is native here and dominates the greens along with bent. We've had some bad winters and layering issues, so there's also a lot of Poa. Because of traffic levels I'm quite pragmatic – I'll use ryegrass as well. If it gives me grass cover, I'm happy. If there's grass, people are not complaining.

How challenging are winters to recover from?

Most of the time I know what's coming. I order everything well in advance because we're on a rock in the North

About Reykjavik Golf Club

Reykjavik Golf Club operates two distinct courses within the capital area: Grafarholt and Korpa. Grafarholt, located inland, is a traditional parkland layout and historically the club's original home. Korpa, where head greenkeeper Holmar Freyr Christiansson is based, sits closer to the city and the coast, bordered by open land, sea views and the Korpa river. Korpa features 27 holes plus a short nine-hole course, with flexible routing that allows multiple 18-hole combinations. The exposed setting, high traffic levels and compressed season place unique demands on turf management throughout the year.

Atlantic and deliveries take time. But April is always the moment of truth, when you see how much damage is actually there. We've had years where I used three times more seed than the year before because it was that bad.

What keeps you motivated in the job after so many years at the same club?

It's the versatility. You have to be a greenkeeper, a mechanic, a problem-solver – everything. When you fix something, whether it's drainage or irrigation, that's satisfying. And when a tournament finishes and people tell you the course was fantastic, you know it was worth it. **GI**



Finding his niche

How Ryan Gall became an award-winning spray tech at Loch Lomond

At a venue as exacting as Loch Lomond, there is little room for error. High rainfall, exposed conditions and a relentless standard of presentation demand precision across the board.

As the club's spray technician, Ryan Gall carries that responsibility with a sense of pride, earning industry recognition along the way with the Amenity Sprayer Operator of the Year title at BTME 2026.

In this Q&A, Ryan reflects on his route into greenkeeping, why spraying became his niche, the realities of operating at a challenging site and the blend of confidence, technology and awareness required to excel in a specialised role.

How did you first get into greenkeeping?

Originally, I wanted to be a farmer. My father had worked on the estate that Loch Lomond sits on since I was born, so I'd always been outdoors, and farm management was what I thought I'd do. We lived right across the road from the golf course. I'd been at university for two years and got a summer job on the course before going back to finish my degree. I absolutely fell in love with it. By October, I decided not to return to university.

It was only seasonal at the time, so I self-funded my apprenticeship and did three seasons while working

part-time in a pub, waiting for a full-time job to come up. In 2015 I was lucky enough to get one, and I've worked my way up from there.

When did spraying become your focus?

I always enjoyed using the bigger equipment, and spraying was something that was held in high regard here. I wanted to find a niche – I didn't just want to be a greenkeeper, I wanted to specialise in something.

Loch Lomond is a difficult site, and being able to spray here requires a certain level of skill. It's not something you can switch off doing. You have to be switched on at all times, and that really appealed to me.

What makes Loch Lomond such a challenging site to spray?

It's quite undulating and very wet. We get around two metres of rain a year and it can be gusty. Spraying on slopes, navigating tight green surrounds with bunkers, ponds and steep run-offs – if you get it wrong, you can slip or spin wheels.

Knowing when to pull the trigger and when to hold back is another element. Conditions can change quickly, so you need to be constantly aware.



How did you build the skills and confidence to operate at that level?

When I spoke to Pete Haggarty (golf course manager) and Dave Cole (former superintendent) about doing my tickets, they agreed to finance them, but Pete wanted me to learn to calibrate properly first. I had to understand the maths and the equations so they knew I wasn't just filling out forms to get a certificate.

I spent a lot of time with Gavin Graham, who was the spray tech before me – sitting beside him in the cab, picking his brains, learning how he approached greens. I started on fairways and rough as a second operator, then gradually stepped up to greens with him nearby giving guidance.

We've also been fortunate with technology – GPS sprayers and satellite systems – so I've been able to learn and experiment with that as well.

How highly regarded is spraying as a specialised role in the greenkeeping industry?

I think the industry values it, especially as chemicals reduce and accuracy becomes more important. The ability to apply fertiliser and fungicide properly is sought after.

I'm fortunate here that it can be a specialist role. At some clubs it's spread between staff or falls to the deputy or

Spraying on a championship stage

Set on the banks of Loch Lomond in the west of Scotland, the course presents unique agronomic challenges. High annual rainfall – around two metres – exposed conditions and undulating terrain demand precise timing and execution. Greens are tightly framed by bunkering, water features and steep run-offs, leaving little margin for operator error. Wind can limit spray windows, while a busy schedule of play and maintenance activity requires careful coordination. Investment in GPS-guided spraying technology and data-led decision-making supports accurate, efficient application. At Loch Lomond, spraying is a specialist discipline central to presentation, sustainability and performance.

“On a site like this, presentation is key”

course manager. Nine times out of 10, if the sprayer's out here, I'm operating it. That allows me to concentrate on one thing and really take ownership.

What does a skilled spray technician add to a golf course?

Confidence. These chemicals can be damaging if we get it wrong, so the head man and superintendent need to trust the operator. We're quite data-driven. We use Growing Degree Days and disease forecasting tools, and we're trying to be sustainable rather than just reaching for the chem safe. It's about timing things properly and not over-applying.

On a site like this, presentation is key. Taking pride in avoiding tyre marks, planning your route, maintaining standards – that all feeds into the overall finish of the course.

What does a typical spraying day look like?

The management team does a good job of planning ahead, so we know what's due and don't leave things too late. If we're spraying greens, I need to know when cutting, rolling and hole changing is happening so I'm the last person out.

I'll spend time getting set up, mixing correctly, checking nozzles and making sure everything's accurate before heading out. I try to stay several holes behind the rest of the team for safety.

On fairways, if it's a 1,900-litre tank mix, I'll prepare the next batch so there's no wasted time. It's about efficiency and trying to make things 1% or 2% better each time.

With tighter regulations, unpredictable weather, but advances in technology, is the job getting easier or harder?

I think it's getting harder. If you don't understand how a platform works, the fields, boundaries and how the nozzles are switching on and off, you can get bogged down quickly. The technology improves accuracy and can reduce inputs, but only if you understand it. If you let jobs stack up or don't understand the systems, it becomes difficult very quickly.

What advice would you give to someone considering specialising in spraying?

Take pride in your work and be passionate about it. That came through in my feedback from the awards judges. Try to stay at the forefront of technology. Understand the platforms you're using and how data, pest management plans and forecasting tools all fit together. Being able to talk confidently about that makes a big difference.

You visited top US venues as part of the BIGGA Delegation. What did you take from that experience?

Seeing maintenance and mixing facilities at places like TPC Sawgrass was invaluable. We're looking at upgrading our own facility, so bringing ideas back helps. Even small things – like adding cameras to improve visibility – can make a difference. It was about seeing how top venues operate and how we can improve what we do.

Finally, you're involved in coaching American football. How important is it to have something outside of work?

I played for 12 or 13 years before moving into coaching, and now I coach at Stirling University.

Greenkeeping can be all-consuming. You're always thinking about what needs to be done tomorrow. Having something else to focus on helps you switch off. As much as we love what we do, you can't let it take over your life. **GI**





'Elevating the process to an art'

Ryan was presented with the Amenity Sprayer Operator of the Year award at BTME 2026, managed by the Amenity Forum and sponsored by ICL and Syngenta. Judges praised his deep understanding of sprayer fundamentals, attention to preparation and ability to optimise application through decision support tools such as Growing Degree Days and disease forecasting. Presenting the award, Amenity Forum Chairman Ian Graham said: "The skills required to competently apply professional plant protection products are often overlooked. Along with the formal training and accreditation process, there is the experience that takes years to acquire. "Winners of this award have elevated the application process to an art, be that with a knapsack or a boom sprayer, to help create great playing surfaces all year round and managing amenity areas efficiently and cost effectively, along with maintaining immaculate lawns for customers."



You have to be switched on at all times"

The qualities of an award-winning sprayer

- Confidence under pressure – decisive operation in changing conditions
- Foresight and planning – always know your route and exit strategy
- Technical understanding – calibration, nozzle selection and platform knowledge
- Data literacy – using GDD, forecasts and ITM principles effectively
- Situational awareness – spotting pressure changes or blocked nozzles instantly
- Concentration and resilience – maintaining standards over long days
- Pride in presentation – understanding the visual impact of every pass

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Stuart Wilson, Managing Secretary.

For Earth, For Life
Kubota

Browntop bentgrass being
grown in a Canterbury field.

The appeal of Browntop Bentgrass

Will Bowden, Turf Agronomist / Product Development Manager, PGGWTurf/
DLF New Zealand, explains why, in the right climate and with appropriate
management, browntop provides greenkeepers worldwide with a flexible,
resilient and high-performing turf option

Nearly a century after its first use on golf greens, New Zealand-bred browntop cultivars continue to lead international performance rankings.

Understanding this success requires a look back at browntop's unusual history. In an era of rising operational costs and increasing environmental scrutiny, browntop's strengths as a sustainable cool-season grass are no longer historical curiosities – they offer real, practical advantages.

Adaptation to New Zealand

In New Zealand, browntop bentgrass (*Agrostis Capillaris*) has travelled a

remarkable path from an uninvited pasture grass to a globally significant fine turf species. It is believed to have first naturalised in New Zealand during the mid-1800s, when it was introduced inadvertently by a group of Scottish Presbyterians (from Nova Scotia), led by Minister Norman McLeod, who settled in Waipu, north of Auckland. Bedding material from their voyage is believed to have introduced browntop seed to the land, where it thrived in our immature and low-fertility soils. By 1867, it had been described botanically, and by the early 1900s, it was established

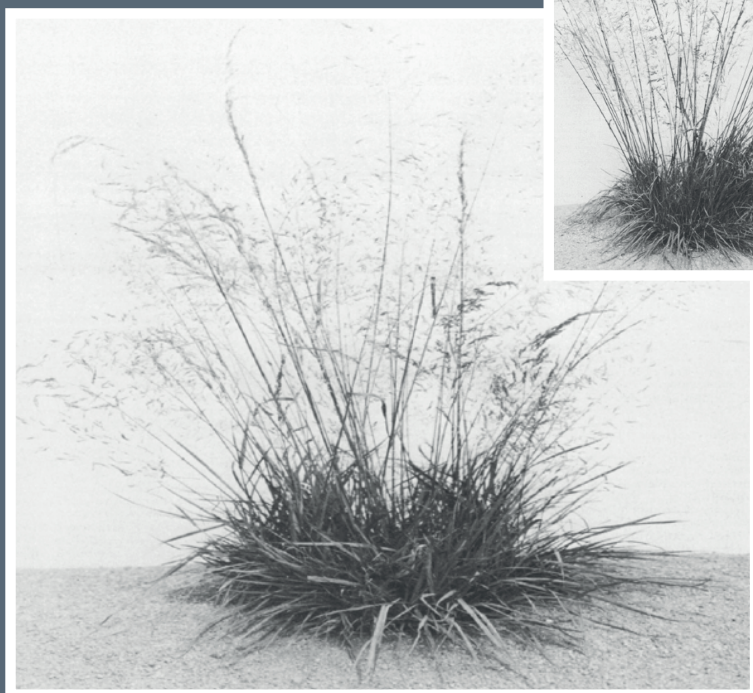
nationwide. Later confirmation by British botanist Sir Bruce Levy described how the New Zealand 'Waipu browntop' was botanically identical to the US 'Rhode Island' variety, further validating this account of naturalisation.

Despite its persistence, browntop became somewhat unwelcome among pasture improvers; Levy described "manuring out" browntop as being central to pasture improvement, associating it with poor fertility and low productivity. For greenkeepers, however, those traits of stress tolerance, low nutrient requirements,



The Hills GC, Otago, New Zealand.
Everything here is browntop

Grasslands Egmont and Grasslands Sefton



New Zealand steps into breeding

Browntop breeding in New Zealand accelerated in the mid-20th century when grasslands scientists Dr Phil Rolston and Dr Bill Rumball, supported by modest government funding, began selecting varieties for commercial use in the residential turf market.

Over 4,000 plants from New Zealand and Australia were collected, leading to the release of two cultivars in the late 1970s: 'Grasslands Dark' (now 'Egmont') and 'Grasslands Sefton'. 'Egmont', coarser and less dense, was suited to home lawns, while 'Sefton' was preferred for high-quality surfaces such as golf greens.

These early cultivars demonstrated that browntop could be bred for both survival and performance.

The international significance of this work was recognised when 'Grasslands Egmont' was granted Plant Variety Protection (PVR) in the United States,



and density under close mowing hinted at its potential as a high-performance turfgrass.

Pre-commercial use and a global stage

During the 1920s and 1930s, browntop was specified on some of the world's most prestigious golf greens, championed by designers such as Dr Alister MacKenzie for its relatively fine texture and resilience, which suited the low-input maintenance practices of the era.

A pivotal moment came during the MacKenzie-Russell redevelopment of Royal Melbourne, when the greens were resurfaced using the 'Suttons Seed Mix,' which included a component of New Zealand browntop seed. Around the same time, MacKenzie reportedly used a similar mix at Cypress Point, combining browntop, velvet bent and creeping bent types. For the next decade, New Zealand browntop was imported to the US to supplement the local production of Rhode Island bentgrass, peaking at around 130 tonnes in the early 1930s, a 'boom' that was the result of the post-Great War trade gap between the US and Germany, who had previously been importing the 'South German Mix' to supplement local US production. The

export market was short-lived, however, as US tariffs on imported browntop served to shift demand back to domestic Rhode Island bent. After this time, the established export of New Zealand browntop to northern Europe and the UK took priority.

Breeding for modern turf realities

Modern browntop breeding in New Zealand reflects the practical constraints faced by greenkeepers globally, where turf quality can no longer be defined solely by aesthetic criteria. Instead, traits such as disease resistance, particularly to *Clarireedia* spp. (Dollar Spot), drought tolerance, and reliable performance under low-input management regimes have become increasingly critical.

Research at the Kimihia facility is focused on validating our agronomist and end-user observations through quantitative assessment. Root architecture screening and drought tolerance are being embedded as important selection criteria within the browntop breeding programme, reflecting the growing need for cultivars suited to low-input management systems.

In parallel, laboratory and off-site field trials are evaluating whether older 'heritage' browntop cultivars, including 'Egmont', 'Sefton' and 'Manor', exhibit

representing a significant milestone for New Zealand turf breeding.

The New Zealand, Royal Melbourne connection

In the early 1990s, PGG Wrightson turf breeder Keith Saulsbury, after whom the current browntop cultivar 'Saulsbury' is named, was commissioned by Royal Melbourne's then superintendent, Jim Porter, to identify the key constituents of the original 'Suttons Seed Mix' used on the greens.

This initiative reflected the club's intent to preserve the agronomic and cultural heritage of the seed blend that had been originally selected by Dr Alister MacKenzie when the course was redesigned, and which had become synonymous with the greens' playing characteristics and identity.

Keith surveyed the greens alongside Jim and collected approximately 250

turf cores for analysis at the Kimihia Research Facility in Canterbury, New Zealand.

These samples were grown out to identify the constituent species present.

The investigation confirmed the dominance of browntop within the historic 'Suttons Seed Mix' and provided rare insight into the agronomic factors underpinning the greens' long-term performance consistency.

As a result, PGG Wrightson Turf was commissioned to replicate the original blend, leading to an exclusive agreement under which the 'Suttons Seed Mix' (v.1) continues to be produced solely for Royal Melbourne's greens.

This seminal work reinforced the enduring influence of New Zealand-adapted bentgrass genetics on world-class turf performance.

The grower behind the grass

No discussion of browntop breeding is complete without recognising the contribution of seed growers.

Early browntop seed yields in New Zealand averaged just over 100kg per hectare.

Through improved agronomy, cultivar selection and grower expertise, yields steadily increased.

Today, browntop seed yields commonly sit between 350 and 450kg per hectare.

Around 350 hectares are grown in Canterbury under structured, long-term grower contracts.

These contracts allow for stability of supply and enable our breeders and agronomists to focus on quality and consistency, while growers refine production techniques.

The result is a seed supply system that underpins New Zealand's global competitiveness.

enhanced disease resistance relative to the finer-textured, drought-selected cultivars released over the past decade. Collectively, this work seeks to balance performance, resilience and sustainability in contemporary turfgrass breeding.

An important outcome of the current evaluation programme is that several of the oldest browntop cultivars remain among the most drought-tolerant, underscoring that genetic progress does not necessarily require replacement. Instead, historical germplasm continues to offer valuable traits for contemporary breeding. Moreover, turf quality does not consistently align with disease resistance ratings, reinforcing the need for breeders to balance visual performance with resilience, adaptability and long-term sustainability.

Still leading after 95 years

Nearly 95 years after its introduction to elite golf greens, New Zealand remains a leader in browntop performance. Courses across the country demonstrate the species' adaptability, while its success reflects long-term selection, collaboration between breeders and growers and an understanding of turf performance under sustainable management.

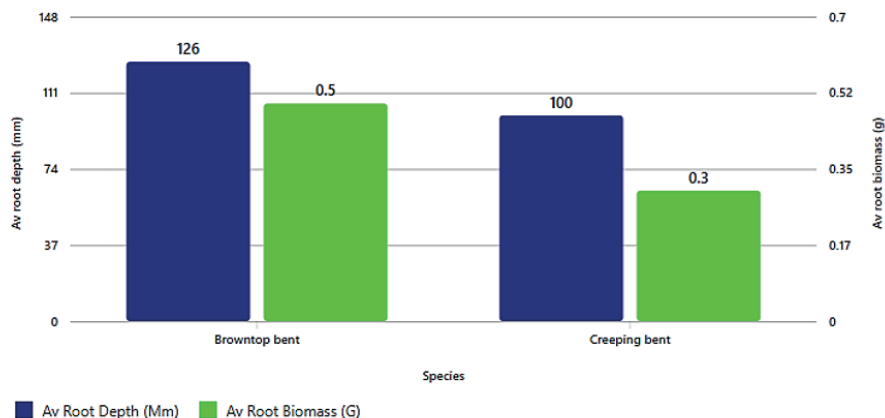
Looking ahead

As the turf industry faces growing pressure to reduce inputs and enhance environmental performance, browntop's inherent strengths remain highly relevant. With an increased focus on screening new material for

key sustainability traits such as disease and drought resistance, New Zealand browntop is poised to remain central to fine turf management for decades. From a reluctant pasture resident to a global turf mainstay, browntop bentgrass stands as a defining New Zealand success story. **GI**



Quantifying key sustainability traits forms the backbone of our ongoing R&D work



About the author - Will Bowden

Will Bowden is the Turf Agronomist at PGWWTurf/DLF Oceania.

Based at the Kimihia Research Centre in Canterbury, Will works closely with the turfgrass breeding team to evaluate and develop turfgrass products for the local and global turf sector.



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Education & Training

Askham Bryan College



Askham Bryan, York, YO23 3FR

Contact: Apprenticeship Department

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

w: www.askham-bryan.ac.uk

Askham Bryan College is a specialist land-based college and university centre offering a large range of courses from foundation to degree level and beyond, which will set you up for a career doing what you feel passionate about. In addition to Level 2 Golf Greenkeeper, Level 2 Sports Turf Operative, Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician and Level 5 Golf Course Manager, we can offer specialist short-course training and bespoke CPD events based on your business need.

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



Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA)



Hall Place, Burchetts Green, SL6 6QR

Contact: Lawrence Jones

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

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

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

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

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



Bishop Burton College and Riseholme College



Bishop Burton College, York Road, Bishop Burton, HU17 8QG

Riseholme College - Showground Campus, North Carlton, LN1 2ZR

w: www.bishopburton.ac.uk | www.riseholme.ac.uk

Contact: Craig Malloy t: 07702 671614 e: Craig.Malloy@riseholme.ac.uk

Bishop Burton and Riseholme College are leading land-based colleges and universities offering a range of courses from entry level to master's degrees, including apprenticeships, adult learning and part-time courses. Our Greenkeeping and Groundsman apprenticeships will prepare you for work in the industry. With strong industry links you'll gain experience, skills and knowledge required.

Apprenticeships available include Level 2 Greenkeeping, Level 2 sports turf Groundsman, Level 3 Advanced sports turf technician, level 2 Horticulture/landscaping, level 3 Horticulture/landscaping, Level 2 Arborist as well as specialist short courses and boot camps.



Cannington College



Rodway, Cannington, Somerset, TA5 2LS

Contact: Adam Collett

t: 07740 255973 e: colletta@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

w: www.ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

Formed to drive economic growth, deliver cutting-edge skills, and transform opportunities for students and communities across Somerset, we're building the future of education, today. Cannington College delivers a range of land-based programmes, including agriculture, arboriculture, nuclear energy, golf greenkeeping, sports turf maintenance and animal management. It has an extensive, rich history, has trained generations of Somerset residents, and is well-respected in each of its primary industries. Cannington College offers unrivalled opportunities to get hands-on with the worlds of agriculture, animal care, grounds maintenance and horticulture. Our facilities include a 200-hectare farm, a cutting-edge Agricultural Innovation Centre, a golf course and living accommodation.



Hadlow College



Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0AL

Contact: Anthony Stockwell

t: 01732 850551 e: AnthonyStockwell@northkent.ac.uk

w: www.hadlow.ac.uk

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

For a full list of courses, visit www.hadlow.ac.uk.

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



Myerscough College and University Centre



St Michaels Road, Bilsborrow, Preston, Lancashire, PR3 0RY

Contact: Course enquiries team

t: 0800 652 5592 e: enquiries@myerscough.ac.uk

w: www.myerscough.ac.uk

Myerscough College and University Centre is the pioneering centre for sports turf and golf course management education in Europe. Courses are available at all levels, from introductory practical skills training to the postgraduate Masters Degree in Sustainable Golf Course Management. There are options for full time or part time online study. The foundation degree, honours degree and MA programmes are available online and have students enrolled from across the globe.

Apprenticeships delivery is across England and includes Golf Greenkeeper Level 2, Advanced Sportsturf Technician Level 3 and Golf Course Manager Level 5 with flexible start dates across the year. We also offer a wide range of industry short courses.



As a member of the GTC, BIGGA works closely with training providers that enable greenkeepers to achieve qualifications required to progress their careers. Here are a selection of educational organisations offering training for greenkeepers.

The Greenkeepers Training Committee maintains a list of GTC Approved Training Providers (ATPs), who offer Government-approved greenkeeping courses and qualifications, adhering to a strict criteria.



Oaklands Training and Development



Hatfield Rd, Oaklands, St Albans AL4 0JA

Contact: Andy Wight

t: 01727 737000 e: ContactCentre@oaklands.ac.uk

w: www.oaklands.ac.uk

Oaklands Training & Development, part of Oaklands College, has been delivering greenkeeper training for over 40 years, offering work-based diplomas and apprenticeships across the Southeast. Using an expert delivery team with extensive industry experience, Oaklands works closely with the GTC and BIGGA, and hosts an annual Greenkeeping Education Seminar—one of the largest of its kind in the UK.

Courses include Level 2 Golf Greenkeeping Apprenticeship; Level 2 Sports Turf Operative Apprenticeship; Level 3 Advanced Sports-Turf Technician Apprenticeship; Level 5 Golf Course Manager Apprenticeship; Level 2 and 3 Work-based Diplomas in Sports-Turf/Golf Greenkeeping and ILM Management qualifications.



Oldham College



Rochdale Road, Oldham, OL9 6AA

Contact: Phil Lomas

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

w: www.oldham.ac.uk

Oldham College is first choice for greenkeeping apprenticeships in Greater Manchester and the surrounding areas. As a result of strong employer partnerships, the college supports apprentices in undertaking Golf Greenkeeping Level 2 and Advanced Sports Turf Technician Level 3 Apprenticeship standards. The college is also able to facilitate short industry specific courses, including Pesticide Application and Safe Use of Mowers. Our teaching learning and assessment team have vast experience in the greenkeeping sector, keeping up-to-date with current practices to ensure high-quality provision is maintained.

The team has first-hand experience of the End Point Assessment processes that assure apprentices have the best possible experience and opportunities to achieve.



Pershore College



Avonbank, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10 3JP

Contact: Dave Coutts

t: 0330 135 7134 e: dbcoutts@warwickshire.ac.uk

w: www.wcg.ac.uk

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

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

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



Plumpton College



Ditchling Road, Plumpton, East Sussex, BN7 3AE

Contact: Plumpton Business Services

t: 01273 892127 e: business@plumpton.ac.uk

w: www.plumpton.ac.uk

Plumpton College is a leading land-based Further & Higher Education and Apprenticeship provider, supporting golf clubs and greenkeeping professionals across the South of England. The college offers the Golf Greenkeeping and Sports Turf Operative Level 2, with progression onto the Advanced Sports Turf Technician Level 3, delivered through a flexible, multi-start model.

Learning is further enhanced through access to a broad suite of LANTRA and NPTC approved courses and assessments, delivered either at the main campus near Brighton or on employers' premises.

Training is delivered by tutors with extensive industry experience, supported by guest lecturer masterclasses, resulting in outstanding outcomes for learners.



Sparsholt College



Westley Lane, Sparsholt, SO21 2NF

Contact: Karen Jackson

t: 01962 797452 e: Karen.Jackson@sparsholtservices.ac.uk

w: www.sparsholt.ac.uk

Our stunning 450-acre campus boasts all the facilities students need. The college cares about the environment and is well on its journey towards carbon neutrality.

We have a team of industry experts to deliver and assess the Level 2 Golf Greenkeeping and Level 3 Advanced Sports Turf Technician Standards as well as the Level 2 Sports Turf and Level 2 Horticulture or Landscape Construction Operative standards.

Our assessing and teaching team has experience that enables them to support with the End Point Assessment.

In addition to this the college offers short courses in horticulture, landscaping and arboriculture, such as pesticide application, safe use of brush cutters and trimmers, first aid and more.



SRUC Elmwood



Carslogie Road, Cupar, Fife, KY15 5YT

Contact: Course enquiries team

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

w: www.sruc.ac.uk

SRUC Elmwood is based in Fife just 10 miles from St Andrews.

For those seeking an entry level qualification we offer Work Based Modern Apprenticeships at SVQ Level 2. For those looking to develop their managerial careers, the college offers SVQ Level 3 in Sportsturf, as well as our online Higher National Certificate/Diploma in Golf Course Management.

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



Suffolk New College



Charity Lane, Otley, Suffolk IP6 9NE
Contact: Apprenticeships
t: 01473 382600 e: apprenticeships@suffolk.ac.uk
w: www.suffolk.ac.uk

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



Train Together Ltd



3 Gilmour Close, Leicester, LE4 1EZ
Contact: Brynne Roberts
t: 0116 235 8000 e: Brynne.roberts@traintogetherltd.co.uk
w: www.traintogetherltd.co.uk

Train Together is a specialist training provider delivering high-quality apprenticeships in Golf Greenkeeping and Golf Course Management, supporting the industry from foundation through to degree level. With a modern, flexible delivery model, our tailored apprenticeship programs are designed in partnership with sector specialists, ensuring relevance to the day-to-day operational needs of golf clubs. From nurturing new entrants into the profession to upskilling experienced staff, we offer a progressive pathway that supports career development. Train Together's innovative approach blends digital learning with on-site visits, expert mentoring and hands on assessments, providing a balanced, engaging experience for learners and employers alike.



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Where learning comes to life

Field trips are the classroom for sports turf apprentices

Over the past year, we have been proud to host a series of field trips for our Sports Turf Apprentices. These visits, held at a range of leading venues across the country, have played a key role in supporting apprentice development while strengthening links between education and industry.

From February 2025 through to January 2026, apprentices visited a variety of venues including Strathallan School, Cabot Highlands, Murrayfield Rugby Stadium, Aberdeen FC Training Ground, Royal Aberdeen GC, Lundin Golf Club, Leven Links, Dundonald Links and Kilmarnock Barassie. Apprentices attend these visits as part of their regional cohorts, allowing them to access high-quality venues locally while learning alongside peers from their area.

Each visit is carefully planned to align with the apprentices' coursework, enabling them to see theory put into practice and engage directly with experienced turf managers working to the highest professional standards. This exposure helps reinforce place-based learning and provides valuable insight into operations across different environments.

A major benefit of the programme is exposure to a wide range of surface

types, business models, machinery, and maintenance facilities. Observing how decisions are made on site, from renovation schedules to data capture and planning, helps bring valuable context to their studies and deepens understanding.

Beyond turf talk itself, the field trips offer valuable opportunities to network, ask questions, and learn directly from hosts and peers through open discussion. Turf managers share honest insight into career journeys and pathways, industry challenges, and the skills required to progress. For many apprentices, these conversations provide inspiration, build confidence, and strengthen motivation to succeed in their chosen career.

The host venues benefit too, with

the opportunity to showcase best practice, highlight innovation, and contribute to the development of the future workforce. From an educational perspective, these visits strengthen partnerships between training providers and industry employers, ensuring that learning remains relevant and aligned with current industry needs.

Looking ahead, the success of the past year's field trips has reinforced the value of hands-on learning and industry engagement. By continuing to collaborate with venues and employers, we can help equip sports turf apprentices with the knowledge, skills, and inspiration they need to progress, without relying solely on a traditional classroom setting.

If you are interested in becoming a future field trip host, please feel free to get in touch;
chris.dickson
@sruc.ac.uk



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Shared experience matters

Despite a challenging start to the year, BTME highlighted the strength and optimism of greenkeepers



Steve Lloyd, Chair

BTME provided a welcome pause in what has been a demanding period for greenkeepers, and the overriding feeling coming out of Harrogate was one of positivity and momentum.

That was particularly encouraging given the context many in the profession are working within. The past year has tested golf courses in very different ways. Much of 2025 was defined by prolonged dry conditions that pushed turf, irrigation systems and teams to their limits. That has been followed by a challenging start to 2026, with persistent rainfall creating its own set of problems.

In many areas, ground conditions have remained saturated for weeks, making day-to-day decision-making increasingly difficult. It has been one of the toughest starts to a year many of us can remember.

Against that backdrop, BTME felt important. It offered a chance to step away briefly, compare experiences and be reminded that these challenges are widely shared. Talking to colleagues made it clear that few, if any, are immune to the conditions, and that sense of shared experience matters.



Greenkeeping can be an isolating job at the best of times, and events like BTME reinforce the value of staying connected and leaning on one another.

looking to support staff without committing to full-time academic routes. That flexibility is increasingly important.

There was also real

Membership growth remains another positive sign. Stronger numbers reflect a better understanding of the value BIGGA provides,

“The focus was firmly on collaboration and problem-solving”

Education was a standout feature of the week and the level of engagement with the Continue to Learn programme showed a clear appetite for development. The new education pathways announced at BTME have the potential to make a real difference over the coming months and years, especially for clubs

encouragement to be taken from the quality of engagement between greenkeepers and suppliers. The focus was firmly on collaboration and problem-solving, with conversations centred on how to cope with conditions now, while planning for what may lie ahead.

particularly around community, support and professional guidance. In challenging seasons, those networks really matter.

BTME reminded us that while conditions may be unpredictable, the profession is resilient, connected and better equipped to face what comes next. **GI**

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