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Bill Lynch
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ADVERTISING SALES EXECUTIVE
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PRINTING
Hi-Tec Print, Unit 7, Universal Crescent, Houghton Road, North Anston Trading Estate, Dinnington, South Yorkshire S31 7JJ
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GREENKEEPER

International

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COVER PICTURE: Looking back from the 17th green at Letchworth Golf Club: part of Duncan McGilvray's triumph

Communication is the answer

Struck by the wide variety of misinformed comment I hear from many Club members on golf course maintenance (and aren't they all experts), I am prompted to ask one simple question: Are you getting your money's worth? With few exceptions, the answer depends on how well the green committee relate with the greenkeeper.

The norm for admission to green committee status often seems to be coercion, with the sometime carrot of Club captaincy perhaps an attraction, though all too often the incumbent knows little or nothing about agronomy, course management or course architecture. How then can that weakness in the chain – knowledge – be overcome in order that the green committee man may participate effectively in an on-going maintenance programme which will continue long after he is done with committee life?

This is not the problem it seems, for the answer – practiced and preached by all effective managers – is communication.

Visiting Letchworth Golf Club, where Duncan McGilvray is the course manager, I was impressed by one of the best structures I've seen yet, where Duncan works not in isolation but as an equal in golfing terms. He eats lunch in the dining room, talks with most of the members both on and off the course and enjoys regular dialogue with the Club secretary and his course liaison officer – a one on one discourse – as well as playing the course regularly and being active at meetings. The result is that he knows what members want.

The antithesis of this enlightened approach came to my attention at a northern Club where most members didn't know the head greenkeeper's name and where a bunch of low handicappers were exerting authority to toughen the course up to the detriment of the rank and file majority. The final outcome of this aggression has yet to surface, but with the head man listening to the few, my guess would be that his job could be on the line.

There are problems in having too many bosses and again Letchworth have it right. Members may button-hole Duncan with ideas but they know how the course is managed and that only declared policy can be implemented. Such policy is well documented and programmed long term. It not only works but can be seen to be working.

The weakness of an ineffectual green committee can manifest itself in another and even more insidious fashion when complaints fail to reach the ears of the head greenkeeper. I know of more than one case where silence reigned and resulted in a programme continuing in total disregard to the members' wishes. The end result, when called to explain the direction the course was heading, was that yet another greenkeeper – rightly protesting that he hadn't heard of such problems and where early communication would have diverted the bubbling volcano – was forced to look elsewhere for a job.

In advocating an enlightened approach to course management via the green committee it would be wrong not to highlight the sterling work carried out by the STRI agronomists. They do a grand job but are quite clearly overworked. An annual course visit is fine but when isolated problems loom large and time is not on their side, Clubs must pay for expert advice and get advice *fast*. The wise greenkeeper will know not only his own course but those around him and will be able to guide his committee. If there is a moral to all this it is a simple one – communication wins friends and influences people and the good course is one where regular informed dialogue between green chairman and greenkeeper takes place. Added to this might be the truism that is much in fashion these days: a green committee should consist of an odd number... and three is too many!

DAVID WHITE



Flying Divots

An appreciation of what is not always appreciated

Gloomy outlook for some new golf course projects

As predicted in 'Flying Divots' in April, a report issued by Savills, the estate agents associated with pricey country estates and 'high rent' property in Belgravia or the like, estimates that about 30 golf course cum hotel sites are in the hands of the receiver, with many more on the brink. That grandest of grand projects – Loch Lomond – with a budget variously estimated at between £45 – £60million and promoted as a rival to Gleneagles, is "in difficulties" and is now run by an accountancy firm. It is not alone, with developers now chided for having responded too soon to the 1989 R&A report predicting a need for 700 new courses by the end of the century. As we always guessed and is now confirmed by R&A Secretary, Michael Bonallack: 'it didn't mean you could build them anywhere'. Thus it now seems that some developers have egg on their faces for building on a grand scale in places clearly inappropriate – the biggest sin.

The secret dream of some Club members – that a Japanese consortium will offer umpteen millions for their course – is now a fairy tale and Greenkeeper International understands that one estate specialist has no less than 80 potential courses and 40 existing courses on its books with precious few buyers.

Those already built will of course survive and continue, but is there really much 'silly money' around any more, where debentures of £15,000 – £30,000 are demanded? Henry Cotton had the right idea – simple courses for beginners – and one wonders if perhaps the report should not have identified the prime candidate, who is clearly not yesterday's 'yuppie'.

■ **Some 104 years later**, the following from Sir Walter Simpson, author of 'The Art of Golf' still stands in good stead: "The vital thing about a hole is that it should either be more difficult than it looks, or look more difficult than it is. It must never be what it looks."

■ **Foreigners laugh** at we British and our obsession with the weather, but it is a subject that is catching. Now some American friends have taken to weather watching and as they flew in from the yellows and browns that mark California – still drought ridden after five years – remarked on the sudden and astonishing green-ness that is our home.

Not surprising really, as June drew to a close with what we believed was a record soaker. Don't believe it! Weather men claim that the monotonous downpours were 'nothing special', with things just feeling worse because we had some rain every day.

Who and what are moving on and moving in, in the greenkeeping industry

■ Jimmy Richardson wrote telling of young Michael Gunn's lucky escape following an incident at Tyneside GC. Michael was cutting grass on the 15th fairway when his tractor somersaulted three times down a 30ft ravine before coming to a halt and catapulting him clear. Michael's father, club professional Mac Gunn, on talking of Michael's injuries to back, neck and stomach, said; "He is lucky to be alive. The tractor could easily have fallen upon him".



■ Ian Corcoran, pictured, Assistant Greenkeeper, Market Drayton GC, will play in the 36 hole strokeplay Dunhill Amateur Masters at Woburn on September 6th. This after placing first in the regional finals held at Tytherington GC. He beat last year's Champion, Ian Pethybridge, by one shot.

■ Scottish BIGGA Chairman, Harry Diamond, who is also head greenkeeper at Belleisle and Seafield GC, had a dodgy start to his day recently when vandals decided to make an unscheduled visit and set fire to the starters box. It was razed to the ground.



■ Despite forbidding weather forecasts which happily proved wrong, nearly 100 head greenkeepers attended two Sta-Brite golf days in June, the first held on a blustery but dry day at Calcot Park GC, the second at Mid Kent GC, Gravesend.

At both events a great day's golf was followed by a splendid dinner, with prizes presented by Mike Fabb, General Manager of Sta-Brite.

Pictured: Mid Kent winners, from left, Richard Pride, Willie McConville (winner) Ron Christie (third) Mike Smith (runner-up) and George Barr (longest drive).

■ Gordon Moir, the Sherlock Holmes of Fraserburgh, wrote telling a sad tale concerning Derek Ray, head greenkeeper at Nairn Dunbar, who - wait for it - broke his leg playing cricket! I wonder, do we send Derek a get-well card or a contribution toward psychiatric guidance?

■ From the East Midlands, via Walter Cole of Longcliffe GC, comes the startling news that Tim Allard has had a baby! We bet his wife is pleased and is taking great care of the new 'mother' during the critical nursing period. Good luck to them both!



■ ICI have just appointed a new member to their National Sales Team, Johney Beck, who takes up the position as ICI's Technical Area Sales Representative responsible for the south and south east of England. Johney has recently moved to be central to his area and can be contacted on 02407 4741.

■ It's difficult to keep Elmwood College out of the press these days, and now comes news that a Toro 3000 D Greensmaster has been donated by the manufacturers through A M Russell Ltd of Edinburgh, who will undertake all servicing. The machine will be used on Elmwood's golf

course and in training greenkeeping students.

■ Hawtree, the golf course architecture practice responsible for more than 600 projects world-wide, will celebrate their 80th birthday in style next year with their first Indian course, a newly commissioned 27 hole layout in New Delhi. India was the first country outside Great Britain to be introduced to the game, the first Club being established in 1829, and it is hoped that this course will mark a revival of golf in a country with a great golfing tradition.



■ The firmly established Annual Parkers Greenkeepers Tournament was staged recently at Cuddington GC, with 68 Golf Clubs represented. The coveted Parkers Rose Bowl was won by Eric Green, Woodcote Park GC, with 35 points, followed by Stuart McMillan, Leatherhead GC, with 34 points.

Pictured: far right, Mr Jim Parker; centre, Mrs Yvonne Montague, far left, Peter Simpson, and the winners.



■ Barcham Trees of Soham, Ely, Cambridgeshire, have appointed Andrew Mitchell to their sales team to promote their range of container grown trees. Andrew was formerly with the Crown Estates Commissioners at Windsor and Notcutts Garden Centres.



■ Steven English has been appointed UK Sales Manager - Tyres, for Trelleborg Ltd. He will be responsible for the market development of Trelleborg Low Ground Pressure tyres used in the sportsturf industry.

■ The footprints of a giant lizard which last roamed the Cheshire Plain over 230 million years ago have been re-created in the shape of two bunkers on the Donald Steel designed Portal golf course, which opened for play on June 24th. Portal is aimed primarily at the corporate business market and will operate on a pay-as-you-play basis, with a green fee of £30.

Picture by TONY PUGH



■ Excavation at Chirk Golf and Country Club, near Oswestry, meant digging out a huge rock weighing in at 35 tons, a back-breaking task. Pictured with course manager Alan Sharp (left) are Roy Thelwell, Patrick Anderson, George Griffiths, Richard Taylor, Haydn Jones, Sidney Woods, Barry Roberts and Mike Turner. Now where exactly did you bury Alan's car lads?



Howard Swan commented recently on the creation of the first nine hole Sir Henry Cotton Foundation course for beginners at Bridlington. He said: 'Sir Henry wanted to see some simple courses built where beginners felt comfortable and were able, under tuition, to learn the rules and the correct way to play. I hope Bridlington Bay will be the first of many such facilities'. Cotton, three times Open Champion, thought simple strips of land with mown areas for tees and greens were all that was required for people to start playing golf. The nine-holer forms part of a new 27 hole complex.

■ Picture shows the late Sir Henry Cotton with Howard Swan, with whom he collaborated on many projects developing the simple theme of golf for beginners, now embodied in the Sir Henry Cotton Foundation.

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Following the recent Stage III examination for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate, Laurence Pithie has been declared Britain's first Master Greenkeeper – after being the only candidate who successfully completed the two examination papers presented.

Laurence, Course Manager of Minchinhampton Golf Club in Gloucestershire, will be presented with his Master Greenkeeper Certificate by Viscount Whitelaw in Harrogate next January at the opening ceremony of the BIGGA (BTME) Exhibition and Seminar Programme.

Since the Master Greenkeeper Certificate (MGC) was launched at BTME in January 1990, many members have been striving toward achieving the magical 200 credits necessary for completion of the first stage. From this, four members moved successfully on to stage II, which involves a visit to their respective places of work by a panel, before moving to the final hurdle, the examination!

Shortly after examination day and before the results had been announced, Laurence wrote to our Education Officer, David Golding, outlining his views on the MGC programme. Such a thoughtful document deserves wider exposure and with the proud result no longer a secret, we print it here in its entirety.



Picture: Wilts and Glos Standard

Britain's first **MASTER GREENKEEPER**

THE MASTER GREENKEEPER CERTIFICATE – FROM A MEMBER'S VIEW

When details of the MGC were first published, I thought to myself 'do I really need to undergo a lengthy procedure of study and examination?' After all, I had 20 years experience in greenkeeping, 14 of them as a course manager, as well as gaining various greenkeeping certificates many years ago. In fact, there must be many more course managers who have greater experience than myself and who may also have a proven track record of hosting major events.

Then I thought, 'if this certificate is just about the number of years one is engaged in working on a golf course, it seems fairly useless and unlikely to be accepted as a meaningful achievement within the golf industry'. Conversely, if our profession is to meet the ever increasing demand for better surfaces and progress successfully toward the year 2000, then the need to establish a worthwhile qualification is greater than ever.

In 1971 the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) recognised this problem and implemented their own Certification Programme (or Program, as they spell it) soon after. It has been tremendously successful in raising the standards their profession and my view is that we must do likewise and learn from our American colleagues.

Education is, has, and always will be the foundation upon which BIGGA exists, for through training and education it can promote confidence, improve technical knowledge and engender motivation, which leads in turn to greater respect. Managing today's golf courses requires not just practical experience but a wealth of technical expertise in understanding the theory and practice of turfgrass management. If we are to change the public conception of being 'the greenkeeper that cuts the grass', we must improve our image.

The course manager must be an agronomist as well as a business manager and public relations officer, he should also understand the basic principles and inter-relationships of turfgrasses; soils; fertilisers and pesticides, as well as irrigation; drainage and construction. Together with this knowledge he must have the ability to train; supervise; motivate and lead by example, as

well as possess the ability to communicate ideas and plans in a professional manner when addressing committees or a board of directors.

It must be seen therefore that it is increasingly important for aspiring course managers to prepare for the technical and managerial aspects of their profession by attending college, conferences, seminars and management/workshop courses organised by our Association. Only then can we as individuals hope to advance our own careers and raise the standards of our profession.

The MGC was set up to recognise these aims and gaining any such certification should be regarded as a worthwhile achievement. If the MGC was simply 'handed out' to those greenkeepers with 20 years or more experience, or far worse, made too easy, then it would not meet the required objectives and be a complete waste of time. With this new qualification there will inevitably be a degree of fine-tuning required, but I firmly believe that it will be seen as a most thorough and comprehensive examination of all the technical skills required by those who seek to manage both golf course and course personnel. As such, it will be warmly welcomed by those within the golf industry.

Gaining certification requires that the candidate accumulate 200 credits – recognising one's educational efforts and commitment as well as years of practical experience. A successful assessment of the candidate's course and style of management follows, perceiving the desire that person has to provide the best possible playing conditions at all times and – not unnaturally – this generates a feeling of pride and fulfilment. It is, however, the third and final stage which demands the greatest self discipline – that of studying and being able to answer a large and varied number of detailed questions relating to every aspect of turfgrass management.

My eight months of self sacrifice brought home to me the reality that there was much I didn't know without further research. As a result of that research, the knowledge gained has proved most beneficial in my own career, as well as being essential in completing the final examination.

■ If you think education's not for you – think again!

Laurence Pithie's success story reflects his determination and hard work for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate.

This autumn, another BIGGA education process takes place. The management courses, held at Aldwark Manor, are aimed specifically at attracting greenkeepers who may not have received further education or greenkeeper training.

BIGGA management courses are entertaining – they're educational, but not at the expense of being boring, and speakers don't talk over your head.

Talk to anyone who has already attended, ask about the courses and what they gained from them, ask about the spirit of informal good fellowship that pervades throughout the whole period – the exchange of ideas and the sheer good fun of it all.



If that doesn't convince, look hard at the sats. vac. columns and see how the better educated command higher pay!

You too could enjoy the company of over 100 fellow greenkeepers: for more details, see the pre-paid management courses postcard facing Page 2 in this magazine.

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**'The MGC... should be the aim
of every golf course manager
or head greenkeeper'**

7 ➤ For those who remain undecided about registering for the certification programme, let me remind you of one simple fact. Considerably more money is now being invested in maintaining today's courses and just as these sums increase significantly each year, so also does Club management seek assurance that the man entrusted to take charge knows exactly what he is doing. The knowledge gained through years of practical experience is both invaluable and essential, no one would disagree. Equally important however, and rightly so, is the need for technical skills and those of a manager. The MGC provides proper recognition for these facets of total management and achieving this qualification should be the aim of every golf course manager or head greenkeeper.

■ *Laurence Pithie, Britain's first Master Greenkeeper, is 38 and lives in Tetbury with his wife Sandra and their two children, aged six and 10. He first entered greenkeeping in 1970, beginning as an apprentice at Bruntsfield Links, Edinburgh, whilst studying at Elmwood College, before moving to Moretonhall, also in Edinburgh and thence to Sandiway in Cheshire as head greenkeeper. Five years later he became Course Manager, Minchinhampton Golf Club, a position he has held for some ten years.*

On three occasions Laurence has visited the USA as National Greenkeeper and Groundsman of The Year, presenting papers on turfgrass management to an international audience in Houston, Texas. When not at Minchinhampton he can often be found photographing other golf courses and now possesses a large collection of slides, books and other literature relating to golf course management. Not surprisingly, his 'other' interests are sporting and include both golf and badminton.

The Joint Golf Course Committee

'Great cause' continues

After the announcement in the June issue of Greenkeeper International that the R&A had created The Joint Golf Course Committee, a decision to broaden the horizon for greenkeeper education has been taken. The appointment of Bob McLaren as Chairman of the JGCC Greenkeeper Training and Recruitment Panel will come as no surprise to those who have been following the fortunes of "The Way Forward."

Bob's volunteer support of golf has been highly visible for many years and significantly his professional career was in the field of education. After a number of years in the Glasgow Education System, McLaren became head teacher at Quarriers School for Special Education near Largs, where he now lives. Before retirement, Bob was active in the game as Ayrshire delegate to the Scottish Golf Union, which led to him being elected President in 1989.

As a member, now Chairman, of the Greenkeeper Training Committee from 1984 and a member of the four man R&A committee commissioned to further the cause of "The Way Forward", this first chairman of a Joint Golf Course Committee Panel stated quite simply, "I expect the next few years to be of great benefit to Golf Clubs and golfers". Of course, that is exactly what Bob McLaren has been doing for a long time past; so why should we expect less now?

Readers of Greenkeeper International are first to know the Terms of Reference for the JGCC. Here are extracts of consequence for greenkeepers.

- 'To recommend standards of golf course construction and maintenance.
- To work with National Golf Unions and other organisations for the improvement of education and professional standards for greenkeepers.
- To promote golf-related turf research.
- To ensure availability of effective agronomic and technical advice.
- To encourage more effective committee structures and the formation of long term management plans within Clubs.
- To raise funds for the furtherance of stated objectives'.

If anyone can give reasons why these objectives are not in the best interests of golf, let him or her speak out in the next issue of Greenkeeper International. More to the point, the writer would love to hear from anyone with bright ideas towards dealing with the last of these Terms. Golfers are well known for their generosity in the clubhouse bar, let's hope they will spare the cost of a pint a year on behalf of one of the hot topics they pontificate upon, that being - whether they know it or not - "The Great Cause".

● **The writer, Eric Shiel, is Executive Director of the Joint Golf Course Committee.**

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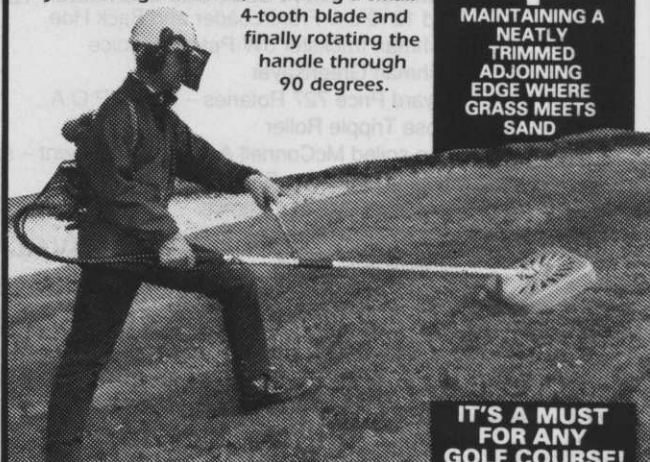
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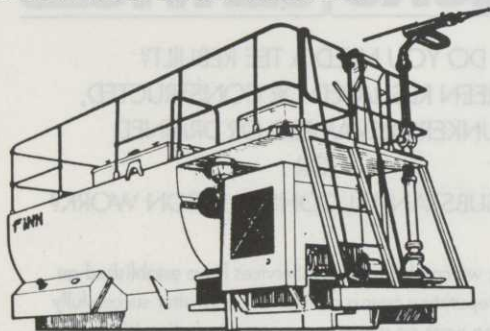
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