

THE DAY A GOLF COURSE DROWNED



**...and how
the men of
West Kilbride
brought it
back to life**

The prospect of staging the Scottish Boys' Matchplay Championship with only 16 greens was never really a starter and Jim Paton knew this only too well. It was foolish even to contemplate, yet on January 5th 1991 this greenkeeper's nightmare came true, caused by a monstrous storm dumping its full icy wrath directly over West Kilbride golf course during the afternoon. The destruction took less time than it takes to play a round of golf, the desolation indicating a score of 'two under', two holes gone to a watery grave. Yes indeed, a 16 hole championship course seemed a distinct possibility.

Subsequent reclamation of the course, including those sectors that were literally hurled into the raging sea, was of such military order and precision that the accomplishment might have drawn admiration from General Stormin' Norman himself.

The day started peacefully enough, though trouble was certainly brewing in the air and no golfer ventured out that day to tackle West Kilbride's fair links, which ♦ 22

84 days – from total wreck



On previous page: a view of the 14th green looking northwards during the eye of the storm. Above: the same scene today



Above: What was left of the 14th tee – and what it looks like today, five months later

21 ➡ are slap bang along the seashore of the Firth of Clyde and within sight of the Isle of Arran. Local wags are prone to quip 'if you can see the Isle it's going to rain, if you can't, it's already raining!'

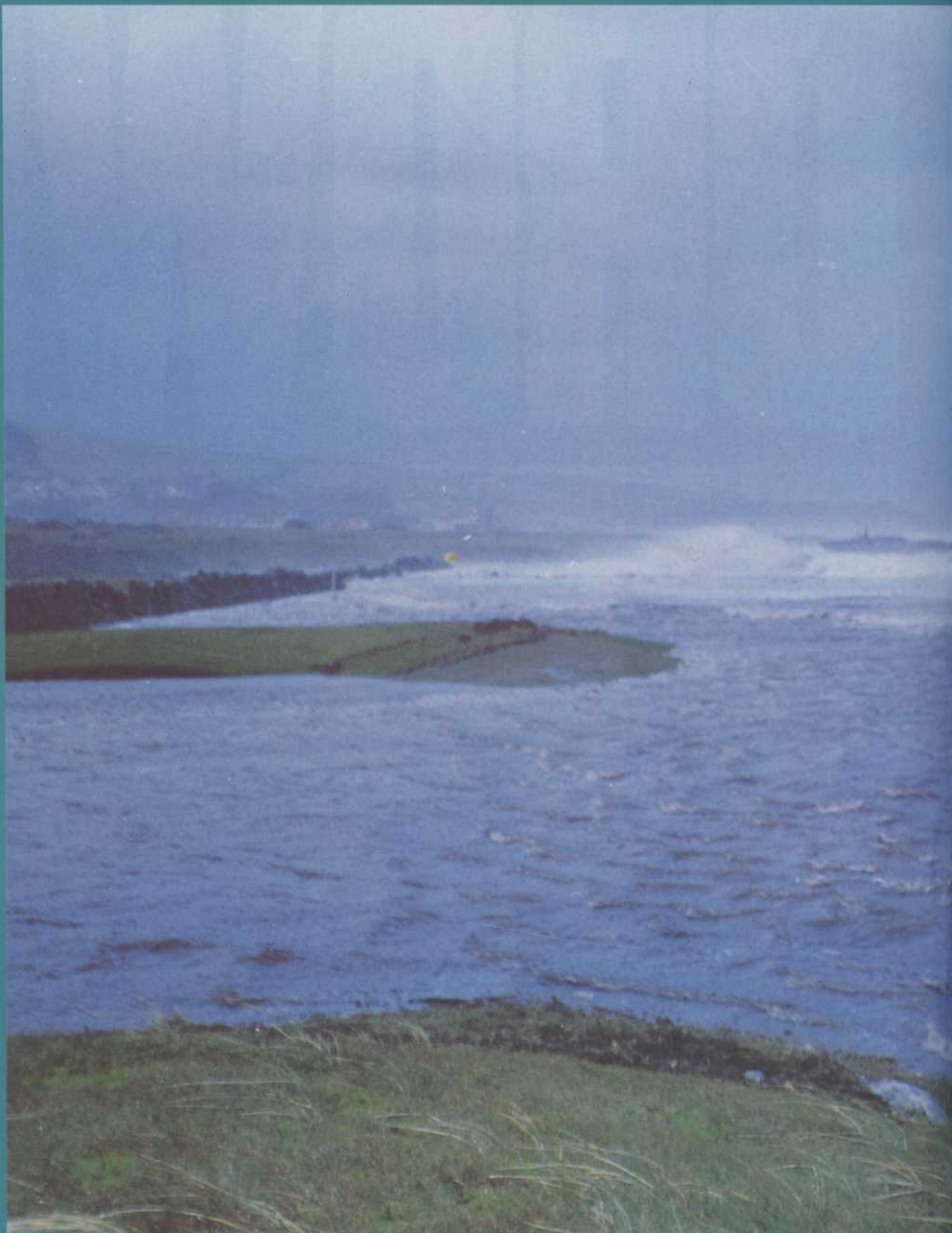
At 1pm the storm eye hit West Kilbride, stripping vast chunks of golf course adjacent to the shore into the sea and dumping what was later called the six 'esses' – salt, silt, sand, shale, shells and seaweed – onto what but a few hours before had been the brightest jewel of golfing excellence twixt Troon and Greenock. The whole episode brought a brand new meaning to coastal erosion.

Men of West Kilbride – especially greenkeepers – are made of stern stuff and under the guidance of head greenkeeper Jim Paton, a masterplan was in operation within hours. Reviewing the aftermath, Jim's first priori-

ty – since golfers will insist on playing their little game come what may – was to remove the hundreds of tons of detritus and wash away as much of the turf damaging salt water as was possible.

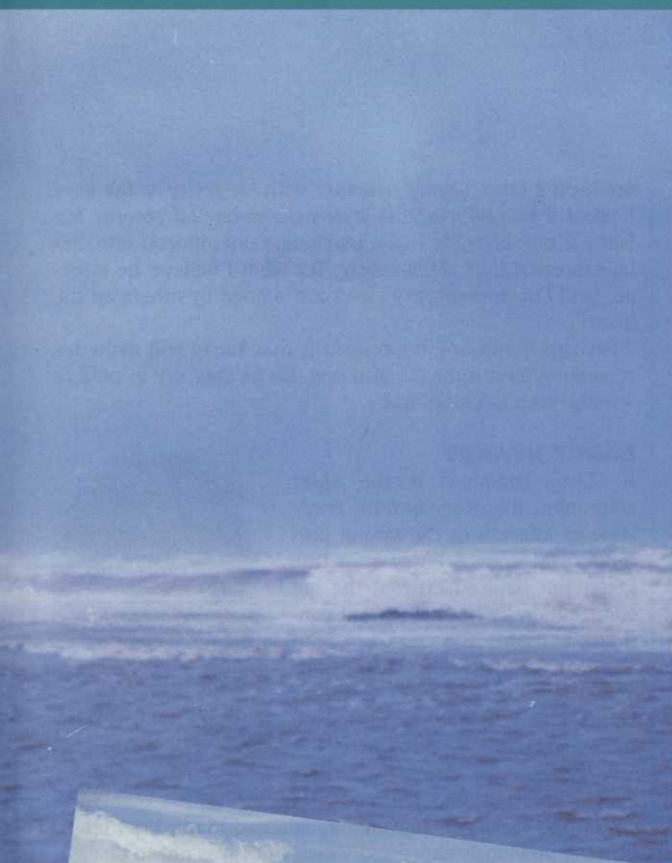
West Kilbride is no Titanic and there was never a thought of sinking, but Ayrshire is not Georgia and West Kilbride certainly doesn't have Augusta National's budget, machinery or manpower resources. This then was an exercise in hard graft, together with commandeering every available tractor, trailer, Cushman, wheelbarrow and willing shoulder.

All hands to the deck as the workforce sweated through the chill (it was January, remember) gave Jim hope that his primary aim – to speed recovery as swiftly as possible for member play – would soon be achieved and indeed, within 24 hours, the course rang once again



Same viewpoint, five months apart – but the dry stone wall to the left of the pictures is the only constant feature.

Back to totally respectable



The clean-up begins ...and is completed

to the sound of persimmon striking balata.

Damaged greens were nurtured back, though salt seemed unlikely to evaporate over a few days and this did cause problems of patchiness and burn-out, with traces still visible on two or three greens when I visited the links in June. The putting surfaces however, somehow miraculously remained firm and true.

Soon earth movers and excavators were scurrying across the wrecked beach, some good perhaps coming from the disaster in focussing attention, sharper than any plea made in council chambers, that erosion was a problem that would not go away. Subsequent efforts reveal solid progress made in dune and foreshore battlement re-enforcement, together with new tees and surfaced walkways immediately adjacent to the shoreline.

Like many a good drama this one had its happy end-

ing, for on April 1st – just 84 back-breaking days after the tempest – a proud Jim Paton and a relieved Club committee presented a rebuilt West Kilbride, complete and looking fresh as a young bride, to the cream of Scotland's youth for the Scottish Boys' Matchplay Championship. It would be grand to report the day loomed bright and sparky but it was not to be. The heavens opened once again and it rained and rained and rained – so much so that the Isle of Arran disappeared!

Somehow it didn't seem to matter to the boys, all of whom declared the event a great success, though there were sore backs nursed by Jim's stalwarts who stormed the breeches yet again, this time manning squeegees in their successful efforts to keep greens water-free. There's something about the cannie Scots, don't you know. It's called PRIDE.

Who's who in BIGGA



HARRY DIAMOND

The epitome of a true Scot, Harry Diamond is a ruddy faced and exceedingly jovial character (I use the term unreservedly, for he is a character) who nevertheless has about him a serious side. Not for him the chasing of rainbows to the ends of the world, as so many of his countrymen are apt to do, for Harry has found his niche in greenkeeping in his home location of Ayr, where for the past 21 years he has worked for Kyle and Carrick D.C., currently

as head greenkeeper, Belleisle and Seafield GC.

His record speaks volumes for location longevity for in all his long career – he is 61 – he has maintained a record that is one for the books; beginning with 11 years at Glasgow Gailes followed by 13 years at Bogside, 11 of those as head greenkeeper. His proud claim is that this first promotion made him the youngest ever head greenkeeper in Scotland at that time.

The bug must have bitten early, for Harry worked on a course during school holidays, 'far better than compulsory potato picking' he recalled, before promptly moving into the business proper when schooling was over. Glasgow Gailes was his launching pad and he vividly remembers their kindness. As an example, during National Service in Malaya he saw a 'plane overhead dropping a wee parachute which missed the target and landed in a river. Scrambling in fully clothed, Harry discovered the pack contained a soggy 'fiver' – an unexpected Christmas bonus from Glasgow Gailes and a fond reminder of happier days back home. 'What do you do with a soggy 'fiver' in Malaya?', I asked, 'dry the bloody thing and take it home' he chortled, 'it was the most welcome bonus I've ever had'.

Like most people who hold office Harry is a busy man. He still plays golf to a handicap of four (he was scratch for 30 years) and seemingly thrives on a diet of committee work that includes chairmanship of the Scottish section, working closely with the Ayrshire section and contributing years of wisdom and understanding to the Liaison Committee of Ayr College. Like most elder statesmen in his profession, Harry applauds the strides being made in greenkeeper education and although he didn't exactly spell it out, I formed the impression he's just a mite sorry the generation gap precluded him from such educational opportunities.

For the future, again not surprisingly, his enthusiasm is tempered by realism in acknowledging that the Association's main goal must be to attract more members. How to achieve this is another matter but his views are firm and unyielding. 'Greenkeeper International plays a vital part – indeed, the vital part – and its credibility is our strong and lasting link', he said. 'We owe it to members and prospective members to continue demonstrating our effectiveness and to show the world our position as the heartbeat and conscience of the profession'.

As a serving member of the magazine sub-committee Harry speaks from a platform of authority and it was on this subject that I felt I touched a raw nerve. 'I've only a year to run before retiring from the board and committee and, of course, have no way of knowing who will take my place, or indeed other places on the committee. As an Association we have much the same board and committee structure as that of most golf Clubs and I feel we are in danger of perpetuating the same mistakes. If we were to be really courageous we should follow the dictum of "The Way Forward" and

Prompted by an idea spawned in committee and properly brought into youthful bloom at The Open Championship, where an air of relaxed informality creates just the right atmosphere for taped interviews, your editor talked with members of the executive and regional administration, set on taking them from what may perhaps be seen as local parochialism into the national eye of the Association. I began by talking and listening to Harry Diamond and Barry Heaney

establish a more lasting structure with longevity as the key.' I asked if he preferred the statement to be "off record" but learned that his view was a passionate one, indeed one that he expressed most vehemently. 'It's what I believe' he insisted, 'and I'm sure that my views are echoed by others on the board'.

Perhaps my lasting impression is that Harry will make his remaining term a meaningful one, for as they say in politics 'even a week is a long time'.

BARRY HEANEY

If Harry Diamond is the elder statesman, the ever youthful Barry Heaney appears as the young pretender. I'd known Barry as a fine golfer but realised little of the big contribution he has made, and continues to make, as a member of the Board of Management. His appearance belies his age and one might be forgiven for disbelieving that he is 55 years old.

Barry began by giving the Greenkeeper International team a little pat on the back for achievements attained in our brief reign, echoing previously expressed views, but I was not to be easily led down this path, wanting to learn more about Heaney the man. Is he going to be reluctant to 'spill the beans' was one thought that crossed my mind.

Not so, for here is a man in love with his profession and he enthuses over it like a teenager over his first motor car. Like many fine greenkeepers, Barry has found his perfect patch, Wortley Golf Club, where he has happily worked as head greenkeeper for over 19 years. 'It's such a good place to work that I plan to remain until my retirement' he said, 'they are as understanding as any Club could be and are totally supportive. They are like good friends'.

Quite apart from thoroughly enjoying his chosen career, Barry has enjoyed a long lasting love affair with the game of golf itself and is its most enthusiastic exponent. 'I first took to the game about 30 years ago', he grinned, 'though as any good Yorkshireman should, I was 'blooded' into cricket first and enjoyed a few good seasons before taking up the sticks'. He is, dammit, one of those for whom the game came naturally and though never once having a lesson, played to single figures within 12 months and has maintained his strength of purpose by remaining thus, playing now to a handicap of eight.

To get to his proud position of head greenkeeper – and to maintain it – Barry worked hard at educating himself in the intricacies of his craft, though his tuition was of the night school variety and he opined that the opportunities of today were just not available to him as a youngster. It was largely down to IOG courses, which were the best, indeed probably the only courses available in his time and his appetite for learning was voracious. 'If I could wave the magic wand', he said, 'I'd make college education compulsory for new incumbents to our profession, further I'll ram home the thought that burns within me: greenkeepers, get involved in everything the Association does and you'll get the best out!'

Magic wand waving just once more, Barry wished that rank and file golfers would understand that greenkeepers don't slit, hollow tine or top dress greens for amusement, but for their lasting benefit. 'How nice it would be' he concluded, 'if they appreciated the situation, rather than heaping scorn on our efforts'. And so say all of us.



Vital survey relies on YOUR help

Within the next few weeks BIGGA greenkeepers throughout the country will receive a comprehensive Golf Course Management Survey through the mail, which they are earnestly requested to complete and return without delay.

There can be few who have not been confronted by survey forms of some sort or another before and will perhaps question why this one is so different, why it is so very important and why it should be acted upon?

First, the information sought is such that every answer will be absolutely confidential. No names or addresses will be requested and data gathered will be used only in producing trends, regional averages and – perhaps most important of all – highlighting differentials.

Next, you may ask, what's in it for me? The answer – simply – is that it will assist **you** in managing your course with every possible means at your disposal by way of information. This information will enable you to fight your corner with totally accurate facts rather than hearsay or fantasy. In using current jingoism, BIGGA endorses the statement: if you can't accurately measure it, you can't accurately manage it!

Each greenkeeper completing the survey will receive a free synopsis of the report, believed so valuable to greenkeepers that a similar survey and report conducted in the USA some little time ago positively revolutionised the industry in that country.

Golf is undergoing unprecedented changes, together with a much more enlightened approach to total management of the most important facility – the course itself. BIGGA urges you to spend a little time in completing the survey – a vitally important tool of good management – the urgency generated by the knowledge that the end result will be of lasting benefit to the greenkeeper and his chosen profession.

Be a professional – stand up and be recognised.

Gearing up for Iseki, Ransomes and Kubota tournaments

There is an air of excitement around the greenkeeping fraternity that is positively boiling. Already we've experienced some of the most electrifyingly close battles in greenkeeper golf at Royal St David's, venue for the ICI Professional Products sponsored BIGGA National Tournament, where a single stroke separated players in the gross competition and handicap players demonstrated skills often beyond their wildest dreams. Clearly the ICI Professional Products Tournament was a great success.

Fine tuning of skills continues unabated for the forthcoming Iseki Championship finals to be held at Hillside on September 12th and whilst none could have failed to be impressed by the strength of play of those who have battled through the many rounds in order to reach the pinnacle, the question remains on everyone's lips – who will be the Iseki Champion for 1991. Greenkeeper International will be at Hillside to catch the players in action and a full report and pictures will appear in our next issue.

But that's not all, for just two weeks later the venue changes again, moving to the delightful Fulford course on October 2nd for the Ransomes Interna-

tional Greenkeepers and Superintendents Tournament. This will be the seventh such tournament, with a select and hugely talented field culled from the best of greenkeeper golfing skills around the world, each bent on proving national superiority in a team competition that has no peer. Competitors will also enjoy a BIGGA Seminar at Aldwark Manor on October 1st, given by an international panel of speakers and entitled "Environmental Considerations in Golf Course Management". All this, together with a spirited two day entertainment programme, suggests a promise of something quite extraordinary.

Finally the scene changes yet again, with successful British greenkeepers, who earned their laurels by finishing high in their class at Royal St David's, competing in the Kubota Team challenge at the Belfry on October 17th. BIGGA's team have a successful record in this event and will be keen to wrest the Trophy from last year's winners, the Club Secretaries, who took the BIGGA held trophy from the Stewards in a cliff-hanging final.

To them all, good fortune with never a three putt. May they return laden with trophies, honour and glory...

**HEAD
OFFICE**
NOTICES

**MORTGAGE
FUNDS AVAILABLE
TO BIGGA MEMBERS AT
9.95%**

THE BIGGA PERSONAL PENSION PLAN

- ♦ A tax-free lump sum and full pension from the age of 50
- ♦ A full tax relief on all contributions made
- ♦ A tax-free investment growth within Standard Life's unitised with-profits Pension fund
- ♦ BIGGA Pension Plans are available to all greenkeepers, whether in a golf club scheme or not
- ♦ BIGGA Pension Plans are also available to all Golf Clubs who wish to establish Pension arrangements for greenkeeping staff.

THE BIGGA MORTGAGE SERVICE

This recently established service for BIGGA members has been of great service to greenkeepers throughout the UK. Greenkeepers do not always have the time to select the best mortgage possibilities available, and so to have someone searching for the right deal is really useful.

♦ Best mortgage deals sought out ♦ Either fixed or variable rates available ♦ Either endowment or pension-plan linked mortgages available.

The BIGGA mortgage service is available to all greenkeepers, whether purchasing a property or seeking re-mortgage facilities.

NOW is the time to find out more. Please complete the form below and post to:

Executive Director, BIGGA, Aldwark Manor, Aldwark, Alne, York YO6 2NF

1. I will soon be/am in the process of buying a house. Please send me details of the new BIGGA Mortgage Service
2. I already pay for a mortgage on my house, but I wish to know if any better mortgage arrangements are available to me
3. I am/am not in a Golf Club Pension Scheme. Please send me details of the new 1991 BIGGA Pension Plan

Tick box

☐
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Name.....Date of Birth.....

Golf Club and Job Title.....

Home Address.....

.....Post Code.....

Tel No. (Work).....(Home).....

GI.9.91



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To Neil Thomas:

■ Thanks very much indeed to you and members of the Association for their very valuable service provided at Royal Birkdale during The Open Championship.

Certainly the bunker raking between matches has now become an accepted part of The Championship and makes things much easier for the players and their caddies. This is so important to those in a following match, who find that bunkers have been left in a fair and consistent condition.

We look forward to having you all with us again next year.

MICHAEL F BONALLACK

Secretary, Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews

■ Thanks to all those who gave valuable help at The Open, particularly with divoting and bunker maintenance.

All BIGGA greenkeepers were very smartly turned out and a true credit to the Association. I am most grateful and again my sincere thanks.

TOM O'BRIEN Head Greenkeeper, Royal Birkdale Golf Club

■ I was most concerned to read in your interview feature (July, pp. 23-25) with Bruce Jamieson, that turf sterilisation using methyl bromide is suggested as a greenkeepers technique to kill *Poa annua* in greens. Gassing greens with methyl bromide by greenkeepers is illegal in the United Kingdom and is also a highly hazardous process.

Special equipment is needed for its application and the chemical may only be used by professional operators trained in its use and familiar with the precautionary measures that must be observed. Methyl bromide is subject to the Poisons Act 1972 and Poisonous Rules 1982.

I consider your article to be lacking by the omission of this important information and request you publish this letter in order that greenkeepers may be aware of the hazard presented by gassing with methyl bromide.

NEIL BALDWIN Plant Pathologist, Sports Turf Research Institute
The point is well taken, though it should be noted that the article offered the viewpoint of one respected individual and was not intended to be definitive instruction on methyl bromide gassing. Taken further, my understanding is that such operations have only ever been undertaken (by expert operators) in the British Isles on new green constructions prior to seeding, with results that were most encouraging. Its application remains untried on any established British green. Since Clubs are, understandably, reluctant to act as guinea pigs, especially as gassing is viewed by some expert critics as impractical for our climate, perhaps there is a case for official field trials to be held in Britain - Editor.

■ The R&A Championship Committee have failed miserably in one of their main briefs, namely as the body 'responsible for organising and running the Championships'. I refer to the poor state of a number of greens at Royal Birkdale during The Open Championship.

The main complaints from players were: inconsistent green speeds and differences of colour on individual greens, making them difficult to read.

The question must be asked: has the Championship Committee ignored the advice set out in the R&A's document 'The Way Forward', compiled by leading greenkeepers, agronomists and others concerned with the condition of our championship courses or, as seems more likely, have they succumbed to pressure from the PGA and media? The latter seem heavily influenced by American values including colour and lightning-fast greens.

If the pro. golfer requires putting surfaces that have constant stimpmeter readings, without regard for the location or climate he is in, then surely he requires synthetic turf to play upon.

If we are to take the advice of Payne Stewart and 'tear the greens up and replace with bent grass', the outcome would be greens suitable for play over just four months each year. The remaining eight would be taken up with overseeding, causing constant disruption to the putting surface, and die-back as a result of winter play on dormant grass. I find it incomprehensible that someone earning vast sums on the putting surface knows so little about the surface on which he works.

As the oldest golf championship, The Open has always been played on traditional links where bent and particularly fescue are commonplace. This will remain as long as our putting surfaces are not shaved to meet the demands of a stimpmeter, cam-

■ Hero at the Nationals... yes, a golfing greenkeeper made hero status at Royal St Davids, though not especially for his golf.

Two young children were stuck on a sandbank, unaware that an incoming tide was rushing in, the water around them dangerously out of their depth. When their calls for help were heard, our hero played it cool, (twirling round three times in a 'phone booth) peeled off his shirt before calling for the assistance of another to take one child, then swam semi-clothed to rescue the other. Safely to shore, the children were returned to their much relieved mother.

Who was this hero? No, not Superman swathed in a red and blue cape but denim clad Ian Holoran of the Cleveland section.

Well done Ian, we are proud of you!

**ROGER AND VALERIE GLAZIER
Cuddington GC.
Surrey**

era lens or golfer who cannot change his game to prevailing conditions.

I hope this will not be regarded as pompous, rather a viewpoint from the practical stance of a greenkeeper who understands the burden places on our courses and upon those who maintain them once the cameras and professionals have had their fill.

BERNARD FINLAY Course Manager, Portstewart GC.

This letter also appeared in The Daily Telegraph under the heading 'pampered pros must adapt'.

■ As the August issue had nothing to say about Birkdale, I feel some statement is necessary about the sorry state of Birkdale's greens for The Open. Surely it is in the interest of every greenkeeper in the country to know exactly what went wrong.

I am prompted to ask this after reading (Tom O'Brien profile July) that the aim was to have firm, fast greens for The Open. To my mind they certainly were not firm!

JAMES PEACE Head Greenkeeper, Newburgh on Ythan GC.

Scotland

Mr Peace implies that Greenkeeper International has failed by keeping quiet. Not so, as he will see in this issue. This magazine, like most monthlies, is prepared and laid for press at least two weeks before publication. The Open finished on the 21st July, one full week after editorial deadline. It speaks wonders for our production team that two colour pages were set aside in order to include my late photo montage of BIGGA's activities at Royal Birkdale, this being achieved without delay to publication day. The luxury of overnight reporting is something that must be left to the national dailies - Editor.

■ I heartily agree with your astute comments (July editorial) but feel one point of contention was overlooked. The so-called consultant was saying that he would like to see more university graduates overseeing young greenkeepers. Not so, say I, for after finishing college and passing exams these younger greenkeepers need the guidance of older and more experienced greenkeepers, men capable and willing of passing on their wide knowledge of local soil conditions and weather patterns.

As an example, the spring of '91 caught out many greenkeepers with little prior knowledge of the effects of cold, dry conditions on the growing cycle. I myself run a small upland 9 hole course single-handed and by using my knowledge of such spring conditions, often experienced in this corner of the country, managed to keep my greens in excellent condition whilst others were suffering with bare greens.

On a different subject, I think the industry is losing sight of golfers' real needs and that maybe they don't want to play on huge, fancy complexes. My own experience suggests that the ordinary golfer is happiest on a simple parkland course where he can tee off on grass, play two shots to the green and putt out on a good putting surface, all at a reasonable green fee.

E GRAINGER Melrose, Roxburghshire, Scotland

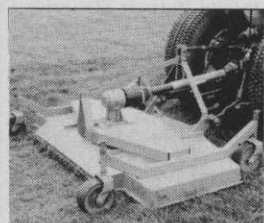
The exchange of information and knowledge is one that BIGGA positively encourages. Perhaps the greatest stumbling block is a reluctance on the part of many greenkeepers to admit to a colleague that they have a problem and could use some guidance. On so-called championship courses, you touch a raw nerve. Having teed up on some architectural nightmares built only for Supermen, especially those in America, I have no desire to return and lose another cluster of golf balls - and my self-esteem - Editor.

FOOTNOTE: The receipt of so many letters of congratulation for the National Tournament is hugely satisfying and I join with those involved, especially at Royal St David's, ICI and Head Office, in acknowledging the writers concerned. Space limitations prevent the publication of such letters, encouraging and flattering though they are, and so with heartfelt appreciation for your generous comments, we thank you one and all.

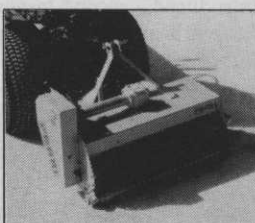
Letters



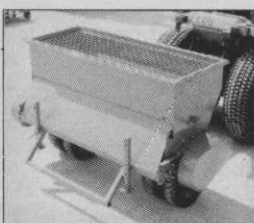
If you've got one of these...



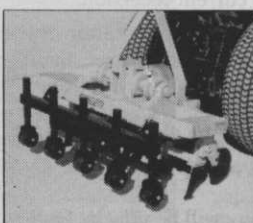
ROTARY MOWER



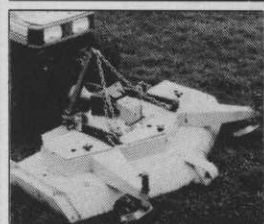
FLAIL MOWER



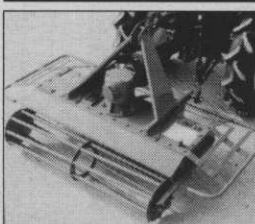
MULTISPREAD



VIBRAMASTER



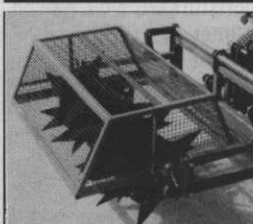
FRONT MOWER



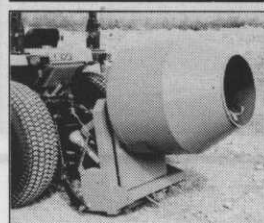
ROTARY HARROW



TRANSPORT BOX



POWER LEVEL



CEMENT MIXER



GRADER



BACKHOE



SWEEPER COLLECTOR



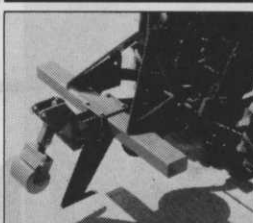
TIPPING TRAILER



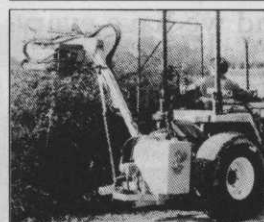
FRONT LOADER



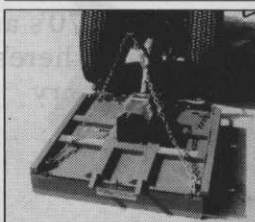
ROTARY CULTIVATOR



TURF DRAINER



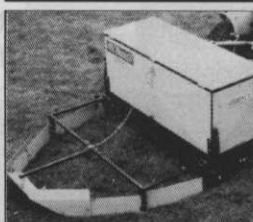
HEDGE TRIMMER



ROTARY CUTTER



POST HOLE BORER



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...you'll want some of these

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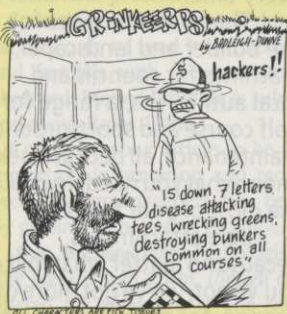
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TRACTORS · MOWERS · POWER EQUIPMENT · ATTACHMENTS

TRADE TOPICS

■ Subject to German anti-trust agency clearance, John Deere-Lanz Verwaltungs-AG, part of John Deere Group, intends to acquire the major shareholding in SABO, manufacturer of lawn mowers and other grounds care equipment, and – under the trade name Roberine – rotary and reel mowers for commercial use. Worldwide, John Deere has a workforce of 38,000 employees.



■ Dan Haas, Director of Sta-Brite Supplies Ltd, was 'tickled pink' at news just announced that Sta-Brite have been awarded Main Distributor status by Rhône-Poulenc Environmental Products.

This prestigious distributorship can be seen as recognition of Sta-Brite's prominence in the south as major suppliers of turf care products. Equally gratifying must be the news that sales are growing 33% each year, despite the so-called current recession.

■ Garfitts are back... and after over 200 years of manufacturing scythes and mower blades of all kinds, this is good news indeed. The new owners, Gerald and Trevor Brooks of Turf Machinery Ltd, have purchased the business assets and will continue producing quality cylinders, blades, parts and grinders from Cross Scythes Works in Sheffield.

The company will be now be known as Garfitts International.

■ Aitken's Sportsturf Ltd have moved, their new depot in Sherburn-in-Elmet, North Yorkshire giving them a fine edge by being close to most motorway networks. As main distributors for many major manufacturers, the new base will help them to increase market penetration, whilst continuing the personal service for which sales specialists Norman Sheddon, Peter Fell and Tony Kvedaris are famous. Telephone: 0977 681155.

■ After trading for 21 years as Sachs Dolmar (UK) Ltd, Britain's largest independent supplier of outdoor power equipment will change its name to Outdoor Power Products Ltd. The new name more accurately describes the company's widening product range, which includes chain-

saws, shredders, rotary mowers, brushcutters and those clever Robin Dagger soil ameliorators.

■ I admit to being sold on the versatility of skid steer loaders, more so since watching the Bobcat range perform so famously on new bunker building at Pennyhill Park G&CC last March.

It's good news then, especially for those in the golf course construction industry, that Bobcat-Melroe Europe have introduced a second larger model in their 50 series, the 853, with an operating capacity of 771kg. Details from Bobcat-Melroe on 0455 251725.



The newly-introduced Bobcat 853

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DIGGING FOR DIRT



A review of the Golf Landscaping and Construction Industry
and a plea for responsible reporting in the national press

by MARK PIERSON

The Golf Course Construction Industry, like many others, is cyclical. Last year, and to a certain extent this year as well, the steady increase in the number of new golf courses available to golfers was maintained, with the only noticeable difference in '91 being that as banks and financiers began to draw in their horns, several highly publicised and ill-conceived projects ground to a halt.

These bank inspired closures gave the national press something of a field day in highlighting the often more imaginary than real problems and gave great joy to so-called 'environmental guardians', who took delight in shouting *golf is bad for you*. Not only are golf courses a bad financial risk, they howled, but just look at the effect on the environment!

Curious then, it seems to me, that the most desirable houses in the country are often found in our beautiful English countryside nestling close to or on a golf course, itself a haven and often last preserve of certain rare or endangered species or flora and fauna.

Bankers must live somewhere and they are often the lucky ones enjoying such residential delights, sad then that their actions and those of the misleading environmental issues should have muddled the otherwise clear water.

Pressures on the environment cannot be overlooked by any thinking and responsible body and thus it is ➔ 30

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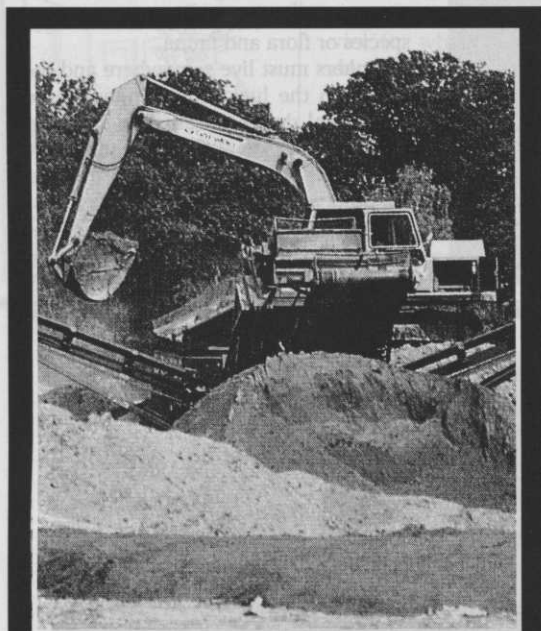
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Beautiful endings from machinery-scarred beginnings. Are such developments really the work of 'the devil incarnate'?



'Our industry is environmentally friendly and we continue to be the envy of many other industries'

how practical – or indeed how necessary – their proposals and demands really are? We know for certain that local planning authorities *will* listen to sensible proposals outlined by organisations wishing to protect our countryside and heritage, but how will they know which organisation is right?

I concede that the lobbyists have a point about Trojan Horse developments. They are not what our industry is about and are best left to property speculators, who should properly be divorced from the golf course industry. However, given the 1,400 or so *granted* applications for new golf courses, how will local authorities judge and compare those applying with the right sort of land in the right place to those already granted in the wrong place?

As an example, I know of one county where 12 new courses have been approved and that – thank you very much – is quite enough! Does this strange sort of logic now preclude

29 ➔ galling to those in our industry, who spend their working lives enhancing the landscape, to hear that within the space of a single year our work is now that of the devil incarnate. Certainly we know we must respect the countryside, but the issue of *carte blanche* directives and inaccurate statements does no good to anybody, save that of giving one environmental pressure group a chance to score brownie points over its rivals.

How many of the pessimists and killjoys, I ask myself, have ever made contact with the BAGCA, BAGCC, BIGGA or governing bodies of the game to establish just

the one good site that is sensibly drawn up, located in a prime position (where golfers can travel easily) and on the right land? Do not think I am advocating an opening of the flood-gates, but to illustrate my thinking I know of one site where a partially-built course is described by locals as being smack in the middle of a bog! It seems unlikely ever to be completed, but should it be, the players will need to emulate Jacques Cousteau.

My point is this: the bog is registered as a golf course and forms one of the total for which permission has been granted. Its presence gives a distorted view.

Balance in newspaper narration is very important but since the recent rash of 'let's bash golf' reports in the tabloids, I haven't seen a single report of the good side and wonder where the reporters are hiding. My feelings run high on such irresponsible journalism and I know that some local authorities are having their judgement clouded by misinformation.

Our industry has the right information to hand and longs to give out the good news – the many successes – but no-one wants to listen.

Here, for those tabloid reporters who may chance upon these words in Greenkeeper International, are the good tidings.

The standard of new courses is improving every year, we are meeting the demands of new players and golf is still relatively inexpensive at the pay and play end and seemingly attractive at the private and very exclusive end. Massive attention is being paid to environmental and archeological issues, a good example being the introduction of barn owls to a new course in the Midlands. Our industry is environmentally friendly and we continue to be the envy of many other industries, with a growth potential that is quite staggering.

We believe golf occupies a very special place in our national way of life and that development tempered with good husbandry and caring attitudes has a very long way to go before ever reaching saturation. We hope the irresponsible pundits may begin to understand and will soon change their tune to one that heralds *golf is good for you*.

● Mark Pierson, is New Developments Manager at Brian D Pierson (Contractors) Limited.