

# Equipped for success

On December 17/18th last, an inaugural meeting took place at Aldwark Manor between the officers of BIGGA: Neil Thomas, David Golding and Debbie Savage, and representatives of the various regions and sections-ecretaries, administrators and committee members. The purpose was to give an opportunity for those present to familiarise themselves with headquarters; staff; and facilities available, and for the officers to outline BIGGA's current progress and future plans.

Most sections were represented and there were quite a few new faces (seven of the twenty-five section secretaries this year being newly elected). Amongst the newcomers, I'm sure all were pleased to see Jane Ryan, our first lady secretary, from the Sheffield section.

On first impression, many were overwhelmed by Aldwark Manor's baronial splendour: lofty oak-beamed ceilings, grandfather clocks and the like. For a lucky few, rooms even had four-poster beds (no preferential treatment, but Jane had one, of course). Neatly tucked around the corner from the hotel, the BIGGA offices were a hive of activity. Samantha Flint seemed permanently occupied just answering the 'phone, with a visitor's chances of catching anyone else's attention dependent upon speaking quickly as they rushed past. The offices themselves are light, airy and packed with technology, but hardly large enough to accommodate dedicated cat-swingers! Neil Thomas later explained that another section of the building was available and that the Association hoped to make use of it in the near future.

For the body of the meeting itself, the party divided into three groups, each spending a couple of hours with the officers in turn. Discussions ranged over BIGGA's whole current sphere of operation, with the most recent activities being highlighted: the launch of the Education and Development Fund, the reduction of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate registration fee, and the preparation of a greenkeeper 'training' video. The latter is

intended to show the role of the greenkeeper within the game of golf. It is hoped to make the completed tape available to individual Clubs, schools and colleges, promoting recruitment and on-going education. If a general conclusion can be drawn from these sessions, the Association has come a long way very quickly – from very little to more than 4,000 members and with our own magazine and exhibition. However, future major developments such as a site for our own practical and technical training – although already much discussed – currently await funding beyond our present resources.

On the social side, a splendid Christmas dinner was launched by 'Santa' doing Lance Percival impressions and dishing-out Iseki stationery. Many members may recognise the 'face behind the beard' from this brief description – and those who can't probably don't want to! A welcome guest was our chairman, George Malcolm, who spoke after the meal and thanked all involved with running BIGGA. We were also, thanks to Jane, privy to George's views on whisky and women (no preference expressed!). The evening concluded with an impromptu pool competition for small stakes, in which the Leicestershire greenkeepers demonstrated their tenacity wherever money is involved. Well done Roger Willars! (the writer was a disappointed second).

Before leaving Aldwark Manor, an hour was set aside for an 'open forum'. The officers of the Association were keen to hear any views passed on by members (for example difficulties in obtaining BIGGA garments), from which good will hopefully result. It was the general feeling that the meeting was worthwhile, not only for the exchange of information between HQ and sections, but also for the informal discussions between representatives on how different sections are run. Why not, indeed, make this an annual event?

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David White meets Neil Whitaker, down amongst the sheltering pines of Woburn, and learns how once Poa-dominated greens were transformed into tournament standards of excellence



# Woburn's troubleshooter

The world of golf course architecture was robbed of one of its finest when the Scot, Charles Lawrie, died in 1976 at the untimely age of 53. Whilst it is not uncommon for new architects to produce quite routine designs for at least their first couple of tries, Lawrie, who had come to architecture late in years after a 'glittering-prize' lifestyle that included Fettes, Oxford, the Coldstream Guards and amateur golf of a high order, produced two absolute 'corkers' straight from the gun: The championship Duke's and the quite exquisite Duchess, both at Woburn.

One can imagine the thrill that Lawrie and his partner Frank Penninck must have experienced when they first drove through the pine firs that dwarf the narrow lane leading to the Woburn Club, for here undoubtedly was a tract of land that cried out – "build a golf course here". Ten years or so later, Neil Whitaker must have experienced similar tingles of excitement when called upon to mastermind a task that was to thrust him into the high profile maelstrom of championship golf at international level.

Neil's first exposure was anything but peaceful, however, for he was brought in by Woburn's MD Alex Hay specifically to coax the Duke's course back from the brink of a precipice, just seven weeks before the first 'major' – the early season Dunhill Masters – and at a time when the greens were bare, *Poa annua* dominated and decidedly un-tournament like.

Neil's reputation as a trouble-shooter stood him in good stead, he waved his own peculiar spell-binding magic over the Duke's and the rest, as they say, is history. But his was no seven week wonder, for history has a way of repeating itself and each season thereafter has seen Neil's team deliver the goods with skill and aplomb whilst earning unsolicited praise (the only kind worth having) from touring professionals, Seve especially! Whilst it is true that many pro's don't

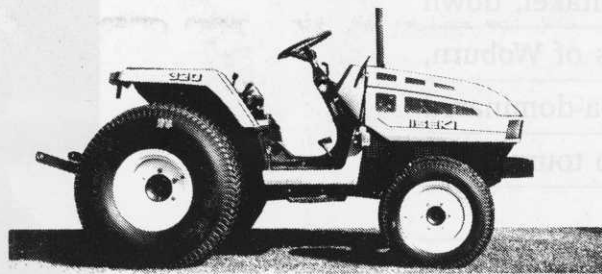
know their *Poa annua* from their *Agrostis*, apparently they do appreciate good working conditions.

In Neil's case his early season wand-waving continues year long and is witnessed by the thousands who flock to play this little corner of God's Kingdom. Having played with Neil when both courses were at their autumnal best, I was keen to learn more of his maintenance programme and primed him for this later quizzing, which took place in January.

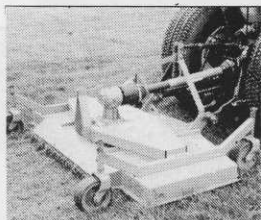
Vigilance is Neil's watchword, for with early tournaments uppermost in his mind (the Ford Ladies Classic lines up in late April!) there is no room for error. Natural vigorous growth is no early bird in Bedfordshire, and an ever watchful eye means that any signs of weakness and possible disease is leaped upon – always prevention rather than cure!

The courses have not been without major problems, notably intensive green compaction that became so acute that rebuilding of several greens was called for, this after trying a number of ways in an attempt to break up the pudding-like sand/silt soil, taken from nearby Birchwood Farm, and laid over an unwashed limestone carpet layer which had literally become solidified. The carpets themselves resisted all attempts to re-open proper drainage, including the unconventional use of road drills!

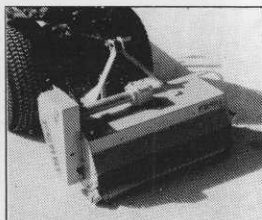
Rebuilding the greens solved those earlier drainage problems, though a new difficulty now presents itself, that of coping with a jet black root zone mix which has a fondness for congealing and massing and demands Vertidrainning every 6-8 weeks in winter to keep it open and friable. Regular core extraction has also been necessary, the 1" core holes being filled with a 90% sand mix to help bring about a partial soil exchange. With continual top dressing, this has produced a surface which Neil describes as a 'pretty decent' top,



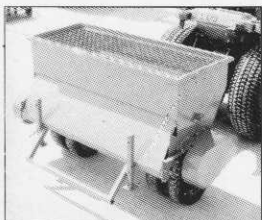
**If you've got one of these...**



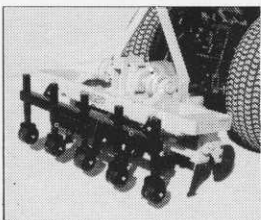
**ROTARY MOWER**



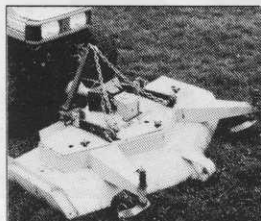
**FLAIL MOWER**



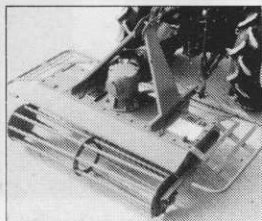
**MULTISPREAD**



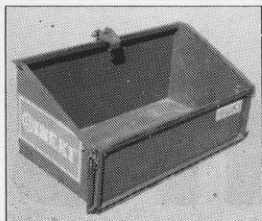
**VIBRAMASTER**



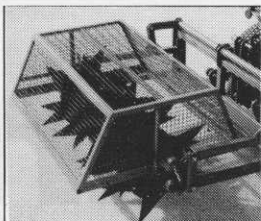
**FRONT MOWER**



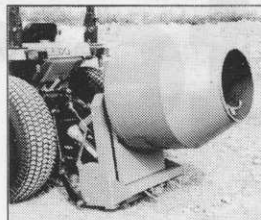
**ROTARY HARROW**



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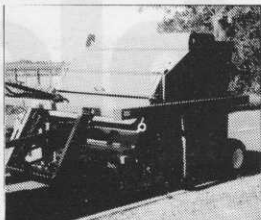
**CEMENT MIXER**



**GRADER**



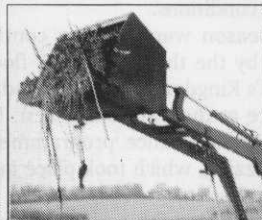
**BACKHOE**



**SWEEPER COLLECTOR**



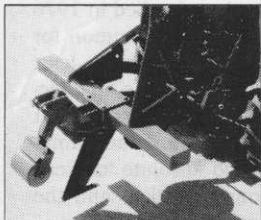
**TIPPING TRAILER**



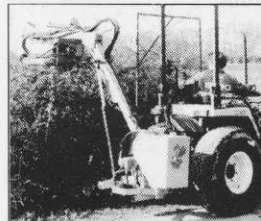
**FRONT LOADER**



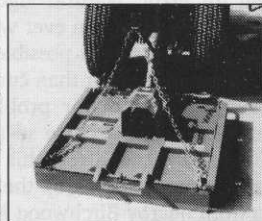
**ROTARY CULTIVATOR**



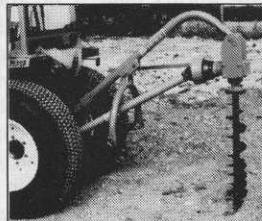
**TURF DRAINER**



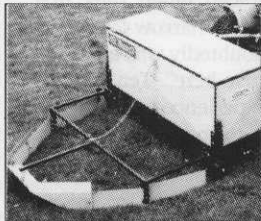
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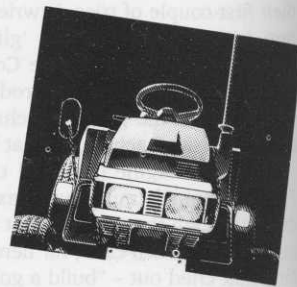
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Neil Whitaker and Alex Hay, Woburn's MD, inspect a new mesh element tee

**'Greens are overseeded with bents every September and Neil would dearly love to repeat this in April, though tournament demands prevent this happening'**

though the underneath remains 'claggy' and demands constant vigilance. A policy of slit-tining every two weeks throughout the winter is followed, bringing worthwhile results.

Bearing in mind that both courses are used for tournaments, we touched on green speed and resultant turf quality. Interestingly on the Duke's, where rapid surfaces are paramount for the Dunhill Masters (a minimum of 9-10 feet on the stimpmeter) and greens are tournament cut at 1/8", there is a greater predominance of *Poa annua*, perhaps as much as 70%, whilst on the Duchess, where cut is restricted to 3/16th, this is reversed, producing sward that is 70% bent/fescue. Neil follows an otherwise identical management programme on both courses, one that includes verticutting and grooming, the implication being that the shorter and twice daily hand mown tournament cut on the Duke's encourages *Poa* domination. Greens are overseeded with bents every September and Neil would dearly love to repeat this in April, though tournament demands obviously prevent this happening. In the speed league he's looked seriously at turf rollers; has had a working demo of the Australian model and is impressed by its results. For 1992 he hopes to use the PGA owned unit from Quietwaters; and who knows, if it works as he thinks it will... maybe he'll get one in 1993?

In 1990 the fairways were wiped-out by drought and subsequently over-seeded with a mix containing 34% mixed Chewings fescue, 45% Creeping red fescue, 10% bents and 10% smooth stalked meadow grass. These fairways receive almost as much attention as the precious greens; and indeed the fairways, tees and greens are all verticut and Vertidrain, cut with fine mowers and receive an application of wetting agent in March. This has definitely paid off, with results showing an encouragingly high percentage of finer grasses in the fairways. The application of wetting agents on fairways may on the face of it appear extravagant, but Neil reckons that subsequent water saving (all Woburn water is metered and the courses have a complete irrigation system) easily justifies this move.

Typically, each January begins with Vertidrain of tees, greens and fairways, repeated again in March (when the irrigation system is re-activated) and followed by wetting agents and the application of a suitable granular slow-release fertiliser. A weekly 'topping only' cut is carried out on greens throughout the dormancy period. Soil tests are evaluated annually to establish any particular weaknesses, the readings indicating that Woburn is low, indeed nearly off the scale, in phosphates and lacking in Potash and Nitrogen. In early April and, temperatures permitting, weekly thereafter, verticutting, grooming and light dressing (70%

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## Woburn's play policy during frost is a sound one, demanding the immediate use of properly prepared 100-200 square metre frost greens'

sand/30% loam) is the norm. Given that appearance is important, especially for TV, a spray dressing with a seaweed agent containing Iron is applied before the earliest tournament to give a 'fix' and bring about a greening effect.

Woburn's play policy during frost is a sound one, demanding the immediate use of properly prepared 100-200 square metre frost greens, all created away from the main greens and approaches, either to the left or right. Tee areas are large enough to enable constant tee block re-positioning and the spring programme is aimed at keeping them well drained and open. The dreaded 'black pudding' is found on tees as well as greens, though on the few tees that have been converted with the mesh element created by Netlon, not only is this eliminated, but vastly improved deep rooting is evident. Woburn was the first to try the system and obviously must like it, for they are currently installing six further mesh element tees and will eventually complete every championship tee in like style. Trees abound, predominantly Scotch pine and birch, and whilst they are beautiful; a lot of trees means a lot of work when they shed needles, leaves and cones. For the Ford Ladies Classic this creates extra work raking up tons of the wretched things, the ladies insisting on a fair carpet if they stray from the straight and narrow!

How is all this achieved? By year round dedication from a crew of just twelve greenkeepers plus Neil himself, a fully occupied machinery engineer, Martin Davies; and more recently a full time irrigation engineer, Lee Murdoch. 'Team work is all', says Neil, 'and I am unbelievably proud of every one of them'. Proud he may be, but when one digs below this course manager's apparent modesty another and even deeper burning passion is discovered. It is for the Duke and Duchess as well!

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## COMING UP

**February 10th-17th:** GCSAA Exhibition and Convention – New Orleans, USA.

**February 11th:** STRI Welsh Seminar – 'The Environmental Impact of Golf Course Construction and Management' – Caer Beris Manor, Bulth Wells.

**March 11th:** British Institute of Golf Course Architects Seminar, 'The Positive Face of Golf Development', Institute of Engineers, London.

**March 24th-26th:** RECMAN (Sports Council) Conference and Exhibition – National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.

**March 26th-29th:** Golf Asia '92 – World Trade Centre, Singapore.

**March 27th-29th:** BIGGA National Education Conference – Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester.

**April 8th:** BIGGA Annual General Meeting, Royal York Hotel, York. Commencing 2.30pm.

**April 23rd-26th:** The World of Golf, Olympia, London.

**April 29th:** BIGGA South West and Wales Region Trade Show WESTURF '92 – Long Ashton GC, Bristol.

**June 3rd-4th:** Landscape Industries '92. Trade Show – National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire.

**July 16th-19th:** The Open Championship – Muirfield, Scotland.

**August 10th-12th:** BIGGA National Golf Tournament – Littlestone GC, Kent.

# AROUND THE GREEN

## Keeping in touch with news and comment from the regions

● Will section reporters please note that final copy date for inclusion of *Around The Green* material in the April issue is March 1st.

### KENT

December 12th saw our annual Turkey Trot played at Ashford GC, and despite this taking place in the middle of a very cold spell – frozen ground et al – we were very lucky to find a pleasant, clear day. The course was in excellent shape, especially the fairways, and our thanks again go to Willie McConville and his staff. Once again the catering staff did us proud with a superb Christmas dinner and we are thankful that Ashford GC, undoubtedly fine hosts, are prepared to have us visit them on a regular basis.

First pick of the prizes went to Peter Gee with 41 points, followed by David Wood with 39 and Peter Biscoe with 38. It was nice to see some new faces participating and I hope we will see them again in other events later in the year. The trade prize was won by one of these 'new boys' – Chris Dale of Haynes – with 44 points. I can assure Chris it will be the last time he plays off a 24 handicap! Thanks also to the many trade members who supported us and provided raffle prizes, especially Mike Lincoln-Smith who brought the Ransomes Goblet, also won by Peter Gee.

Some members may have noticed that we held a 'vegetarian' Turkey Trot this time – no turkey

appearing on the prize table. I understand one was sent, but it was unable to read directions, its main problem apparently stemmed from disorientation after crossing the new Dartford Bridge and in receiving little help when asking the way. Running round the toll-booths emitting gobble, gobble noises only seemed to annoy people and when it eventually found the M20 and got through the road works, it finally got lost in the fog!

Following our dinner and prizegiving we held our AGM, which must have been the fastest in BIGGA history, for those assembled (representing only about one third of our membership) had very little to query. The committee remains the same as last year, seemingly no volunteers coming forward for election. However, this year the role of secretary and 'main man' has been filled by David Wood of Holtye. As some of you already know, John Millen has taken on greater responsibilities with the Joint Golf Course Committee, his Board of Management work and his new Weald of Kent course (which will open in the spring) and this will consume much of his time. Our thanks to him for his skill and devotion in handling the majority of our section affairs over several years. During the meeting, David Wood gave a brief summary of our activities in 1991 and reminded us of the events planned for 1992. If you need to contact him, his number (evenings) is 0342 850875.



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# AROUND THE GREEN

It further transpired that I failed in off-loading my job of Around The Green scribe, so you will have to put up with my ramblings and rantings for another year – you lucky people! Please always remember that Around The Green is YOUR section of the magazine and I will be pleased to include any snippets of gossip you may feel the urge to pass to me. My number is 0634 682908. With snippets in mind, may I welcome Neal Carter back to Kent, this time as head green-keeper at the new Birchwood Park development near Swanley. The Welsh wizard returned from his Italian post full of pasta and with pockets bulging with lire (and boots full of Farmura), and though he lasted longer in Italy than Jimmy Greaves, it seems his main dislike of that country – and therefore his inspiration to return to Kent – was probably the inability of his Italian staff to grasp his rules for indoor cricket!

PAUL COPSEY

## SOUTH WALES

December 11th saw our annual Christmas Competition held at Pyle and Kenfig for the Vitax Shield, the day being well attended with 33 people playing and the competition going well, especially when one considered the hard ground conditions which made judging putts difficult. The weather got the better of a few golfers, some playing only nine holes, but all in all I think the rest enjoyed the day. The winner of the Vitax Shield was Idwal Morris with a very respectable score of 35 points, this enabling Idwal to win a cut glass decanter set, donated by Allan Stow of Vitax, and a statuette. Andrew Jenkins, a new recruit for 1992, scored 36 points and was awarded a consolation prize, with the field following thus: 2nd D Donne, 3rd M Stokes, 4th L Hallett, 5th N Owens, 6th D Jones, 7th P Lacey, 8th P Long, 9th B Price, 10th B Kitcher, 11th M Jones-Inco, 12th R Lucas, 14th M Norfolk, 15th P Swain, 16th J B-Jones, 17th A Bull, 18th T King, 19th M Jones-Llanishen, 20th A Millar. Each of the above won a bottle, varying from whisky and wine to lager; and our thanks to some of our members, along with the following traders, for presenting prizes: Proturf, Sisis, Western Log Company, Tacit, Birds of Cowbridge, Colin Murphy, Rigby Taylor and Avoncrop Thanks must also go to the captain and committee for allowing us courtesy of the course and clubhouse facilities.

We held our AGM in the clubhouse with a total of 42 members in attendance and a number of items successfully discussed. The following officers were elected:- Chairman: H Parry, Vice Chairman: M Jones-Inco, Section Administrator: P Swain. Golf & Social Committee:- H Morgan (chairman), R Kitcher, L Hallett and T King. Education:- D Archer (chairman), P Lacey, G Price and A Jenkins. Regional Board:- P Swain and H Morgan. H Parry is our representative on the Board of Management. Those elected were given a unanimous vote by all present.

Thanks must go to Paul Robinson and his green staff for the course preparation, to the steward and stewardess for looking after us throughout the day, and the cook for providing an excellent evening meal.

Congratulations to Mr and Mrs John Walsh and Mr and Mrs Brian Price, each on the addition of little one. They can also look forward to sleepless nights! Fixture cards will be sent to members in the new year and I hope to see many more of you attending our meetings in 1992.

PHILIP SWAIN

## DEVON AND CORNWALL

With the frost slowly clearing, twenty pairs tested their skills on December 11th against a well prepared Oakhampton course, a credit to Richard Wisdom and his staff. This event saw numbers limited to a maximum of 80, which hopefully made lunch more comfortable for those attending – and what a meal the girls served to us! It kept coming until we could eat no more and our thanks to them all – including those in the kitchen – for their superb food and service. Fol-

lowing lunch, Patrick Flegg of P J Flegg presented prizes to those who had battled for honours in playing a greensome Stableford. 1st: J Mitchell and R Parr 35 points, 2nd: G Child and T Gooch 34, 3rd: B Lewer and C Rawlings 33. Just missing the prizes and in 4th place were K Kellow and P Bullen with 32 points. Our thanks to Patrick for both donating and presenting the awards.

Following the prize presentations we all sat back to enjoy our afternoon cabaret by the 'Wag from Widecombe', Mr Tony Beard, who kept us all entertained with his West Country humour and ably demonstrating that his will be a hard act to follow – but we'll try! Tony's cabaret act completed we held two raffles, the first for the Avoncrop hamper, donated and presented by Rod Feltham to our lucky winner, Clive Ralph. The second raffle saw members choose from a table laden with over forty prizes! Our thanks to all who donated such fine prizes, also to Oakhampton GC for making us feel so very welcome and to Don Hunt for providing us with wine over lunch.

MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE: Westurf '92 is to be held at Long Ashton GC, Bristol, on Wednesday April 29th. Please support this show, in order that the region may support you.

RICHARD WHYMAN

## NORTHERN

I will start by wishing all our members a happy new year. In December we saw the winter golf competition and AGM held at a bitterly cold and frost-bound South Leeds GC. Just 14 members bothered to turn out and this looks like being the last winter competition unless considerably more interest is shown. However, the lads who did play enjoyed it and Telford (bandit) Jarvis won first prize, followed by Robin Smith and Chris Martin.

The AGM which followed was attended by 12 members, and for those who were not there, the following is a brief resume: The treasurer reported a reasonable financial position, but money had been hard to come by and a large loss was incurred at the annual dinner/dance. The secretary's report stressed again that members should support the section. On a more successful note, 38 new members had joined; Telford Jarvis had won the ISEKI final and the Northern Region won the team event. Additionally, the Northern Section retained the Patissons 'Battle of the Roses' trophy. Golf in 1991 had been arranged at Bradford, Northcliffe, Scarborough South Cliffe, and Kirbymoorside. The secretary then thanked the president, chairman and committee, also Norman Sheddon, Tony Dodson and the rest of the section's trade friends. The new committee was elected as follows: President-Bill Mountain, Chairman-Philip Taylor, Secretary/Treasurer-Bob Lupton, Committee – Alan Gamble, Ian Thomson, Dennis Cockburn, Telford Jarvis, Colin Garnett and Brian Carr.

Places are still available for the trip to Lloyds of Letchworth in March – please ring me for details.

You will shortly be receiving details of golf for 1992 – is your address correct? Please notify me if you move. Please also note that all entries require a £10 deposit for each tournament. You will not be placed on the entry sheet until a deposit reaches me. This seems to be causing some consternation with some members. The reasons for having a deposit system are 1) Caterers need to know exact numbers one week before a competition, and these numbers must be paid for. 2) Numbers of players must be known beforehand so that I can budget for the prize table. 3) Golf Clubs not only limit numbers of players but also require – in advance – names, addresses and

handicaps of all players. I am afraid that the days of 'just turning up on the day' are gone.

Finally, on a sad note, I have just heard of the death of Eric Armitage, formerly of Mountains. Eric had been ill for a long time and I am sure his passing will be sadly noted by our more senior members.

BOB LUPTON

## LONDON

The AGM of the London section was held at Mill Hill GC on November 28th, the committee for 1992 being elected as follows: Brian Kelly-Secretary, Norman Exley-Chairman, Andrew Phillips-Treasurer. Committee – Martin Smith, Barry Moggeridge, Nick Baldwin, Craig Handyside and Doug Smith.

Our Turkey Trot preceded the AGM, the eventual winner being Craig Handyside of Hadley Wood GC with 34 Stableford points, a good score under difficult conditions. Thanks go to the trade members for supporting us again, and to Mill Hill GC staff for looking after us so well on the day. For 1992 the London section has set up a sub-committee of three to organise golfing events throughout the year. Hopefully, if this is successful, entry forms will be sent out for all our golfing events. This will enable us to calculate exact numbers for catering, for we have been lucky so far in guessing numbers for lunch or dinner, but it might be only a matter of time before we get it all wrong and upset all concerned, especially the host Club. We must organise ourselves better and, to this end, the new sub-committee is relying heavily upon you, the members, to advise them well in advance if you intend playing at our selected venues in 1992. More information about this will be made available in our next 'Around the Green'. The sub-committee consists of: NICK BALDWIN (tel: 0525 714452), CRAIG HANDYSIDE (081-447 0214) and BARRY MOGGERIDGE. Please give them a call about any London section golfing event.

Dates for 1992: London Section: April 9th-Spring meeting/ISEKI qualifier at West Middx GC. July 7th – Summer competition at Panshanger GC. August 11th – Summer competition at Hatfield and London CC.

South East Region: March 13th- Gentlemen's Dinner at Walton Heath GC. July 6th- ISEKI Regional Final at Chelmsford GC. August 10th to 12th – BIGGA National Tournament at Littlestone GC.

If anyone has something interesting to tell, please do not hesitate to contact me, telephone 081 441 3216.

ANDREW PHILLIPS

## SOUTH COAST

Once again our annual Christmas Stableford Competition took place at the Royal Winchester GC in December. Over sixty members took part in the competition – a record for the section.

We are made most welcome at the Club and the support from the committee and manager, Mr David Williams, is much appreciated.

The competition took the form of individual Stableford points over 18 holes and was sponsored by Rigby Taylor and New Forest Farm Machinery. Results: Winner of the Rigby Taylor Shield- Brian Newcombe, Woodcote Park, 40 points. Runner-up, for the New Forest Machinery/John Deere Cup – Eric James, Bulberry Woods, 37. Third Alex McCombie, Parkstone, 35. Other prize winners were: Stephen White, Jeremy Norris, E Ball and John Payne. My thanks to Mark Wilton and Nick Clarke for providing and pre-