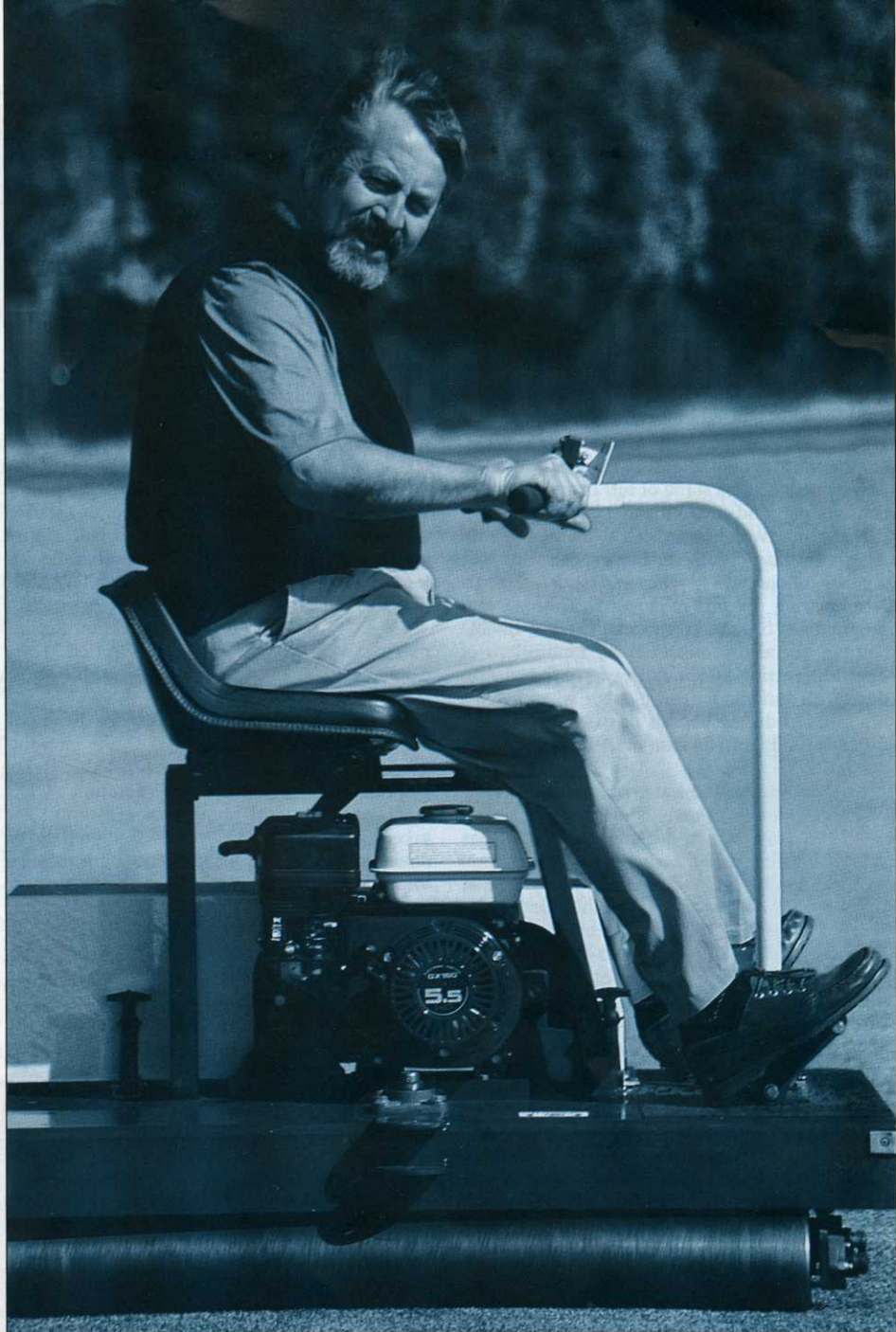


9 → view. These plans call for our involvement with the golf course as well as for the construction of new purpose built offices for ourselves. If these plans fail to come to fruition then, at some future date, we may need to seek an unwanted move from Aldwark Manor.

If uncertainties cloud our future at Aldwark Manor, then our future standing within the game looks much brighter than it did five years ago. We have created an impression, we are respected as a professional body that knows where it is going and, quite frankly, we are generally ahead of the game in our organisation, planning, administration, professionalism and indeed pure enthusiasm.

In getting ahead of the game, we do attract antagonism from time to time, but if progress and development attracts such antagonism then we have no need to be apologetic. We will continue to set standards and hopefully the game will react favourably. We shall certainly not be detracted from doing what is right for the greenkeeping profession and right for our members. We are not yet set on a firm base. We remain dependent on membership subscriptions and income from the BTME and 'Greenkeeper International' for our very existence and much more work remains to be done to ensure the security of our income from these three principal sources. In all three areas our marketing team faces formidable challenges.

Finally, my special and sincere thanks to our chairman, Roy Kates, for all he has achieved during his year of office. Like our previous chairmen, nothing had prepared him for his shock of becoming chairman of this vibrant Association of ours. It cannot be disputed that Roy has put himself about this past year on behalf of the Association. He has particularly had to cope with the 'politics' of the new education unit and his diplomacy during this period has been first-class. His employer at Wexham Park has given excellent backing and support, which was recognised by Viscount Whitelaw during BTME. The duties of chairman demand a substantial and ever-growing commitment and Roy has given freely of his time. I would conclude by thanking him for his steadfast support during the year. I am sure the experience he has gained will be utilised for the future benefit of BIGGA.



A spot of IRONING

DAVID WHITE (pictured) discovers how to increase putting speeds without stress

Eyebrows were raised, a murmur of disquiet droned across the crowded lecture theatre. Delegates at Keele were informed yet again that in America the greatest thing since sliced bread was not the stimpmeter, not the mower that grooms, trims and cuts grass lower than a gnats eye – and certainly not those unfamiliar strains of turfgrass suited more to desert conditions than the home counties of England.

No – the use of the piece of machinery known generically as the Australian Turf Iron is, we were assured, the course superintendent's best friend, currently winning great favour and influencing people in all manner of high places.

If you can believe that what America does today Britain will do tomorrow, the Turf Iron certainly deserves closer investigation, and it was with this in mind that I visited Went- ➔ 12

A spot of IRONING

'Don't knock it 'till you've tried it...'

11 → worth's newest course, the Edinburgh, the better to see a Turf Iron in action and to assess its capabilities.

The scenario at Wentworth is no different than that found at other courses around the country: players with low handicaps demand ultra-fast greens with nary a thought for the consequences. On the other hand, the golf course manager aims to provide a healthy stand of turf that will survive constant play and environmental extremes.

Never the twain shall meet might be the easy answer for many course managers, declaring that a golfer cannot have his cake and eat it – fast surfaces placing the turf in jeopardy. Granted that programmes of reduced mowing heights, double cutting, liberal use of groomers, applications of light topdressing and reducing fertility can produce such surfaces for a while, but when heights are lowered during periods of stress, greens can disappear quicker than cash invested in the Channel Tunnel!

Graham Matheson, head greenkeeper of Wentworth's Edinburgh course, is of the opinion that using the Turf Iron as a management tool has proved invaluable. Following a proper aeration programme, not only did he gain an increase in green speeds but he also found the iron invaluable on areas that had been returfed, the iron smoothing out minor humps and bumps with no visible signs of stress while assisting in bringing such areas into play quicker than hitherto. In addition, the machine has a place in day-to-day management after cultural operations such as

verti-draining, coring, top dressing etc. Above all, the greens on the Edinburgh course are healthy, reveal no signs of stress and are quick enough to satisfy all but the masochistic.

Simply stated, the Turf Iron is a motorised ride-on machine, its twin rollers controlled by a simple tiller device that is simplicity itself to use – indeed it is so simple that with just a few minutes tuition I was zooming over the turf in expert fashion. The makers claim no miracles, but insist that when properly used, the Turf Iron will change persistently bumpy greens into smoother, healthier and above all faster surfaces while raising mowing heights, not lowering them!

Quoting from a recent 'Green Section Record' published by the USGA Green Section, Larry Gilhuly cites a specific Turf Iron case history as follows:

"The first step was to reduce surface disruption caused by multiple aerations. With the introduction of water aeration this technique reduced (not eliminated!) standard core aeration while increasing the total number of aerations. The greens were smoother, yet the perennial *Poa annua* still possessed inconsistent characteristics. With monthly aeration to relieve compaction the superintendent began a programme of rolling greens on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The results were instantly positive as far as the membership was concerned and produced the following changes:

- 1 Reduced mowing frequency from seven to five days per week.

- 2 Discontinued all double-mowing practices.
- 3 Decreased labour time spent on greens.
- 4 A virtual halt to player complaints.

These positive results benefited the overall golf course maintenance operation. The growth and playing characteristics of the greens, however, have also changed:

- 1 An increase in mowing height from .15" (between 9/64" and 5/32") to .17" (11/64").
- 2 A consistent increase in overall average speed from 8'6" to 9'6".
- 3 An overall improvement in surface smoothness and a reduction in footprinting.
- 4 Improved daily consistency and surface firmness.
- 5 An apparent increase in rooting depth.
- 6 A slight reduction in pesticide use and a slight increase in bentgrass.

The programme described has been used for approximately one year and continues to produce outstanding results. One point that definitely rings true is that any programme that can potentially minimise pesticide usage, produce healthier turf, and provide desired putting green speed with good surface smoothness is worth a demonstration".

It seems to me that a practice of old, for rolling is indeed an old practice, in these enlightened times is surely worthy of consideration – on the premise 'don't knock it 'till you've tried it', ironing turf may well provide the answer to increasing green speeds without normally associated stress.

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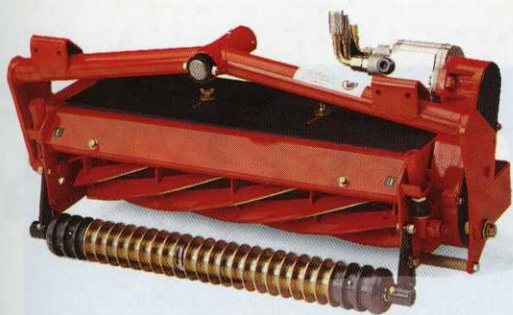
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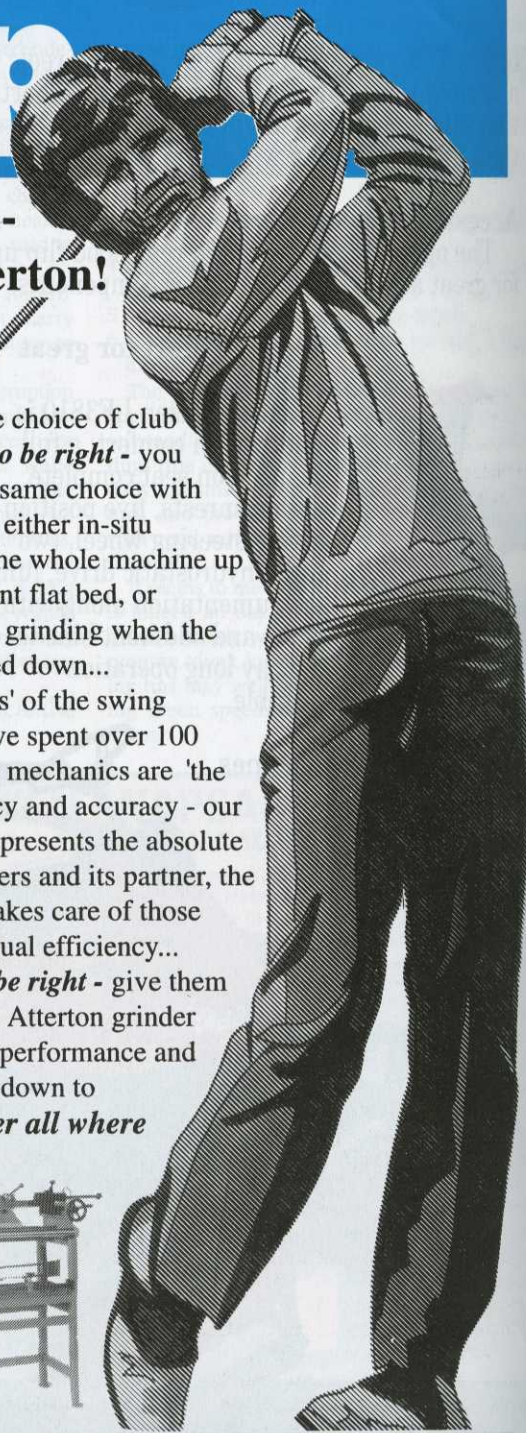
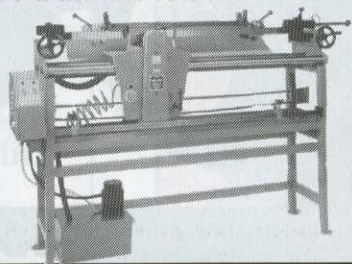
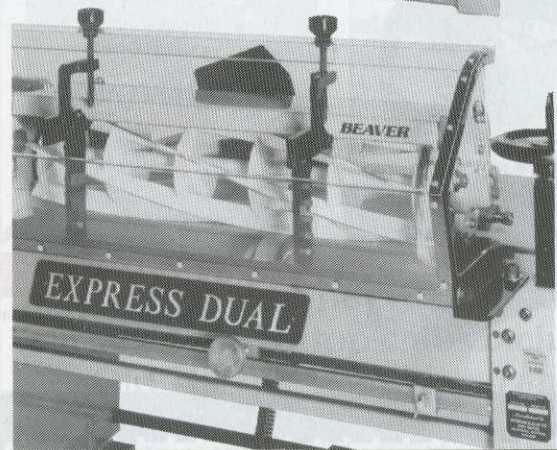
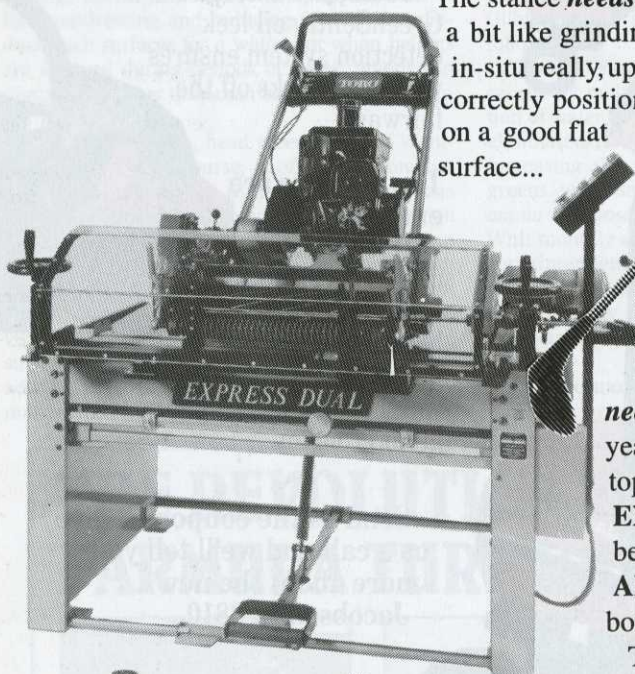
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'Utter rubbish' exposed

Reading 'Greens Must Not Be Spared', I was convinced the piece was an 'April Fool wind-up'. I sought confirmation from the editor, who assured me that the opinions expressed, questionable though they may be, were indeed genuine.

Well – where does one start to expose, discredit and denounce so much utter, irresponsible rubbish and completely unfounded statements? Mr Travers obviously has faith in his convictions and I also have convictions – I am convinced that the article was a gross insult to our profession and I will not therefore attempt to counter the idiotic statements and contradictions contained therein.

I must highlight one, however, which screams 'impossible': How can a course accommodate 2,000 rounds of golf in 14 days in the middle of winter, having regard for the hours of daylight available? That works out at 142 rounds daily, discounting the possibility that the course may not have been open for every one of those 14 days and bearing in mind also that over 26 days of the year his (Lamberhurst) course was closed.

Could it possibly be that Mr Travers – in his capacity as a PGA professional – has a vested interest in green fees? Not to mention the sale of golfing requisites – with an emphasis on luminous golf balls, studded wellington boots and the hire of sledges and aqua-lungs!

The mind boggles. Can readers imagine what must transpire at Lamberhurst GC committee meetings? Answers on a postcard!

DAVID HINDMARSH

Course Manager, Milngavie GC, Glasgow

The article 'Greens Must Not Be Spared' is a prime example of the reason why golf professionals should be kept well away from the running of golf courses.

Every greenkeeper tries to keep greens in play as much as possible, but knows equally that there are limits. In different parts of the country there are harder frosts and measurably different rainfall levels etc., which make comparisons difficult. Sure, we know that plenty of 'assist' machines exist, but can all clubs afford these for the work needed to aid recovery after adverse conditions?

It is stated, quote: 'Mike doesn't believe in temporary greens and unless conditions on the course are unpleasant and muddy the course remains open – whether the rain has bucketed down or greens are covered in frost'. That statement appears contradictory.

To my mind, professional golfers (or those responsible for arranging their tournaments) have not helped greenkeeping one little bit, eliminating many of the natural grasses by insisting that the ball 'holds' even when struck with woods and long irons.

Many are now discovering that American ideas just do not work in Britain and it is unfortunate that many such ideas have also been applied to some of our treasured seaside links, with glaringly detrimental effect.

For me, it is members golf that is most important, and my members understand that if conditions are not right they go over to play on temps for their own good. I am amazed that Mr Travers has time for three jobs, I certainly would not have time to be a golf pro.

JOHN NUDDS

Course Manager, Gerrards Cross GC. Bucks

(John Nudds is captain of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon County Golf Team and a category one player – editor).

Was the nonsense which appeared in 'Greens Must Not Be Spared' put in as bait trailed before readers to induce comment? If it was printed merely to warn members what will happen to their courses (and them) when the PGA takes over (witness what has already happened in cricket and tennis), I could excuse it, but really...!

Every line contravenes sensible greenkeeping, reveals appalling constructional errors and mistaken deductions. The winter of 1992/93 was very wet, but it was abnormally mild according to Met. Office records.

The danger is that inexperienced greenkeepers will be led astray and aggressive green chairmen will use this as a stick.

BILL BISHOP

Ross-on-Wye GC, Herefordshire

Congratulations to Mike Travers for the very brave article 'Greens Must Not Be Spared'. Whilst I cannot condone the set-up at Lamberhurst, the triple role of pro., greenkeeper and greens chairman hardly being ideal, Mike's attitude to his course and greens is to be applauded.

I too managed greens on a heavy clay base for eight years, very successfully and along similar lines to Mike. It seemed to me that in a reasonably sheltered environment, good all year-round greens could be produced from far from desirable growing mediums. Keeping the nutrient levels relatively high and the cutting heights relatively low, i.e. a whisker above an eighth during the summer and never higher than a quarter during the winter, combined with regular aeration and hole changing, gave greens that putted at between 9 & 10 on the stimpmeter all summer and greens which stood up to winter wear at speeds between 7 & 8 except under the most severe of conditions. In fact these greens were noted for miles around as quality greens, when in fact they were constructed from anything but quality materials. A word of warning however – it is absolutely essential to 'keep your finger on the pulse' as the patient can be temperamental, finicky and at times downright awkward!

I feel that Mike Travers may attract a certain amount of flak from the article. I hope this helps to redress the balance.

PAUL WORSTER

Course Manager, Minchinhampton GC, Gloucs

May I congratulate BIGGA on their excellent pesticide course, and especially Jon Allbutt for his superb tuition, which resulted in all participants gaining PA1 and PA2 exam passes with flying colours. Not only was the course first rate, but the conversation was very stimulating – and not always about pesticides or legislation either!

One talking point concerned 'Greens Must Not Be Spared'. After we had convinced ourselves that it wasn't an April Fool joke we discussed it bit by bit, to our great amusement. I know that a certain sector of our membership express fears that PGA professionals will eventually take control of their jobs, but I do not share their view. Judging by the content of Mike Travers article we have nothing to fear, especially when we keep up to the minute

via Allbutt inspired educational courses at Aldwark Manor.

One point I would like to make, however, is this: would the course be kept open in all conditions if the pro. was not making a profit from shop sales or taking a percentage from green fees?

A greenkeeper does not have this problem and the wise greenkeeper will always look after his course at all costs.

ED McCABE

Course Manager, Brokenhurst GC, Hampshire

I wonder if you can help on this? We have received a letter from Patrick Knook, a trainee greenkeeper in Holland. He is attending a school for horticulture and has spent some time working on a golf course.

To further his studies he would like to spend some time working on a British golf course, from 28 June through to 6 August.

Is it possible that one of your members could use an extra pair of hands?

KAREN SMITH

PR & Marketing Manager, Ransomes Sims & Jefferies Ltd, Ipswich. Telephone 0473 270000.

Our greenkeeper at Sandilands was having big problems with moles last year, having no luck in catching them. Though I play at Sandilands I work for another club and having some experience with these creatures I asked if I might give my method a try. He encouraged me to 'have a go'.

From the very start I had success, trapping about seven or eight, though the main problem was centred around our tenth green. Not wanting to place traps on or around the green, I enlisted the help of the catering staff and obtained some five litres of old cooking fat, pouring the whole lot down the two main runs. From that day there has been no signs of the creatures returning.

This is a tip I picked up many years ago, one which I have used hundreds of times and always with great success. I pass it on so that it may help others.

GEOFFREY KNOLES

Vice captain, Sandilands GC., (also head greenkeeper, Woodthorpe Hall GC.) Lincs

Reading April's Greenkeeper International my attention was drawn to the article 'It's Girls' Work Too'. I found this very interesting indeed – and very true to life.

I am the deputy head greenkeeper at Romiley GC, Stockport, and before this I served a sound and thorough apprenticeship at Mere G&CC under the supervision of course manager Mike Sheehan, backed up with college training at Myerscough College.

Personally, I believe that if a person demonstrates real interest, determination and enthusiasm for their job it doesn't really matter if they are male or female, they will succeed.

I can safely say that greenkeeping has proved to be a very interesting, challenging and varied career that has given me maximum job satisfaction. I am glad I took the 'risk' in choosing greenkeeping as a profession – it has certainly paid off.

DIANA K LYTGOE

Romiley Golf Club, Stockport, Cheshire

As greenkeepers, groundsmen and anyone remotely interested in our industry headed for Long Ashton Golf Club on 28 April, they were treated to a rare glimpse of the sun – in a month that had brought more than its fair share of rain. With over 600 cars through the gate in the first hour, organisers and traders were unanimous in expressing themselves well pleased, and with the steady flow continued throughout the day this helped to make this fourth Westurf exhibition easily the best yet.

Eager to show west country folk the very best in turf care equipment and supplies, there were 68 exhibitors from around the country, taking up 114 stand spaces, and there was so much to see that figures were seen dashing from stand to stand, keen to ensure that they did not miss a single thing. Wherever one turned, it seemed there were smiling faces and the atmosphere was one of felicitousness. The BIGGA stand was kept busy with Ma Rion's turf poser and a constant stream of members dropped by to chew the fat, to renew old acquaintances, or to meet the new BIGGA chairman, John Crawford, who had travelled all the way from Scotland just to be with us.

We would like to thank our hosts, Long Ashton Golf Club, for their kindness and we hope that we added a little extra sparkle to their centenary year. A special thanks to John Crawford for his valued support and to the BIGGA staff for all they do. Finally, we acknowledge that without the support of the traders and visitors there would be no Westurf, so to them we say a very special thank you.

Now we look forward to Westurf '94, which will take place at the same venue on 27 April 1994 – see you all there.

GORDON CHILD

IN THE PICTURE: WESTURF '93



A neat team from Castle Coombe GC



Ivor Scoones, left and Gordon Child



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BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW on the 1993 series of BIGGA Management Courses.

There will be two Year 1 courses, 18-22 October and 25-29 October; Year 2, 1-5 November; Year 3, 8-12 November and Year 4, 15-19 November.

This is the fifth year of the courses and delegates who have attended in the past will be aware of the need to book early - places this year are limited and will be on a first come-first served basis. It is an intensive week for all delegates with much to be learnt from the industry's experts - much can also be gained from informal discussions in the evenings in the relaxing atmosphere of BIGGA's headquarters, Aldwark Manor Hotel.

Attendance at each week's course qualifies delegates for eight credits to go towards the Master Greenkeeper Certificate.

The Greenkeepers Training Committee (GTC) has identified supervisory and management training as a priority for head greenkeepers who may never have had the opportunity to attend the type of formal training courses now available at many colleges throughout the UK and Ireland. Golf clubs who have mature head greenkeepers with no supervisory qualifications would benefit from encouraging them to attend the BIGGA Management Courses and a GTC grant of £150 per week may be available to golf clubs supporting this GTC approved course. For more information on the GTC grant, call Sue Gudgeon on 0347 838640.

The cost per week to include accommodation (twin bedded rooms), all meals and tuition fees is £450+VAT.

To reserve your place, complete the postcard in this magazine and return to BIGGA together with a deposit of £100 +VAT (total: £117.50). The balance will be due for payment no later than 1st October, 1993. A receipted invoice will be issued immediately. If a delegate cancels his booking prior to the course, he will be liable for payment of the total cost unless the place can be filled by another delegate.

If you have any queries or you need more information, call Debbie Savage on 0347 838581.



BIGGA Management Courses are approved by the Greenkeepers Training Committee.

Management Courses Autumn/Winter 1993: TIMETABLES

| Year 1 18-22 October 1993 or 25-29 October 1993 | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | 9am - 12noon | 1.30pm - 4.00pm | 4.30pm - 7.00pm |
| Monday | Delegates arrive at BIGGA HQ for lunch at noon | How to manage your time more effectively: David Illingworth | Introduction to computers: Fred Robinson |
| Tuesday | Computers: continued Fred Robinson | Grasses for the Golf Course: Mike Canaway/Dr Peter Hayes, STRI | Communication workshop: Nick Bisset, Askham Bryan College |
| Wednesday | Conservation on the Golf Course: Robert Taylor, STRI | Problems associated with the maintenance of Tees, Bunkers, Surrounds and Fairways: Stuart Ormoundroyd/Alistair Beggs | Problems associated with the maintenance of Greens: Steve Isaac/Neil Baldwin, STRI |
| Thursday | Health & Safety Update: Jon Allbutt | | |
| Friday | Turf Grass Diseases: Neil Baldwin, STRI | Delegates depart following lunch | |

Each day: Coffee break: 10.30am • Lunch: 12 noon
Tea break: 4pm • Dinner is served at 7.30pm

| Year 2 1-5 November 1993 | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| | 9am - 12noon | 1.30pm - 4.00pm | 4.30pm - 7.00pm |
| Monday | Delegates arrive at BIGGA HQ for lunch at noon | Assertiveness: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Report Writing: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley |
| Tuesday | Verbal Presentations: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Leadership: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Presentation: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley |
| Wednesday | Health & Safety at Work Act 1974: Jon Allbutt | | |
| Thursday | Preparing a Health & Safety Statement of Safety Policy/Preparing a Risk Assessment (COSHH-FEPA): Jon Allbutt | | |
| Friday | Turf nutrition: David Lawson, STRI | Delegates depart following lunch | |

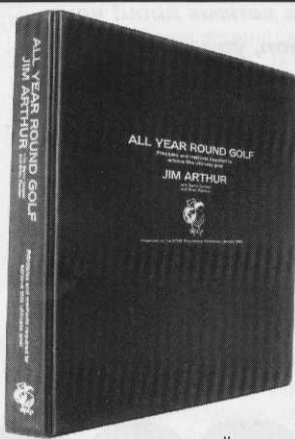
Each day: Coffee break: 10.30am • Lunch: 12 noon
Tea break: 4pm • Dinner is served at 7.30pm

| Year 3 8-12 November 1993 | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| | 9am - 12noon | 1.30pm - 4.00pm | 4.30pm - 7.00pm |
| Monday | Delegates arrive at BIGGA HQ for lunch at noon | Job Interview: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Writing and Assessing CVs: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley |
| Tuesday | Team Development: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Managing Performance: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | |
| Wednesday | Surveying: Robert Everett, STRI | | Finance: What are the Options? Keith Jaynes |
| Thursday | Construction of Golf Greens: Brian D Pierson, British Association of Golf Course Contractors | | |
| Friday | Preparing and Implementing a Course Policy Document: Jeff Perris, STRI | Delegates depart following lunch | |

Each day: Coffee break: 10.30am • Lunch: 12 noon
Tea break: 4pm • Dinner is served at 7.30pm

| Year 4 15-19 November 1993 | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| | 9am - 12noon | 1.30pm - 4.00pm | 4.30pm - 7.00pm |
| Monday | Delegates arrive at BIGGA HQ for lunch at noon | Advanced Public Speaking: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Marketing and Customer Care: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley |
| Tuesday | Negotiating Skills: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | Working Under Pressure: Frank Newberry or Paul Whiteley | |
| Wednesday | First Aid; Ken Bick, Medical Training Services | | |
| Thursday | Health & Safety at Work Update: Jon Allbutt | | |
| Friday | Presenting a Course for Championships: Speaker to be announced | Delegates depart following lunch | |

Each day: Coffee break: 10.30am • Lunch: 12 noon
Tea break: 4pm • Dinner is served at 7.30pm



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TO ORDER, COMPLETE THE CARD OPPOSITE PAGE 42

Debbie Savage, BIGGA's new education officer, is at the leading edge of one of the most important aspects of the Association - its educational and training programmes. RACHEL SEMLYEN talked to Debbie at Aldwark Manor

The achievement of independent funding for the newly structured Greenkeepers Training Committee is a feather in the cap of BIGGA. Its successful campaign to get formal training needs recognised reflects tremendously well on the Association. What of the Association's approach to education and how will it be progressed, now that its education officer has left to direct the GTC?

Neil Thomas, executive director, is acutely aware of the education needs that remain. "We have a priority to look after our members' education requirements just as we have always done" he says. "Whilst the GTC will concern itself mainly with long-term policy, the completion of work on the supervisory and managerial aspects of the Training Manual and the formal education of students through the colleges, I estimate that some 70% of the education and training provisions for greenkeepers remains with BIGGA. These centre around the programme we have built up for courses, awards, conferences, seminars and the Master Greenkeeper Certificate. Much remains to be done and we plan to develop still further liaising on an ongoing basis with the GTC."

Who better to step into David Golding's shoes than the person on the Aldwark team who has assisted him over the past four years: Debbie Savage. Debbie, while in the position of exhibitions/membership officer has helped to set up the Master Greenkeeper Certificate, assisted with the seminar programme at Harrogate and the Education Conference and is known not only to members but also to sponsors and a wide range of industry representatives.

I went to see Debbie when the appointment was announced, but before the changes had come into being. It was the usual busy office, phones ringing, people calling and, outside on the Aldwark Manor course, golfers enjoying the spring sunshine. She told me frankly that David Golding will be "a tough act to follow, but he and I have worked together for four years and have one aim in common, the training and education of greenkeepers. Now I am looking forward to giving the education side of the job 100% of my time."

"The advantage is that everyone knows me. I have a thorough working knowledge of BIGGA in all its aspects and I understand the needs of our members. The adrenalin is starting to buzz now with enthusiasm for the task ahead. There is a tremendous amount to do, with the courses, awards, conference and seminars for a start, before we can begin to look ahead to the next stage and develop the planned scholarship awards. These I see as a most important stage in our development as we seek to provide the means for worthy students in need of financial support to attend college."

Debbie started with BIGGA soon after its arrival at Aldwark in 1989. Since then she has organised the increasingly successful BTME at Harrogate and established it as the most successful new fine turf exhibition in the country. And in her role as Membership Officer she has had to set up and run the computer systems for the membership from scratch.

"When BIGGA was established in 1987 there were some 1,300 members. Now there are 5,000. The main aim was finding out what the sections wanted for their members, providing the relevant information and making sure everything ran smoothly.

"Having been here since the beginning of the Association at Aldwark, I have seen a lot of change. We now run our own magazine as well as the exhibition and to ensure the development and growth of both we have to compete aggressively in a difficult business and financial climate. We consider our magazine to be the market leader and during the last four years we have seen the BTME become the industry's premier exhibition."

Debbie grew up in Sussex and left school at 16. She took a two year course in business administration at Worthing College of Further Education and then worked for ten years in a local solicitor's office as a legal executive for which she trained on a day release course, passing parts one and two of the Associates Examination. It was in the early eighties with marriage to a research scientist and a move to the United States, that her career in professional association work began.

She started in Washington DC with the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, which was the umbrella organi-

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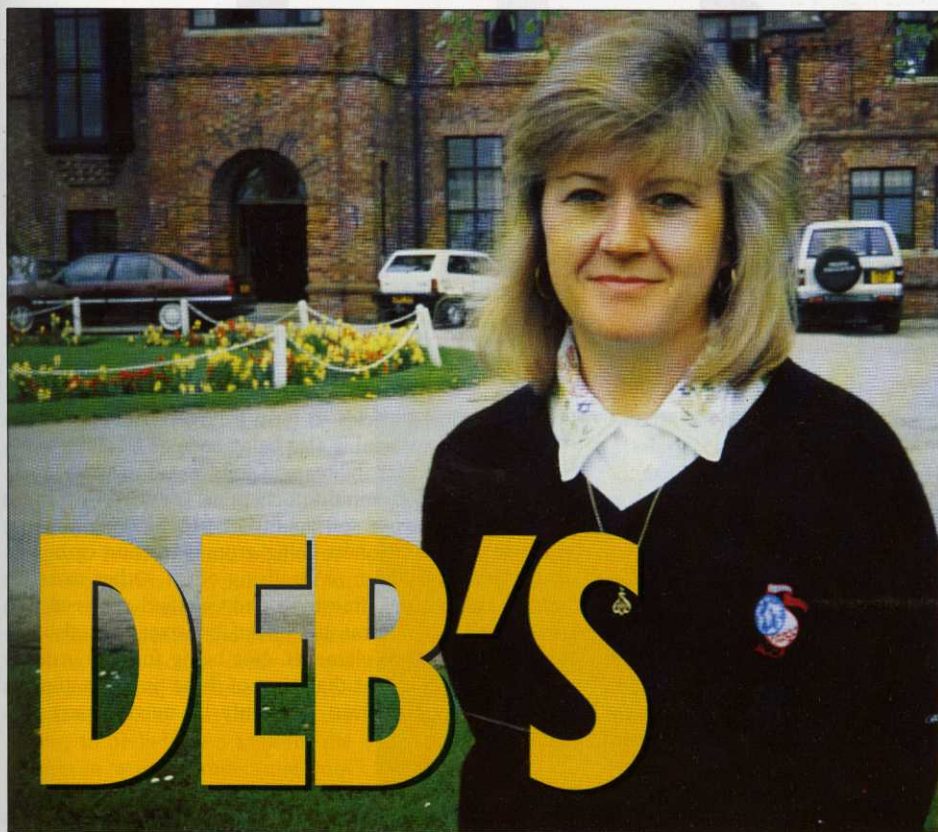
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DEB'S DELIGHT

sation for six scientific societies within the USA with over 50,000 members. She worked in the employment section, placing graduate, post-doctoral and associate scientists in academia or industry. An affiliate society of 6,000 members, the American Society for Cell Biology then asked her to help expand their employment service. It was here she gained the experience of computerising membership services.

A move to Buffalo in upstate New York, saw her take up the new position of administrative secretary of the American Crystallographic Association. This started as a voluntary body run by its members and Debbie was the first paid administrator. There she did everything with running an association of 2,000 members: from newsletters and a membership directory to organising the annual meetings and exhibitions all over the United States. It is with some pride that she says: "it is still going strong".

On returning to the UK after five years it was at York University that Debbie continued her career, helping with short courses in the chemistry department. Then she saw an advertisement in the local paper for a secretary/personal assistant for BIGGA at Aldwark. On interview, it was realised that Debbie was just the person to help develop the new Association. She was taken on, but not in the position she applied for as she was appointed administrative officer.

"At that time BIGGA was particularly looking to take on the organisation and develop-

ment of the exhibition and to manage the membership services and I suppose with my experience I was ideally suited."

Neil Thomas has more to say. "Debbie's background, her skills and total commitment to the job in hand has been a great strength, as everyone will testify. We anticipate that the transition to education officer will be as smooth as it could be. We owe that to all the members enrolled on the Master Greenkeeper Certificate and all those who participate in the various courses, award schemes, seminars and education conference."

Debbie has worked with David for three years on the development of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate scheme. With 100 currently registered, she will take over full responsibility for updating the records, logging in the credits as they come in and keeping an eye on everyone's progress.

"As more and more greenkeepers see members of their own profession being awarded the Certificate, it encourages others to take part. This year's UK recipients, Gordon Irvine and Kerran Daly, have had a high profile and this has helped. They are both now involved with helping on the Stage 2 course assessments."

Asked to comment on other aspects of BIGGA's educational and training programmes Debbie began with the BTME Seminar Programme. "There is a bank of speakers already lined up for next year. We plan to keep the mix of speakers roughly as it was last year,

with a fair number of greenkeeper members because delegates like to hear of each other's experiences."

On courses Debbie commented "We have just had three very successful in-house pesticide courses with 100% pass rates, run by Jon Allbutt. This is a popular and topical course as everyone is increasingly aware of safety rules and requirements. Our members have certainly benefited through these courses being run in-house within a learning environment at Aldwark Manor."

"In September we had the first of the public speaking courses, for members who were presenting papers at Harrogate, then in February for Board of Management members. Further courses are planned and the benefits are being seen in the many recent favourable comments on our members' performances when speaking at the BTME and the National Education Conference."

Both the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year and the ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year awards are major schemes that BIGGA initiated. Outlining the development of these schemes Debbie is excited by the growth of the Student Greenkeeper award which this year will see nominations at a regional level for the first time. Meanwhile this year's ICI award has generated a substantially increased level of participation from the membership.

Debbie will continue to develop the highly successful management courses held at Aldwark Manor each October/ November which this year will run over five weeks. She sees these as "being instrumental in improving the supervisory and managerial skills of our members as well as creating the confidence for members to move from a head greenkeeper to course manager role".

One of the vital areas on which Debbie will need to concentrate is the further growth of BIGGA's Education and Development Fund. She sees this as the most important source of funding for education and training programmes particularly as the GTC has now signalled its intent to utilise its resources in directions other than towards BIGGA's own educational programmes. Debbie looks forward to the imminent career video and the first training video both of which have been made possible through the establishment of the fund.

As far as interests are concerned Debbie loves to cook and is no mean sportswoman, playing badminton to county level in her teens. She keeps meaning to take up golf. "I love watching it as I do any sport, but at the moment I only have time for weight and circuit training at the gym." She looks forward to The Open this year when she will help to organise the support team of greenkeepers. "A sun visor signed by Nick Faldo is one of my most prized possessions from The Open last year."

I asked what she sees as the real bonuses of the job. "I see myself being at the leading edge of the most important aspect of the Association - its educational and training programmes and contributing to the development of future policy. I look forward to being able to help people to develop their careers through the educational opportunities that I will be responsible for providing. I have met many greenkeeper members over the years and most are really friendly, down to earth people who are a pleasure to deal with."

Now for the



There's still a long way to go before we know all we need to know about growing grass for the golfer. HUGH TILLEY reports

The term 'conditioner' means different things to different people, and 'turf conditioners' tend to encompass a wide range of growth promoting substances which cannot legally be called fertiliser, while 'soil conditioners' include an equally diverse range of materials such as lime and pulverised fly ash, as well as chemical (soil) modifiers such as various wetters and gypsum, keserite etc, and the widest possible interpretation which can include machinery such as subsoilers or mole ploughs. While fertilisers are defined in law with required and stated nutrient levels, conditioners are not, although trading standards legislation would ensure that misleading statements are not made. Talking to many of the suppliers of conditioners it is obvious that preferred and more appropriate than 'conditioner' would be words such as stimulant, modifier, improver or enhancer.

The realisation that golf is a growth sector has resulted in several companies switching their attentions and resources from agriculture to turf, and has also led to the establishment of a number of new 'businesses' specifically to produce and market organic fertilisers and turf conditioners for golf and other amenity turfs. Several of these 'businesses' are little more than farmyard operations, with little if any back-up service for soil or tissue analysis, nor do they all have any real knowledge of agronomy or soil science, and a few are very hazy over what their product is, let alone precisely what elements it contains.

This should worry the greenkeeper and he should consider what protection he has if something goes wrong, for instance if some toxic (to grass or humans) substance is applied. Suppliers state there is minimal risk, but are they insured? Normally at worst all that happens if a spray fails to produce the results expected is that you lose your money – although it is possible you could get a refund or even more product.

There are those who imply that their products are a cure for all ills, – they should know that a plant's requirements are many and varied. Sometimes – far too often for the credibility of organic conditioners – enthusiastic salesmen have advised applying 'their' product when what is really needed is drainage, aeration or a bit of warm weather. If turf conditioners are to retain credibility it must be stressed by the seller that these products are just one aspect of a multi-part equation, that success is the sum of optimising all parts of the plant environment, and that turf conditioners can't remedy basic management and soil structure failings. What they can do very effectively is to provide a wide spectrum of ingredients to plants and/or soils that are deficient or out of balance, or provide 'catalysts' to enable the plant to utilise or optimise existing materials more effectively, and by this means they can even offer some defence against adverse soil or weather conditions.

Soil Conditioners

In contrast, 'soil conditioners' work in the soil and are usually more specific, modifying it mechanically or chemically. While the majority of these conditioners are intended to improve the soil structure there are others which are applied to improve the soil by adjusting the balance or availability of micro nutrients, minerals etc. Mechanical methods include slitting, subsoiling etc., but it also includes incorporating inert matter such as sand, Iytag and other materials into the soil to 'open' it up. Traditional chemical means of opening up a heavy clay soil is the incorporation of gypsum, which

flocculates clay particles to form a larger crumb structure. However, this material is also being seen as a source of calcium and sulphur for lighter acid soils.

Perhaps the most important chemical soil modifier of all is lime, used to reduce soil acidity or pH. Several types are available, the commonest being ground calcium carbonate, which has a very high neutralising effect. Other materials include magnesium limestone and calcified seaweed with lesser or slower neutralising effect, however they also provide other essential elements. Not being fully or instantly soluble in water means that most of these products are slow release, thus application may only be needed once in a decade.

Turf Conditioners

Turf conditioners aim to affect the plant more directly, with most being foliar feeds. They used to be categorised in the realms of 'muck and mystery', however they are coming out of the cold as an increasing number of greenkeepers and their advisers realise that grass needs more than NPK to thrive. There is no argument that healthy grass, like healthy humans, needs a complete diet, and this is the position that most of the seaweed and manure derived conditioners see for themselves, – as providers of a wide range of organic elements and enzymes etc. It is a shotgun approach – aim wide and hope to nail the problem – however is it any the worse for that?

Some of the claims made for turf conditioners are rather vague and unsubstantiated by independent trials, and even where there are trial results these generally pertain to specific conditions and locations, for instance on links courses or sand constructions which are inherently infertile and on which it is easy to apply a product and get results. Getting results in high fertility with good growing conditions may be more difficult unless there is a specific deficiency. Producing reliable trials data requires evidence in black and white, but it is not easy or cheap to carry out a fully comprehensive and replicated trial, especially when you don't know the conditioner produces its effect. Many of the suppliers of these materials are small and without significant budget for trials work, however this will change perhaps as the larger and more predatory ones gobble up the smaller suppliers – this will happen as the market grows. Many greenkeepers, (not just marketers), have found that turf conditioners do work, even if they can't always predict when and where.

Still at this point in time the main demand from greenkeepers is for fertiliser, and as a result most of the suppliers (manufacturers?) of turf conditioners actually add N P or K and perhaps other minerals to make an analysis which has sufficient nutrient to be effective as well as making a sales justification for use, – these additions may not be organic, although this will not be stressed on the packaging, so that many will believe they are buying a pure 'natural' product. This should not matter as there is no evidence to say that a plant has any preference for (natural) organic rather than (synthetic) inorganic feed. Of course it makes logistic sense to apply a complete feed, rather than to apply separate materials at differing times, and some greenkeepers already have 'cocktail time', adding a little of this and some of that to the sprayer tank. This can be dangerous unless there is a printed recommendation for tank mixing of each specific product.

The two most common bases for turf conditioner are sea-