

Straight down the middle

Chris Boiling meets up with BIGGA's new chairman, John Millen

BIGGA's new chairman, John Millen, appears to be a quiet, unassuming guy. Straightforward, salt-of-the-earth type. Someone who will give an honest day's work without exciting or surprising you.

That's the first impression. And as I watched him play golf at Walton Heath recently, it seemed that his game was an extension of his personality. Drives straight down the middle. Not that far, but then he's not a big guy. Nothing too exciting. All steady stuff. Getting on the par-4s in three plus two putts to keep to his 18 handicap.

Then, suddenly, this right-handed golfer pulls a left-handed club out of the bag and proceeds to chip up left-handed. His unorthodox cure for the shanks. I hadn't noticed that he'd been putting left-handed as well.

There is obviously more to this man than first appears. He's been a greenkeeper for 29 years, but he left for a while to become a trawler skipper. He spent seven years in Norway, working at a couple of the country's most prestigious clubs. Back home, he helped turn part of an egg farm into a "fun" course, designing, constructing and now managing the Weald of Kent. And it was his decision not to employ a pro at the club "because they take more than they give".

John Millen, 54, was brought up in Tenterden, Kent, on a farm with a nine-hole golf course. His father was head greenkeeper there for 12 years. "I worked on the golf course for a while, and the farm, but I didn't like the job. One of my interests has always been fishing and sailing. I got in with the local fishermen and took that up for a career," he recalls.

For 11 years he had his own trawler. Then he got married and as Britain entered the Common Market he could see the writing on the wall for fishing, so he returned to greenkeeping. He moved to Sutton Valence, just south of Maidstone, and has been there for the last 25 years. His first job back in the business was at West Malling Golf Club, joining as head greenkeeper as it neared completion. He stayed there for five years before a two-year stint at Norway's No 1 golf club, Oslo. Next he moved across country to Oustoen, an exclusive country club with a 12-hole course on an island in a fjord. He stayed for five years maintaining the course six months of the year, working on his wife's family's farm in the winter. The club was good to him, paying for him to go to Canada every year to study for a month. But he studied more than greenkeeping – man management and psychology grabbed his interest, and sharpened his managerial skills.

When John came back to England in 1985



he became the course manager at Canterbury Golf Club, about 30 miles from his home. During his five years there he became involved with greenkeeping associations, and especially in improving greenkeeper education and training.

While working at Canterbury, he went to a local parish meeting to hear objections to a new 120-bedroom hotel and 18-hole golf course to be built just down the road from his home. The local farmers and residents were against it, and John was about the only one to speak in favour of the project. Afterwards he got chatting to the owners, the Edwards family who have a 700-acre egg farm with 230,000 chickens, and offered to help. He started as a consultant to help them get planning permission, then helped with the design and specification of the 6,200-yard par 70 course. "I was getting more interested in this project than I was as head greenkeeper at Canterbury. I could see the opportunities there so I came to work full-time," says John. That was four years ago.

He oversaw the course's construction, manning the machines with two lads. Their aim was to keep the 125-acre site as natural as possible and easy to maintain. It would be a quality golf course for ordinary golfers at a reasonable price. They took in 1,000 members the first year and have settled on 900 now, of whom only three have single figure handicaps. They had to put in a good drainage system because the course is built on heavy clay soil. The greens were built to USGA specs. Ponds and ditches were left and more lakes were dug for irrigation and to create features. And they're obviously attractive features as they attract 16,000 balls a year.

The club runs the shop itself and there is no pro on site. "If people want lessons they can go to the driving range nearby," says John.

The course attracted 270 societies last year and is booked by at least one society everyday

this year from April 1 to the end of September. Last year 39,000 rounds were played there and John expects 41,000 this year.

His management skills have enabled him to put the right people in place to look after the course and all these visitors while he carries out all the obligations foisted upon the chairman of BIGGA. John should have a fair idea of what the job involves as he is an experienced association member. He was a board of management member of EIGGA, taking over from Dennis Ayling when he retired, and has represented the South East Region on BIGGA's board for the past six years, serving as chairman of the education committee and vice-chairman. Now he is the chairman for a year. A daunting prospect for a doer rather than a talker.

"I'm looking forward to it but I'm very nervous," he admits. "I'm more of a backroom person. I'm not an outward going person but being chairman is becoming more and more a PR job. You've got to be the person who goes out there and talks to members and the trade."

His boss, Andrew Edwards, thinks he'll do a good job because he does exactly what he says he will do – and within the budgets he's been given.

One of his major tasks will be overseeing BIGGA's review, which will include updating the constitution, the future location of headquarters and BIGGA's role in education.

"We've been on a rollercoaster of growth but we've never sat back and thought where we were going or where we wanted to go," says John. "We've built up a first-class management team at headquarters. We just need to get the education officer in place now. I think the sky's the limit for the Association. We've become financially viable and we've got the expertise there to meet the members' wishes."

So, he stressed, members need to make their wishes known to their section secretaries.

It's going to be a busy year for John, but he still hopes to find time for his wife of 25 years, Carolyn who's just taken up golf, his two grown-up daughters who are off seeing the world and his 12-year-old son, as well as his other interests – snow skiing once a year, squash twice a week, sailing in the summer and golf once a week "to socialise with members – I don't take it too seriously."

John was a 12-handicapper at 12 "and I've got worse ever since". But he didn't do too badly at the Annual Gentlemen's Dinner tournament at Walton Heath, scoring 33 points for first place among the higher handicappers. The start of a successful year?

Preparation for next year's Open at St Andrews is under way.

Head greenkeeper Eddie Adams and his team have started revetting the 110 bunkers on the Old Course. This work is normally carried out on a three-year rolling cycle, but links supervisor Walter Woods wants them all done by next February.

"The whole world's going to be looking at St Andrews and we want to present the golf course in the best possible fashion," he told Greenkeeper International. The two largest bunkers – Hell and Shell – have already been done. It took a four-man team ten days to lay the 6,000 individual turfs that now make up the face of Shell bunker which blocks the entrance to the 7th green. 60-70 other bunkers – using almost five acres of turf – will be revetted during the season, taking advantage of the Sunday closure policy on the Old Course.

The sand will go in at the end of May, a couple of months before the Open so it has time to compact ("So the pro can feel it firm below his feet with only the top inch raked," says Walter).

Walter also plans to cut back on fertiliser and water this year (despite the new 357,000-gallon water tank, two new boreholes and the new wall-to-wall sprinkler system installed to water all the greens, tees and fairways on the four main courses and the greens and tees on the new Strathtyrum layout).

"We're trying to achieve a very dry surface because *Poa annua* doesn't like a dry surface," says Walter, BIGGA's first chairman. "When you're on a championship course, it's important you have the right types of grasses. so

St Andrews gets



Screens hide the work underway on the new £3m clubhouse

this year what we will do is try to drought out as much of the annual meadow grass as possible."

That will probably leave patches, but the 37-strong St Andrews team will replace these using turf from the aprons and laying new turf there.

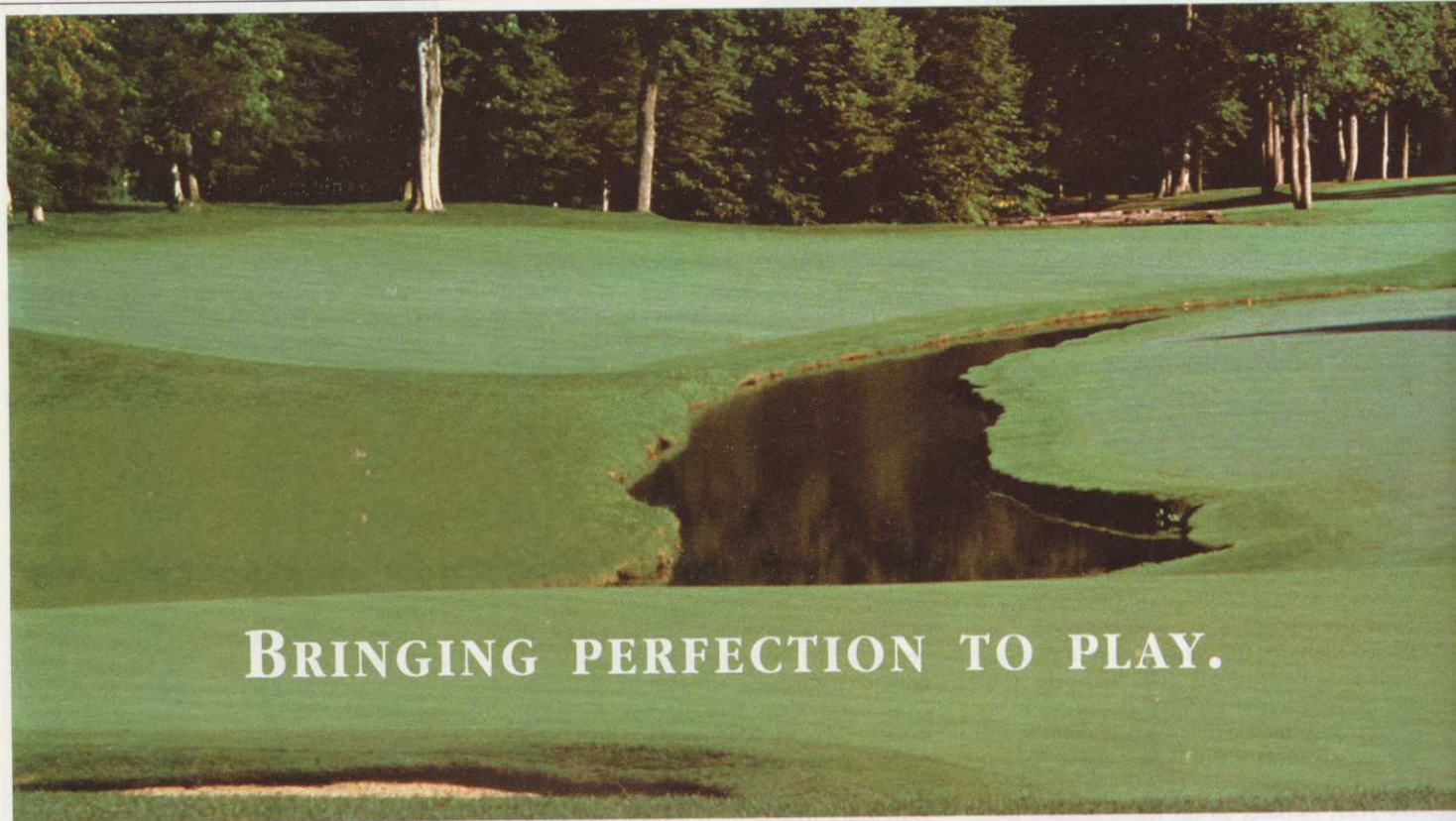
During the season Walter and Eddie will assess the situation daily. "We've got to keep a very strict eye on it because if we're creating drought areas we don't want to lose more than we want to," says Walter.

They will also be doing more aeration work this year. "The more aeration we can do this

year, the less we'll have to do next year – we don't want to leave marks on the course before the Open."

The public will be playing on the championship tees this year to firm them up. "Lots of greenkeepers think that not playing on tees helps them. We have a different view – we like them being played on. The professional likes a good, firm, hard tee. And they've got to be level. So we put the public on them – we've got all winter to repair them. But at least we're taking the thatch out and we're firming them up."

The fairways will be checked constantly.



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set for '95 Open



Tented village to go here – on the new practice range

They won't be fertilised or watered, and more grass will be allowed to grow. There will be extra divot filling to combat wear and tear and, in the winter, members and visitors may be asked to tee up on the fairways.

Walter wants the 6991-yard championship course to look like a true links course with yellowish fairways, revetted bunkers and fescues showing up on the greens.

"We don't have much in the way of roughs, but what there is will be tidied up," he added.

Other jobs they plan to do before next spring include preparing the paths for spectators and the galleries.

"We take advantage of the year before because we find it gives us more time to get things done. When the Open Championship comes we'll just roll through that as if it were another week..."

The 124th Open will be the 25th at St Andrews and Walter's fourth and last.

Clubhouse yields bonus

Work is well under way on a £3m clubhouse behind the 18th green of the New Course – the first visitors' clubhouse to be built at the 'home of golf'.

The two-storey building, which is due to open next spring, will feature sandstone walls and a pitched slated roof. On the ground floor there will be male and female changing rooms and showers while the first floor, with extensive views over the courses, will boast a lounge, bar and dining room. It will also have a balcony all the way round.

The foundation work for the 25,000 sq ft clubhouse yielded a welcome bonus for links

supervisor Walter Woods. Hundreds of tons of good links sand has been dug up and is now being used for bunker filling and on the fairways of the new Strathtyrum course, which will be officially opened this summer after a year of limited play.

Other developments in the pipeline are new maintenance sheds and a proper road system within the links to facilitate the movement of machinery and allow better spectator flow during the '95 Open.

■ Although the new 5,049-yard Strathtyrum course was built on essentially flat agricultural land, it has a links feel to it thanks to the man-made contours around the greens. Sand found during the construction of the clubhouse is being put on the fairways to add to the links feel.

Several thousand trees and bushes have been planted between holes 10, 11, 12 and the nearby main road into St Andrews. Further planting will be carried out as the course develops. This is in addition to the 3,000-6,000 whin and gorse bushes that are planted around the course every year.

■ The Eden Course, the first course to be closed under the Links Trust's new policy of taking one course out of play each winter for maintenance, came back into play on March 1 after a three-month layoff. Work included turfing the 14th and 15th greens, extending tees, remodelling bunkers and tidying up the pond. At the 10th hole, the old railway line has been completely turfed over.

■ The tented village will be erected on the new 400-yard floodlit driving range, between the hotel and the 12 covered and 12 open bays which have attracted more than 50,000 users since it opened last July.



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An even spread

Michael Bird looks at fertiliser spreaders and how to make the best out of them. On Page 39, Chris Boiling meets a head greenkeeper whose problem is not so much how to use his fertiliser - but how to get it to his course...

The fertiliser spreader is probably one of the most undervalued machines on the golf course. Normally costing between £500 and £1,500, the spreader is responsible each year for accurately distributing fertiliser worth four or five times its value, and often more on a multi-course golf and leisure complex.

Apart from fertiliser, most modern machines can, with very little adaptation, handle sand, salt, seeds and top dressings, making the spreader a highly cost-effective member of the machinery fleet. Yet, all too often the machine is not maintained, adjusted nor operated properly, leading to inaccurate, uneven spreading and a waste of time, effort and money.

Six key factors influence the ability to apply fertiliser accurately and precisely. They are the condition and setting-up of the spreader, the type of fertiliser, operator skill, the weather and ground conditions.

It would be wrong to give any one of these points precedence over another, says Ted Crooks of independent advisory and test firm, Spreader Calibration Specialists (SCS), based near Lincoln.

"All are inter-related and cannot be taken in isolation," he pointed out. "When we are asked to calibrate a spreader, that service is just one part of a package designed to ensure that all fertiliser is applied accurately during the year. The other points are equally important in achieving this goal."

Although working primarily in

agriculture, SCS is looking to extend its operations into associated areas, knowing that turf professionals face similar problems to farmers and growers. "Most work with a variety of materials with differing spread characteristics," commented Mr Crooks. "These have a marked effect on the ability to spread accurately across a consistent bout width."

Prills, pellets, granules, crumbs, flakes and powders all have differing flow rates which need to be allowed for during the spreading operation. For example, a smooth, shiny prill will leave a spinning disc or oscillating spout at a higher speed and angle than a rougher, duller granule or a fine powder.

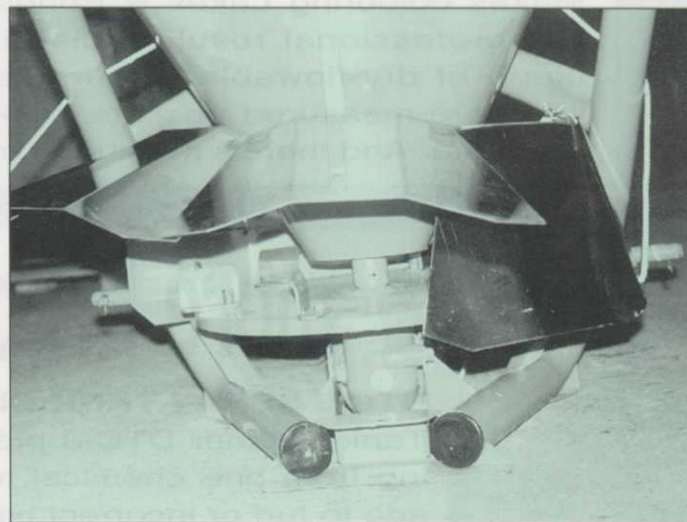
To ensure accurate and even application, the spreader needs to be set up and operated with these points taken into account, in line with the manufacturers' setting and operating recommendations.

Correct calibration of the machine is particularly important when handling fertilisers with large variations in size, shape and consistency. Ted Crooks pointed out that such variations are not found solely within different types of material. They are evident also in those of a similar specification coming from a range of suppliers, especially within imported materials.

For that reason, sound operator training is a fundamental element of precision fertiliser application. "If the operator can recognise the differences in materials and make adjustments accordingly, it will be a major step forward in



Amazone's EK 300 spreader is a single disc machine with a 300 litre hopper capacity and spread width from 3m to 12m depending on material. Ensure that the machine is set level and at the recommended working height.



A range of spread limiters is offered by manufacturers to prevent fertiliser being thrown into waterways and hedgerows. This stainless steel 'skirt' is raised and lowered on cords from the tractor seat.

improving the effectiveness of fertiliser applications," stressed Mr Crooks.

Training elements should include general machine care and use as well as the recognition of materials and their varying characteristics as they move from the hopper via the metering and spreading mechanisms onto the turf.

The first point that is checked by Ted Crooks when called out to test a spreader is the speed of the tractor's power take-off shaft. Using a hand-held meter, the speed of the PTO is compared with the tractor's tachometer to ensure that the spreader is being driven at the recommended input speed.

This test is also of help when

the tachometer is broken or missing as it can be used to establish the required setting on the hand throttle to achieve the required PTO speed.

Incorrect drive speeds are one of the principal reasons for inaccurate spreading and Ted Crooks advises greenkeepers to have their tractors tested regularly. Many machinery dealers offer this service using optical or mechanical instruments.

At this stage, it is vital also to ensure that the tractor's linkage is in good order and can be adjusted to set up the spreader at the recommended working height and attitude at the rear of the tractor. The correct operating height will be specified in the machine's handbook ➔ 27

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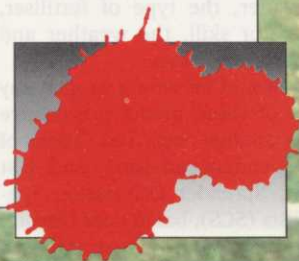
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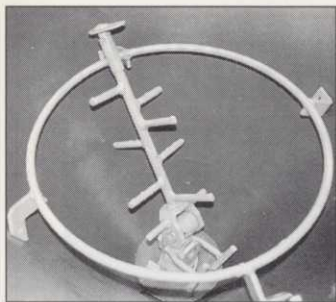
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25 → and must be adhered to if optimum spreading width and accuracy are to be achieved. Always check operating height with the hopper half filled.

One point often overlooked is tyre pressures. These should be equal, otherwise the machine may sit at an angle resulting in uneven spreading.

Machine maintenance is a very important, but often neglected point. Worn or damaged outlets, vanes or spouts, a misaligned disc, and bent shafts, agitators or framework can all adversely affect the spreader's performance.

"The state of some machines is quite alarming," commented Mr Crooks. "One cannot bend or neglect a fertiliser spreader without affecting its operating characteristics. These will change in any case with the fertiliser being applied. Why add to the challenge with a faulty, worn or damaged machine?"

For optimum accuracy, the spreader should be tested with each of the materials to be applied during the year. In practice, this will usually be impractical due to constraints on time and labour. It will, however, be of immense help if at least the principal material used on the course is tested through the machine to ascertain the effective spread width and the distribution pattern.

There is a very good reason for this. Although a machine may have a claimed maximum spread width of, say, 12m (39ft), the effective spread width may drop by more than 50 per cent when applying lighter or less free-flowing materials. Unless compensation is made for this during application, large gaps will result in the spread pattern, causing uneven grass growth.

Similarly, the distance between the tractor's passes needs to be increased when moving from a fine, light material to one which is spread wider due to its weight and greater speed through → 36

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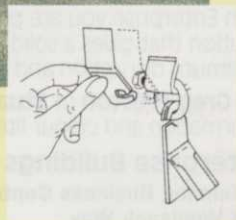
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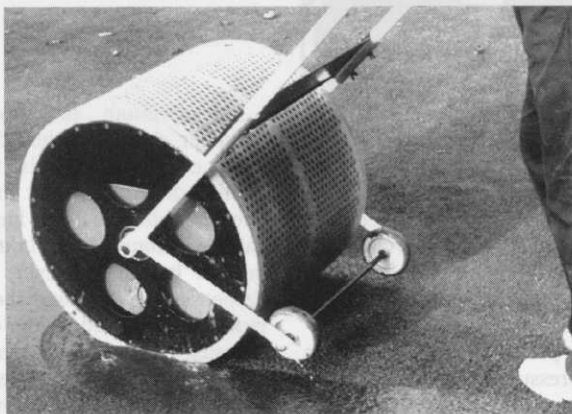
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Around the Green

Keeping in touch with news and comment from the regions

DEVON AND CORNWALL

Westurf will be with us any day now and your support will be vital to its continued success. With Westurf's success, the region will be able to keep its fees on educational events down to cost price.

Westurf has helped the section purchase a secondhand photocopier which will allow yours truly to supply all your committee members with minutes of regional and national board meetings, so if you have any queries about recent events within your Association, your local committee member will hopefully now be able to update you with all the relevant details.

With the winter programme complete, I would like to thank all of you who attended meetings. The section is always looking at ways to generate an even higher membership participation at our meetings, so I would like to hear from anyone who has a good idea to increase numbers.

Our next meeting will be the new summer tournament for the Jacobsen Trophy, to be held at Yelverton GC on Wednesday June 22 and sponsored by Jacobsen & MST. With major educational prizes on offer for golfers and non-golfers, it's one you cannot afford to miss. Details will be sent to you nearer the date.

RICHARD WHYMAN

EAST MIDLANDS

There's not a lot to report on this month as I have just come back from a golfing holiday in the Algarve. Congratulations go to Chris Lewis this month on his appointment as deputy head greenkeeper at The Leicestershire Golf Club and to Kevin James of Rushcliffe GC on his promotion to head greenkeeper.

This month we welcome Paul Redding of Rugby GC and Warren Barker of Ansty GC to our section. We have certainly made a promising start this year with new members to our section - 22 in all. Let's hope this increase continues. Any members who have not paid their subscriptions should do so straight away, or

EVENTS DIARY

April 27: Westurf, Turf Care Trade Exhibition, Long Ashton Golf Club, Bristol

June 8-9: BALI Trade Show, Stoneleigh

June 29: Southurf, Turf Care Trade Exhibition, Mottspur Park, south west London

July 14-17: Open Championship, Turnberry

August 1-3: National Tournament, Dartmouth Golf Club, Devon

September 6-8: Saltex (previously IoG) Trade Exhibition, Royal Windsor Racecourse, Berkshire.

September 22: Hayter Challenge Final, Pannal Golf Club, Harrogate

November (to be confirmed): Scotsturf

December 1: Scottish Region North Section one-day conference at Craibstone Estate, Bucksburn, Aberdeen

January 25-27, 1995: BTME '95, Harrogate International Centre

they will miss out on all the benefits.

With the golf season about to start, I would like to wish all greenkeepers a successful year, and hopefully a drier one than last year.

Our winter lecture produced a good turnout (32), but please try to send your forms back to me before the closing date in future. A thank-you should go to our two speakers, Valerie Holt and Mark Hunt, for their excellent talks, and to Lingdale GC for their hospitality and marvelous buffet meal, which made this a great night.

ANTHONY BINDLEY

CLEVELAND

Clive Higenbotham from ICI Professional Products gave a talk/slides on the management of a golf course. His technical knowledge and enthusiasm was inspiring. He covered fertilisers, fungicides, selective weedkillers etc and ensured us that good turf management was the key factor in producing a healthy sward. The new fungicide Greenshield sounds interesting as it lasts 6-8 weeks and has worm repellent quality. For empty pesticide containers, which are called special waste, ICI will collect empty, clean ICI containers free of charge through their environmental disposal service.

Just ring 0345 125398. All head greenkeepers are personally responsible for safe disposal. We cannot bury or burn anymore and we need written proof of what we have done.

David Crocher has moved from Castle Eden GC to Bishop Auckland. At Castle Eden, Graham Border has been promoted from first assistant to head greenkeeper.

A new course is being built at Ingleby Barwick, near Thornaby.

Paul Millard of Bedale GC has gained year 2 NVQ and a chainsaw certificate.

New members are Anthony McGeough (Richmond), Craig Wayman (South Shields), Allan Piggins (Hunley Hall), and Paul Stephenson and Peter Allison of Beamish Park.

BRUCE BURNELL

NORTH EAST

At last the message is getting around about joining BIGGA. I'm happy to welcome the following new members to the section:

John Walton and Kevin Walkinshaw from Heworth GC; Ashley Marshall, Matfen Hall GC; Jason Campbell, Whitley Bay GC; David Coulson, Morpeth GC; Derek Cruddas, Garsfield GC; James Stoney, Alnwick GC; Steven Quince, Alnmouth GC; Shaun Collier, and Martin Donbavand, students at Haughall College; and John Hogg, student at Elmwood College.

Providing all 1993 members pay their '94 subs, we shall be over the hundred mark, that's up 500 percent since 1984.

On the move is Parklands' Andrew Bowes who has gone to Matfen Hall GC as first assistant. Eddie Crozier, formerly head greenkeeper at Parklands, takes over at Burgher Farm.

Golf dates: April 14 - Spring Competition, South Moor GC; July 12 - Match v Secretaries, Seaham Harbour GC; October 6 - Match v East Lothian, Westerhope.

JIMMY RICHARDSON



BIGGA NATIONAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

Dartmouth Golf and Country Club 1-3 August 1994

ACCOMMODATION

Due to the popularity of the area, may we suggest that you contact BIGGA Headquarters as soon as possible if you are looking for accommodation during the National Golf Tournament. Accommodation to suit all pockets is available in the surrounding area of Dartmouth Golf and Country Club. A selection of local rates is available to competitors - call Samantha Flint at BIGGA Headquarters on 0347 838581.

The full golfing programme will appear in the May edition of Greenkeeper International.

AYRSHIRE

This season's outings have now been finalised with the spring meeting at Thornhill GC in Dumfriesshire on April 19 (also a Hayter Qualifier) and the autumn meeting at Glasgow Gailes on September 22.

As with BIGGA, our section membership is steadily growing but I am sure most of you know of someone who is not a member, so please let them know what is being missed.

Scottish Grass and Kubota have both issued invitations for our section to visit their showrooms and workshops. If anyone is interested, please inform Jim Paton, our secretary, to enable him to organise this.

On the move is David Whiffen, assistant at Dumfries and County GC who is going to Witelbacher GC in Germany. We wish him the best of luck.

The first winners of our lottery this year are R Stewart and N Carruthers, who win £30 each, and G Haughie with £40. The big £100 winner is Jill Paton. Congratulations to them. There is still plenty of time to join up, so let's be having you. If you're not in, you can't win.
DUNCAN GRAY

NORTH WALES

Firstly, a reminder that all entry forms for the Hayter Challenge Spring Tournament should be completed and returned to Terry Adamson at his new address (27 Berwyn Ave, Penyfordd, nr Chester) by April 14. No entries will be accepted after this date. Any members who have not received an application form should contact me on 0836 785751.

Any members wishing to attend a first aid course at the Welsh College of Horticulture

Around the Green



should also let me know so appropriate dates can be booked.

Finally, all nominations for the ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year award should be forwarded to me c/o The Estate Office, Carden Park, Chester CH3 9DQ by April 30.

ANDY CAMPBELL

LONDON

The second RPK supercart challenge was held in February at Bracknell indoor circuit – and it was an excellent evening. I would like to thank RPK Supplies and especially Jamie Bennett for organising the event. The overall winner was the undefeated Cameron McMillan.

I would also like to thank G Brown Implementations for organising the day trip to the Massey Ferguson factory. Everyone that went along enjoyed the excellent hospitality and were all suitably impressed with the set-up.



Another date for your diary – June 28, the summer golf tournament at Old Ford Manor. Details will be sent out nearer the time.

TONY DUNSTAN

NORTHERN

Our Christmas Golf Competition was held at

Shipleigh Golf Club, in December. There were 35 entrants on the day and I am pleased to say that all entrants did receive a prize, which they richly deserved. It rained heavily all day, in fact at night on Calender it actually announced that the largest recorded rainfall in the area was Bingley where 3 inches fell. Despite the weather MOST people enjoyed it.

Our AGM followed the Christmas golf and a brief resume of that meeting being that the following members were duly elected to office: President – Bill Mountain; Chairman – Phillip Taylor; Vice Chairman – Allan Gamble; Secretary/Treasurer – Pat Murphy; Committee – Dennis Cockburn, Ian Thompson, Colin Garnett, Michael Hannan, Telford Jarvis, Robert Gee, Robin Smith, and David Thackray.

I thank those members who attended and voiced their opinion on various matters relevant to our section. President Bill Mountain informed the meeting that this would be his 34th year in office, all I can say is keep up the good work.

May I welcome the two new committee men who have joined us this year. I am sure you will enjoy your term in office.

On behalf of the Northern Section I'd like to thank Andrew Smith for the time and effort that he put into the Northern Section during his time in office.

The visit to Gem Fertilizers was a huge success. I thought it was marvellous how everything was put together on such a huge scale. If you get the chance to visit it, I recommend you go. My thanks on behalf of the Northern Section to John Harris, Andy Hardy, Duncan Metcalfe, and Alan Dyson for making us so welcome. The visit to Martin Brothers was also

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