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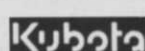


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BIGGA: BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Annual meadow grass

The debate continues

Independent turfgrass agronomist Neil Baldwin adds to the debate by giving the reasons why he believes annual meadow grass has no place on a putting green.

Ever since the first principles of greenkeeping were established, the colonisation of golf greens by annual meadow grass has been at the forefront of discussion. In fact there has probably been more debate revolving around this grass species than on all other topics relating to fine turf maintenance combined. Whilst certain agronomists are totally opposed to annual meadow grass and see no place for it within golf greens whatsoever, others are non-committed and take the 'easy' middle ground and yet more say it has a place and a role to fulfil.

The recent expansion of golf and increasing numbers of courses being constructed has led to many people offering their services as 'agronomists' and these people, usually those without any real technical training or experience have in fact spread much misinformation, resulting in a confused and misinformed greenkeeping industry. Thus, it is the aim of this article to present some of the basic facts relating to annual meadow grass, its biology and its characteristics relating to its suitability as a turfgrass species. In this way it is hoped that the basic record on annual meadow grass may be restored and this article may be presented as a true no-nonsense record of annual meadow grass in fine turf.

Annual meadow grass has been studied intensively and its biology has been reviewed several times from 1937 onwards. But only last year was an overview of chemical control of annual meadow grass published. Thus, it is inappropriate for this concise

| Growth characteristics of annual and perennial biotypes of <i>Poa annua</i> | | |
|---|---|--|
| | Annual biotype <i>Poa annua</i> var. <i>annua</i> L. Timm | Perennial biotype <i>Poa annua</i> var. <i>reptans</i> (Hauskins) Timm |
| Life cycle | Mostly annual but sometimes biennial | |
| Growth habit | Erect, compact bunch type growth | Low growing. Spreads by prostrate stolons and tillers |
| Flowers | Panicles are open with dense seed formation | Panicles are open with sparse to moderate seed formation |
| Tiller number | Variable. Low in spring and high in autumn | High. Produces secondary tillers. More stable growth. |
| Rooting | Few adventitious roots | Numerous adventitious roots |
| Seed dormancy | Will germinate after dormancy of two or more months | Can germinate within three days of maturity on the plant |

article to even attempt to rewrite everything that is known, but certain relative facts are given as its biology relates to fine turf management.

Annual meadow grass may occur in golf greens in many different forms (biotypes) ranging from true annuals to a handy perennial form. The annual form (*Poa annua* ssp. *annua* or *erecta*) seeds rapidly, usually within two months after germination and then dies. The perennial form (*P. annua* ssp. *reptans*) is slower growing, has a creeping growth habit, seeds more slowly and may overwater. In UK golf greens both forms may be found together, as

well as intermediary types but in the majority of cases it is the perennial form that dominates. Thus, we are really dealing with a perennial form of a grass with 'annual' in its name!

Now we have defined the plant we are dealing with, we can discuss its suitability as a component of fine turf.

There are several reasons why annual meadow grass is not favoured as the ideal grass for fine turf. Turf is often judged simply by its colour. A bent/fescue sward is able to maintain its dark green colour year round which is in contrast to annual meadow grass which may naturally pale to

a yellow green colour especially when under stress due, for example, to drought or cold temperatures. Its prolific seeding in late spring can give a white appearance to the surface.

However, during a limited period, annual meadow grass may have an adequate appearance, but as golf is an all-year-round sport it must be said that annual meadow grass provides a poor surface from the visual stance. From the playing viewpoint annual meadow grass is present in virtually every golf green countrywide and so it is difficult to be exact as to how it compares to 100 per cent bent/fescue swards. However from our knowledge of annual meadow grass and how it affects the surface we can come to the conclusion that it is detrimental to the playing quality of the green for the following reasons:

1. Due to its growth habit, annual meadow grass often occurs in clumps or discreet patches. Thus, in combination with the different growth habits of bent and fescue, it may produce a bumpy uneven sward.
2. Annual meadow grass produces thatch much more rapidly than bent/fescue, which can become waterlogged to produce a soft surface more prone to pitch marks and also a surface that has a slow speed.
3. Annual meadow grass is by far the grass most susceptible to attack by fusarium patch and anthracnose diseases.

These are the principal disadvantages with annual meadow grass. I make no apology by starting from the negative viewpoint as, in my opinion, these far outweigh the advantages of annual meadow grass being a species that can provide at least some form of cover on the poor compacted soils present on many greens and also is capable of taking and recovering from wear.



Colonisation of a thin turf surface by annual meadow grass

Top picture: A 100 per cent annual meadow grass sward in winter. Note the pale colour in contrast to the green fairy rings in the foreground

Bottom: Fusarium patch scars in late winter on an annual meadow grass sward



From what is known about the conditions that favour annual meadow grass, certain cultural practices have been developed to favour bent/fescue and reduce annual meadow grass at the same time. Lowering the turf pH for example by making applications of acidifying fertilisers can create conditions more favourable to maintaining bent/fescue as these grasses can grow at lower pH's than annual meadow grass.

Also there is strong evidence that excessive amounts of phosphate are present in many golf greens and that annual meadow grass is favoured by a readily available source of phosphate. In the long term, eliminating phosphate applications will help to reduce the annual meadow grass content. However, it must be remembered that phosphate persists in the turf profile and it is used very slowly, so creating low levels of phosphate may be a long process. There is also a strong

link between annual meadow grass colonisation and excessive watering. Automatic watering systems should be used carefully and judiciously, not simply because they are there and it's not raining! The importance of thatch reduction and relief of compaction by mechanical aeration cannot be over-emphasised as it is important in favouring bent/fescue and discouraging annual meadow grass.

In conclusion, we have seen that annual meadow grass has many disadvantages, and it is the author's view that it cannot make a reasonable putting surface all year round as the demands of the game of golf dictate. The way forward must be to formulate a management plan that favours bent/fescue and discourages annual meadow grass. If this is implemented then a look to the future should see annual meadow grass decline gradually and finer grass take their rightful place.

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Where quality matters.

To hire or to buy? Michael Bird weighs up the options and talks to greenkeepers with their own ideas about capital investments.

Machinery hire has become a profitable venture for Whitchurch Golf Club on one specific item of machinery.

In the early 1980s, the Cardiff club hired in a turf cutter up to four times a year to help with tee extensions, course repairs and other turf renovation work. Today, Whitchurch owns its own machine, hiring it out to other golf courses when available. The venture's success has now covered both the turf cutter's initial purchase price and its running costs.

"A two day hire used to cost us £36," explained course manager, Dennis Archer. "The machine might be on the course for up to a week at a time, but was standing idle more often than not while the ground was prepared ready for turf laying. When delivery charges were added to the total hire bill, we found that that the annual cost was substantial."

Reasoning that a turf cutter should last for many years if properly used and looked after, Dennis produced figures to demonstrate the economies of

buying. In 1985, Whitchurch purchased its own Brouwer machine for £1,700.

"As soon as it arrived, we had requests from other organisations wanting to borrow it," said Dennis. "We were happy to do this providing it was available, but with three conditions. It could go only to other golf clubs. They had to collect and return it. And a charge was made to cover blade and machine wear and tear."

Demand was such that by 1990 the turf cutter had paid for itself. The current hire charge made by

Greenkeepers count the costs of hiring or buying

Whitchurch Golf Club is £19 a day and Dennis points out that, nine years on, the machine is still in excellent condition. "The major benefit is that we have our own equipment and have first call on it. The fact that it produces an income is a bonus."

Dennis believes that a turf cutter makes an ideal hire item due to its ease of use and limited number of wearing parts. He commented that the club had looked long and hard at joint ownership of larger, more complex machines but had been dissuaded by concerns over availability during difficult seasons and the ultimate responsibility for breakages, damage and major repairs.

"Buying and hiring both have an important role to play," he said. "For example, we use a contract service for the annual patch spraying of fairways, bunker edges and other problem weed areas, and yet have our own sprayer for pesticide and liquid fertiliser applications on the greens, tees and surrounds."

"The benefit of the contractor is that he does the complete job for what it would cost us in chemicals alone. I estimate it saves the club up to £600 a year."

Pat Murphy, course manager at Shipley Golf Club, West Yorkshire, stressed that the decision whether to hire or buy was dictated first and foremost by budget. He prefers to own the machines he uses and the club has a five year forward replacement policy, placing machines on the purchase list according to need.

"Obviously, important equipment such as mowers are changed on a regular basis," he commented. "Other items that we would like but cannot afford immediately are noted and hired until we have the money available to buy them."

An exception to that rule is the Robin Dagger, a portable machine which injects compressed air through a steel probe to loosen soil and relieve compaction at depths up to 45cm (18in).

"We hire it in to do all the greens twice a year and the tees when needed," noted Pat. "Although it does a superb job with minimal surface disturbance, the club will not consider spending almost £4,000 on a machine which can be hired for £300 a week. It's almost made the list, but concerns over long-term reliability and running costs will probably keep it as a hire item."

One machine which went onto the club's "shopping list" the first year it was hired was a combined flail cutter, scarifier and sweeper with integral collection hopper. "We used to hire one in twice a year for leaf collection in the autumn and general turf tidying in early spring," explained Pat. "When we saw its potential for scarifying and mowing, we realised it could earn its keep throughout the year."

Despite the obvious benefits, it took eight years for the machine to reach the top of the purchase list. The problem, as Pat explained, was that long-term forward planning and budgeting was not formalised at the club until four or five years ago.

As a result, Shipley Golf Club did not take delivery of its own machine – an RL 1502 Versatile unit from Richard Long Engineering – until last autumn.

The contract hire of a JCB digger/loader with driver is one item that will, however, remain an annual event. Used for greens' reconstruction, tee building and drainage works, the man and machine arrive in September and remain for about a week. "We've had the same operator for the

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A popular hire item with most golf clubs for seasonal course works, the digger-loader can make a good buy at plant hire auction sales

past 24 years, so he knows what he's doing," commented Pat. "The combination makes a valuable short-term addition to my team."

Brian Turner, head greenkeeper at Worplesdon Golf Club, near Guildford, Surrey, used to hire in a JCB and driver for tree planting and course construction works two or three times during the year. That was until he noticed that a nearby plant hire company was holding a liquidation sale.

"We picked up a JCB and a vibrating roller at knock-down prices," he said. "I can now choose the optimum times to carry out course work to suit the weather and turf conditions. If it rains one day, we can get on with another job without paying for a day's wasted hire. The vibrating roller has also proved invaluable for path construction. I recommend all greenkeepers to keep an eye open in the local and trade press for plant hire sell-offs."

Gerry Haynes is responsible for 18 and nine hole parkland courses at Hartsbourne Golf and Country Club, Bushey Heath, Herts, where hiring is preferred to buying in two particular situations: For short, intensive jobs carried out once or twice a year and for those tasks which tend to be highly repetitive or slow and, as a result, boring for his staff.

"Verti-draining is one example which combines both situations," he said. "I cannot see that it is worthwhile buying and maintaining a £12,000-plus machine which will be used for a maxi-

mum of three weeks out of 52."

To ensure that the machine and operator are available when he needs them, Gerry books the Verti-drain up to nine months ahead with Surrey-based contract firm, Turf Machinery Ltd. However, this arrangement does not commit him to taking the service if the weather or turf conditions are not suitable.

"The company is both flexible and helpful, always checking a few days ahead that we are ready for the Verti-drain," he pointed out. "I use them also for hollow coring every other year. They are the only local contract hire firm I know which offers a mechanised core collection service. As a result, we can do all 27 holes in a day. The core collector can clear 18 greens in the time it took us to do one by hand."

A different specialist contract hire service is offered by



Dennis Archer, course manager at Whitchurch Golf Club. Hiring out the club's turf cutter has paid for its purchase and running costs

Turfmech Machinery Ltd in the form of fairway scarifying and grass collection. Based at Hixon in Staffordshire, the firm uses its own scarifier, tractor-mounted blower and vacuum collector to treat up to nine fairways in a day.

Head greenkeeper at Stone Golf Club, Mark O'Malley, has used the service for the past three years to encourage stronger and finer grass regrowth on fairways suffering from compaction due to increasing levels of play. "We had not carried out any regular fairway maintenance during the previous 10 years," he explained. "Drainage was suffering, so we bought a fairway slitter."

Being a nine hole private course, funds for machinery investment are limited to essential items. The ability to hire in a contract fairway scarifying service therefore proved a great attraction, especially when told that for around £1,000, one is hiring machinery valued at £30,000 together with the labour to carry out the work.

"The fairways have benefited tremendously from the treatment and golfers have commented on the improved grass growth," commented Mark. "We plan to scarify again this year and then will probably alternate it with a hired Verti-drain, according to need."

Hiring of a rotary mower is not a typical golf course requirement, as most clubs are normally well equipped with grass cutting equipment. Blairgowrie Golf Club in Perthshire, however, needed a rotary mower for a rather special

task – the management of heather covering large areas of the 54 hole course.

Course manager, Alan Holmes, explained that the freedraining glacial soils did not encourage heavy grass growth. As a result, gangs were used for the semi-rough while the club's flail mower kept the rougher area under control.

Although the flail machine had been used successfully on the heather in the past, its action is quite aggressive and the plants took maybe two seasons to recover. Burning was out of the question.

"I reasoned that the best course would be regular topping to maintain even, yet controlled growth," he said. "However, I did not want to spend £12,000 on a machine that would be used for only 20 days a year. Hiring was the obvious solution."

Turning to Huxleys Grass Machinery at Broxburn, near Edinburgh, Alan hired a Turf Blazer 727 outfront ride-on rotary mower. "We experimented at various cutting heights and found that 5 inches was ideal," he said. "Apart from doing a good job on the heather, it appears that rotary topping will also help keep the broom at bay."

"Hiring provides sufficient flexibility without an accompanying high level of expenditure. For our particular needs, I see no advantage in owning a machine whose depreciation in the first year is equivalent to three times the hire charge."

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Looking back at The Way Forward

The Way Forward, a discussion document of British golf course management produced by the R&A's greenkeeping panel, is now five years old. It pointed the way for greenkeepers and course management to go, but did it change anything? During a recent trip to Scotland, Chris Boiling went to see Michael Bonallack, secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, to find out. After the initial pleasantries, the conversation with the former amateur champion went like this...

Greenkeeper International: The Way Forward is widely read in greenkeeping circles. Can you give me some insight into how it came about, the R&A's role in it, and whether it's changed anything?

Michael Bonallack: The R&A have a very strange role in golf. We are the governing authority for the rules of golf and amateur status, and we have no other responsibility really apart from the championship side where we run the Open Championship, amateur championships, and pick players for Great Britain and Ireland's amateur teams.

We got involved in the Way Forward as a result of forming a committee to decide where the money generated from the Open was spent. We decided that there were three particular areas where money could usefully be spent – greenkeeping, new golf course development, and coaching for youngsters.

This was at a time when greenkeeping associations were not totally unified, as they are now, and we formed a technical committee to examine the various problems that they could see in greenkeeping. On that committee, with others, were Jim Arthur, who is an agronomist, a golf club secretary in Keith Almond, and Walter Woods, who's the course superintendent here at St Andrews. In this document the committee set out what they thought was the way forward for committees to go about greenkeeping matters in the future. It was putting more emphasis on the greenkeeper controlling how the course was maintained rather than six or seven committee people who were there for one or two years dictating the policy. In that document they set out their ideal committee structure,

which is a committee of one plus the head greenkeeper.

Once it was published, we said to the national unions, 'OK, this is what we believe should happen and now we hope that the national unions will take this up and will educate the golf clubs, and committees in golf clubs, on how they should go about reacting to the proposals with their greenkeeping staff.' The English Golf Union in particular have been very active in this respect, and run seminars and educational programmes and I think it's gone well in England. It has in Scotland but probably not to the same extent.

We also formed a joint golf course committee which is composed of a chairman from the R&A and representatives from the four Home Unions. The idea of that committee is to recommend to our external funds committee areas where we might usefully provide money whether it's for research into greenkeeping matters, whether it's in support for the Greenkeepers Association, or greenkeeper training through the Greenkeeper Training Committee. The joint golf course committee has been fairly active, they've now become involved in things like the environment and in particular in setting a standard which we hope will be accepted by Brussels, so that golf will be setting its own environ-

mental standards rather than having them imposed on the game by bureaucrats in Brussels. That is really where we've got to now. These things are all ongoing, it's a comparatively slow process – you don't expect to change things overnight, but I think certainly people are more aware now, and we still get requests for copies of The Way Forward from golf clubs.

I think the standards that were set out in that booklet are becoming much more acceptable, people recognise now the needs for



firmer, faster greens, for regular aeration, for less water, less fertilisers, and this is common practice now. Nearly every club seems to use deep aeration every winter on their greens. And so I think the Way Forward has done a lot of good.

GI: Are the problems highlighted in it, like over-play, year-round golf, faulty construction, unsound agronomic management, ever-changing committees, insufficient budgets, any better now?

MB: In a way I think things are better because there have been a number of new golf courses built, so some of the demand that was causing the problems has been taken off existing courses. I think the human aspect, through greenkeeper education, is improving all the time. Standards of greenkeeping are improving, the advisory services are very good, and, generally, golf clubs are accepting now the need for proper maintenance.

GI: Is the golfing public becoming better educated about greenkeeping matters?

MB: Yes, I think they are. They'll soon tell you if the course is not in good condition....

GI: But from a knowledgeable point of view?

MB: I think they recognise now that it is a false idea to have soft greens where you can stop the ball with almost any club. I think that was one of the biggest problems we had in golf – the wish that anybody could stop a ball on the green whereas the pros have considerable skill to stop it and they do it on very

Looking back at The Way Forward

hard greens. I think greenkeepers tended to pander to the players who wanted to stop it just by making the greens softer – anybody can stop it on a soft green, that doesn't require any skill at all. Even the average golfer recognises now that that's not a good way to go about it because with soft greens you get thatch and you then get all the problems of poor greens in the winter, the course closed, or playing on temporary greens. That's one thing I think which has improved over the past few years, the number of courses now that don't require temporary greens in the winter. They can keep going on their proper greens because they've been properly maintained.

I think there have been a lot of improvements but a lot of them are fairly gradual and you don't notice that they're taking place. When the Way Forward was written very few courses would use aeration to any great extent. A lot of clubs have bought their own verti-drain machine now. That's become a regular occurrence now whereas it was the exception rather than the rule. That can only be good.

GI: Is the technical panel still in existence?

MB: Yes, they have been very busy in trying

to draw up a British specification for construction of golf greens. If courses are constructed in the right way in the first instance then there is going to be less chance of them going wrong during the maintenance.

GI: What else are they working on?

MB: The other thing they've been working on is environmental concerns. The environmental lobby has certainly become fairly vocal recently. There's a group, I think, formed in the Far East which is the Anti-Golf Group trying to stop all golf development, but I don't think they'll have very much success. But golf has got to be seen to be responsible and not to desecrate the countryside and in actual fact golf has a very strong case as it protects wildlife rather than destroys it. The game's got nothing to apologise for, it's just got to publicise its work better and show people that golf courses are havens for wildlife, you get rare flowers, animals and insects that don't exist anywhere else but they do on golf courses. So this is an area where we have been actively concerned.

Also, greenkeeper training, the committee has become involved in that, and in research at the Sports Turf Research Institute. They recommend to our general committee which areas of research should be encouraged and which ones we should give money to. It is ongoing, you can't expect the manufacturers to do it all. Manufacturers are trying to sell a product whereas the STRI should be trying to find out what is the best way of tackling a particular problem without any commercial bias.

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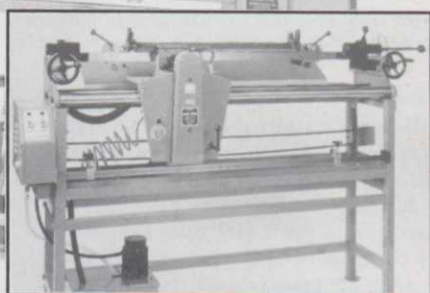
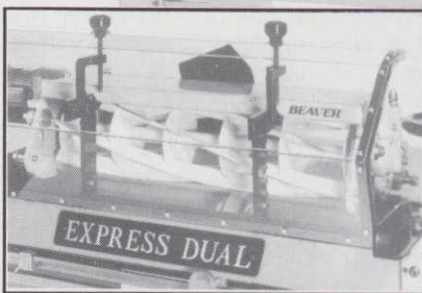
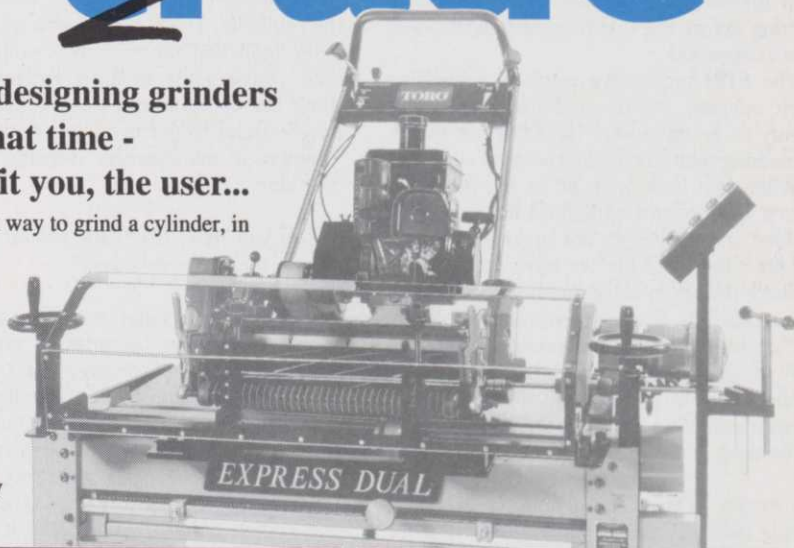
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GI: In The Way Forward, those areas where the panel would like to see action taken were asterisked. How many of those areas have seen change?

MB: I think we have seen some movement away from the demands for Augusta type courses which call for a lot of water and fertiliser and the idea that green is beautiful.

Nature conservancy, as I have said, is something that is a concern and is being dealt with. A proper working relationship with the Nature Conservancy Council is being established. We've published a joint booklet with them on nature conservancy.

Tests are certainly going on on the effect which golf balls have on playing surfaces. That's certainly being looked at, especially the possible damage they can do to greens.

The Unions have certainly become more aware, as I've said, conducting their own seminars at club and county level.

The role of the greenkeeper has undoubtedly grown over the years, through the growth of BIGGA, the exhibition at Harrogate and their profile as shown in the magazine. That's one of the things that they suggested, that BIGGA needs a much higher profile in putting across the role of greenkeepers, well that's happened.

The STRI must have ways of publicising their advisory service. I think there is still plenty to be done with the STRI but that is something that is being looked at.

When you look at it, all in all, the areas which have been highlighted have all been tackled to some extent, not as greatly as some people would like but we have no authority to force people to carry out any of these recommendations. It was an educational process in that the panel put up certain ideas which they thought would be good for the long-term future of golf in the hope that people would adopt them. And I'm glad to say that many clubs have.

GI: At the BTME I heard some greenkeepers saying that they thought it might be time for another Way Forward. Are there any plans? Has it been discussed at all?

MB: Well, if there really was a need for a new Way Forward we would be happy to back it. I'm not sure that we should take a lead in that. I'm not sure what is meant by a new Way Forward, it suggests that the ideas put forward in this document have been superseded by something else. That's a very different matter, but I don't think they have. I think the basics are still the same, it's just a question of re-raising them and reminding people of them. If that's the idea, fine, but it's not really our role. Having done it once I think it's up to the Unions and probably BIGGA to get together on that. I think the greenkeepers, as this document suggested, should be taking a very much higher profile in all greenkeeping matters. Maybe they should be relaunching The Way Forward.

GI: In general, what's the R&A's view of greenkeepers?

MB: We are totally supportive of the role of greenkeepers, that's why we've been supporting them financially and also trying to help them with the education of greenkeepers, we help the greenkeeping colleges. We think that

Looking back at The Way Forward

greenkeepers are one of the keys to the whole future of the game. If you've got good head greenkeepers you're going to have good golf courses. Without good golf courses you won't have many golfers.

GI: What more can greenkeepers do to improve their lot?

MB: They are already making it a much more attractive industry for people to come into and I think that the new video produced by the GTC and BIGGA is going to attract a lot of youngsters into the profession because they can now see that it is a very worthwhile and rewarding career. I think that one of the things that they have got to do is to sell the opportunities that are there in greenkeeping because golf is still expanding, especially on the continent. There are still new golf courses being built and for every new course that's built you're going to need greenkeepers. I think the opportunities for greenkeepers to progress and to get involved, as they do in America, in management is going to come over here.

GI: Do you think the Home Unions could do more to support greenkeepers?

MB: Some of the Home Unions are a bit wary about greenkeepers getting too powerful. I don't see that as a problem at all. I think the greenkeepers should be encouraged to improve their education. The Home Unions are certainly supporting greenkeeper training and education, but I think some people were a bit scared that the Association was becoming a trade union rather than an association. They thought there might be problems with clubs being faced with demands for wage increases and that it would be far more costly to maintain golf courses. I don't think that's a danger at all. I think as greenkeepers become better educated and better trained you're going to pay them more because you get the results on the golf course – the golf course will be better maintained and you'll get more people playing and you'll get a bigger income.

GI: When the Way Forward was produced, BIGGA was in its infancy. What are the R&A's views now about the Association, its role, where it's going?

MB: I think it has developed very well. It has a definite image now. It has its own trade magazine. It has its own exhibition which has been very successful. And I think the whole profile of the greenkeeping profession has been enhanced.

GI: What exactly is your job as secretary of the R&A?

MB: If you look at it in terms of a company, the R&A is a parent company of a number of subsidiary companies. We have a general committee which is the overall committee of the

club. Under that we have a championship committee with its own championship secretary which is responsible for running all the British amateur championships (boys, youths, seniors) and international matches, and they also run the Open Championship which is the oldest championship in the world and now a very big business. We then have the rules of golf committee which is responsible worldwide for the rules of golf, except in the United States and Mexico, and that committee again has its own secretary and that's responsible for making new rules, for making decisions on existing rules, and educating people on rules. They run seminars and exams for referees.

The amateur status committee, also has its own secretary and is responsible for laying down the rules of amateur status worldwide. Then we have the finance committee which is responsible for all the financial affairs of the club and the club committee which is responsible for the R&A as a golf club in St Andrews, and run like any other golf club except we're in the peculiar position that we don't own or run a golf course.

These are the committees and I am secretary of the R&A as an entity covering those different functions. It's my job to make sure the committees operate in accordance with the policy of the general committee. They lay down the policy and, through the committee secretaries, it's my job to make sure the policies are followed. We are also involved in the World Amateur Golf Council which is responsible for running the world amateur team championships, for men and women, on a biannual basis. Then we also have sub-committees, such as the external funds supervisory committee, and their job is to distribute the profits that are made from the Open back into the game of golf for the development of the game on as wide a scale as possible because one of the policies the general committee laid down many years ago was that the profits from the Open cannot go back into the R&A as a club. The profits from the Open have to be distributed for the benefit of golf, and it's for this reason that we have been supporting greenkeepers and greenkeeping matters, because that is one positive way of putting money back into the game for the benefit of everyone.

GI: How long have you been doing this job?

MB: Nearly 11 years now. I came to the R&A in June 1983 and took over as secretary in September '83. It seems like yesterday...

GI: Do you still play golf?

MB: I play occasionally, when I can. Everyone imagines a golf club secretary has a lot of time to play golf, but that isn't the case.

GI: What's your handicap these days?

MB: Three.

GI: Do you play here at St Andrews?

MB: Yes, but I play mainly at Elie which is just down the road and is a wonderful example of how a golf course should be. The greens there are superb all year round, never on temporary greens. The greens are fast and true, even in the middle of winter. And the course is never closed unless it's got snow on it...