



Lovely atmosphere, no great hassle... and according to one league table, the best nine hole course in the world. Bob Gee of Royal Worlington and Newmarket Golf Club explains why he thinks he's got the best job in greenkeeping



Royal Worlington's Martin Law, left and Bob Gee: they plan to stay at the course all their working lives

The only way we'll leave is by being carried out in a box

These men admit they've got the easiest job in greenkeeping. There are only two of them maintaining one of the world's top 100 courses, but they wouldn't swap it for any other position. They wouldn't swap it for a course with an irrigation system, or one with USGA-spec greens.

Bob Gee, 52, has been the head greenkeeper at the Royal Worlington and Newmarket Golf Club, eight miles north-east of Newmarket, for 36 years and Martin Law, 46, has been assisting him for 27 years. They both joined the club from school and plan to stay there for the rest of their working lives, just as the previous team of Harry Rutter and Claude Rutherford did.

"No one leaves, they carry you out in a box. No one wants to leave, it's got a lovely atmosphere and there's no great hassle," says Bob, summing up the appeal of the club, which was founded in 1893, three years after the course came into existence.

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'Colour is secondary. Greens should be firm and fast. We're growing a putting surface, not a crop'

as soon as you drive up and find the course virtually empty, yet there is a notice on the first tee stating 'No three or four balls permitted'.

Royal Worlington is the only nine-hole course in *Golf World* magazine's top 100 courses, and it has been decried by *The New Yorker* magazine as "far and away the best nine-hole course in the world". Much of its prominence is due to the fact that it is home of the Cambridge University golf team whose ranks have been filled with such influential characters as Bernard Darwin, who used to refer to it as "the sacred nine", Harry Colt, Henry Longhurst and Donald Steel.

Money alone will not buy you membership of this exclusive club. You have to know someone or be a Cambridge Blue to get in. This has led to accusations of it being snobby, but we saw no evidence of this during our visit to the club. The atmosphere was very relaxed and friendly and one member bought a round of drinks for the greenstaff and me.

The 102-year-old club has just 350 members and many of these only play once or twice a year. One member was playing his first round there for 30 years. This is one reason why Bob and Martin think they have it easy – Royal Worlington must be one of the few courses in the country that is under-played. Another reason why they are lucky is that the club was built on a superb parcel of land. It's in the middle of Suffolk, 55 miles from the sea, but the soil is a sandy loam that many links courses would love to own. "It's a fluke of nature. It's perfect for a golf course but not much good for anything else," says Bob.

The original plan in 1890 was to build 18 holes, but some of the acreage was rather marshy, so on the advice of Captain AM Ross, an experienced local golfer, the founders of the club chose to lay out nine holes on the sandy soil at the southern end of the plot and let it go at that. Captain Ross is credited with designing the original nine holes on the 60-acre site. A few changes were made in 1906 by an up-and-coming architect called Harry Colt. Over the last 89 years, no alterations of any consequence have been made.

Members appreciate that. In a



One of the toughest greens in golf: the 5th at Royal Worlington

fast-changing word it is a refreshing constant. As you drive down the road to the clubhouse, an old brick farmhouse painted cream, it is like entering a time warp.

I could just as easily have been meeting Harry and Claude as Bob and Martin. In fact, I would have liked to have talked to Harry who, during his long reign, set the standard of maintenance for the course. Rutter's secret was a minimum of watering, no fertiliser, and plenty of common sense.

Rutter had some unconventional but effective means of taking care of the course. One was the use of a squareboard rake, an implement whose head is a thin slab of wood through which nails have been driven so that their points protrude. Each March, employing these rude rakes, he tore the famous greens to pieces. A fortnight later, fresh young fescue grass of the finest texture would begin to establish itself. The rake may have gone but many of Rutter's principles are still being followed today.

Original greens

As far as anyone knows, the greens are those laid out by Ross

or Colt, and have no drainage system. Yet they drain superbly. One minute they could be flooded, half an hour later they will be dry. "It's nothing we do, it's nature," says Bob appreciatively. He has hollow-cored them once and verti-drained them twice in the last ten years. But they are spiked a lot.

The greens are one of the main reasons why people remember this course. They have some of the most wicked contours in the world. Donald Steel describes the green on the famous par 3 5th as being shaped like a vaulting horse. The narrow green falls away abruptly on both sides – on the right, to a stream and, on the left, to a basin of thatchy rough 20ft below the green. There are no bunkers on this 170-yard hole. None are needed. From either side it takes a very deft recovery to stop the ball on the putting surface and prevent it from slipping down the slope on the other side. Tales of good golfers "ping-ponging" their way to an 11 are common.

The greens are not just renowned for their undulations, they are also famed for their

speed. They are always fast (measuring 10-11ft most days on the stimpmeter) and they are in superb condition.

They do not always look green but Bob says: "Colour is secondary. Greens should be firm and fast. We're growing a putting surface, not a crop. It doesn't matter how it looks as long as it putts well."

The sward is 45% fescue, 45% bents and 10% rubbish (Yorkshire fog and annual meadowgrass). Last year they were overseeded for the first time in 100 years. Bob chose Barenbrug's Bar 1 mixture containing Baruba/Bargreen chewing fescue and Heriot/Bar-dot browntop bent.

The greens are hand-watered when necessary. There is no irrigation system. Bob believes this is an advantage: "We don't need it. It's ruined more greens than anything. Not through the greenkeeper's fault, through members. They say, 'We've paid all that money for that expensive watering system – turn it on', whether the greens need it or not. 'They're looking a bit dry, put the water on'."

Bob says it is much easier to

ruin a good green than to make a bad green good. And the easiest way to ruin a green is by overwatering it and overfeeding it. At Royal Worlington they will never overwater their putting surfaces. "We can't. No one's going to stand there with a hosepipe for too long at 6 in the morning. Too little is always better than too much."

Hand-watering also means they can see which areas need it most.

Neither Bob nor Martin have had any formal greenkeeper training. They use the techniques they picked up from their predecessors. Bob was taught by Claude Rutherford, the head greenkeeper for 20 years, who was, before that, Harry Rutter's assistant for many, many more years. The only thing that has really changed during Bob's 36 years at the club is the machinery that's used.

When he came as a boy he used one of the original Ransomes Overgreen walk-behind triples; now he uses a Jacobsen Greens King Mk4 "because members like the greens cut before they play on a Sunday and there's no way I'm getting up at 4am."

They are cut every day in summer (never lower than 3/16ths and never striped) and once a week in winter (1/4in).

There are no temporary greens and you get the feeling 'temporaries' are as alien a concept at Worlington as change. "There should not be temporary greens anywhere in this country," says Bob, without meaning to sound arrogant, "because the weather is not that bad. If you look after the greens in the summer, you will not need temporary greens in the winter."

The course only closes if there is snow or if they've had rain on top of frozen greens and the top 1/4in thaws. "If we close the course, they know it's for the good of the course and we're not just being Bolshie."

They no longer mix their own topdressing, they buy it in. But since they've been doing this, they've had dry patch problems. To combat this they are using a wetting agent twice a year on

advice from the STRI who have been making annual visits for the last six or seven years.

Four times a year (April, May, June, July) they mix a little sulphate of ammonia, potash and iron with the topdressing.

No trolley ban

Trolleys are allowed all year. "Trolleys are banned from 9am on January 1 to 9.01am on January 1," jokes Bob. "It's a con, they tell people to buy wide-wheeled trolleys and then as soon as there's an ounce of rain they say you can't use them on the course. That's ridiculous. There's as much weight on the bottom of the trolley as there is on the bottom of your feet. You can use markers. But there are a lot of old people who can't play golf without trolleys. There are no trolley bans here," adds Bob, who admitted he uses a narrow-wheeled trolley to cart the hole-cutter around while changing the holes.

Another reason Bob feels lucky is that he has a superb chairman of green. Derek Rains has been in his post for five years and often lends a hand on the course. "He gets out on the tractor and pulls a dragmat across the greens. But he's not very good with a shovel," says Bob with a smile. One of his farm workers, Brian Hobbs, helps out on the course too, bringing a JCB with him to construct tees.

New tees are one of the few signs of change at the course. While other courses move bunkers to take account of technological advances in the game, many bunkers at Worlington lie in wait in case anyone turns up with a gutta-percha golf ball. But Bob was quick to point out that not all the bunkers were as obsolete as they appear. The bunker by the putting green, which you're not allowed to practise out of, comes into play if they swap the 9th green and the putting green.

One of the most famous throwbacks to the olden days is the small hole in the wall of the clubhouse lounge. That's the bar!

Although they don't like change, one change is imminent for Bob - his first contract of employment is being drawn up!

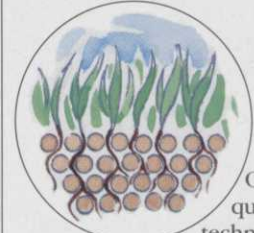
TIP
"If you've got a patch of moss, put the pin there in the winter and let the golfers scratch it out for you"
- Bob Gee



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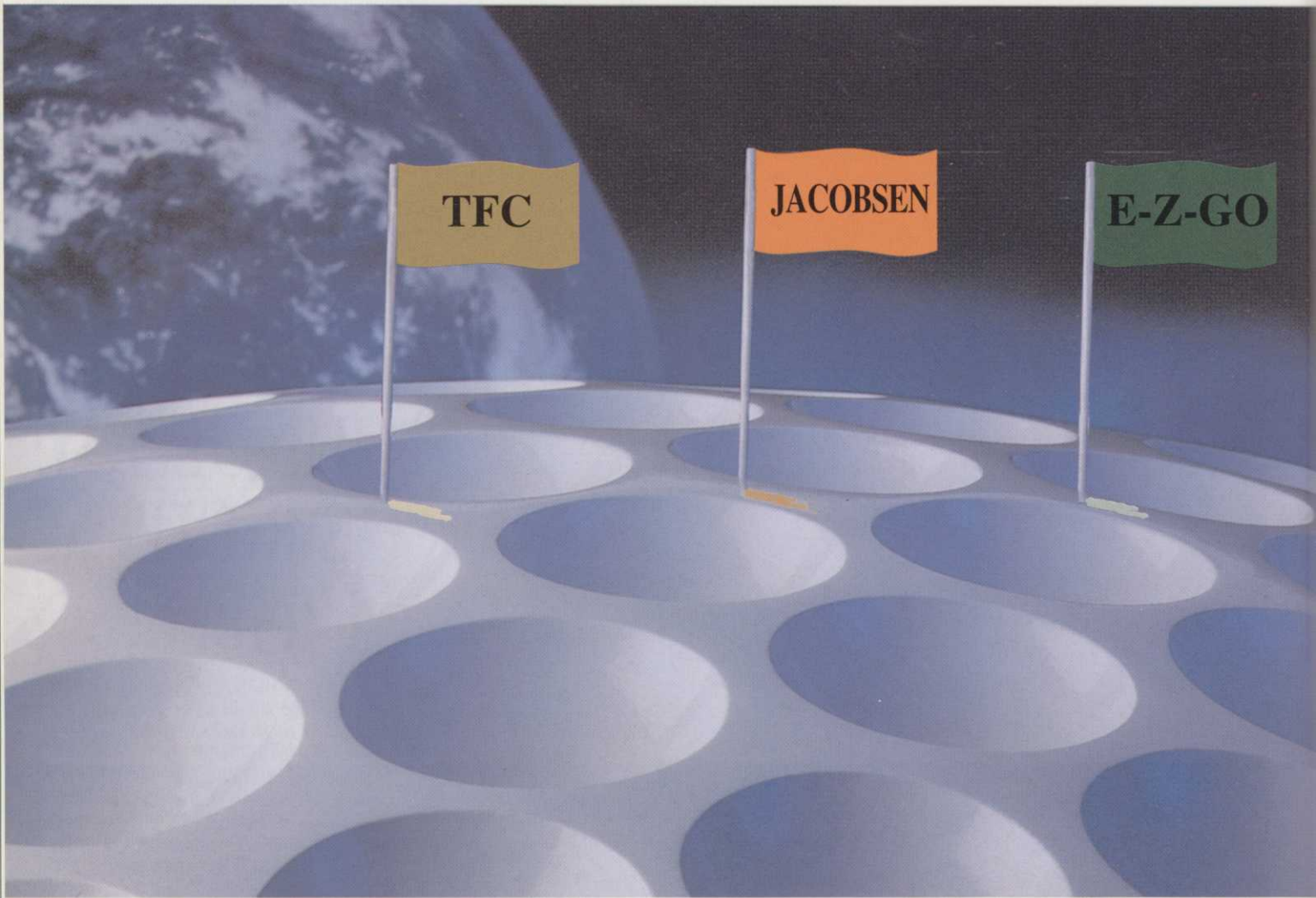
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Bright future

Jacobsen's René Orban, pictured right, has seen an industry once content to plod along change into something much more vital. It's great now, he tells Carol Dutton

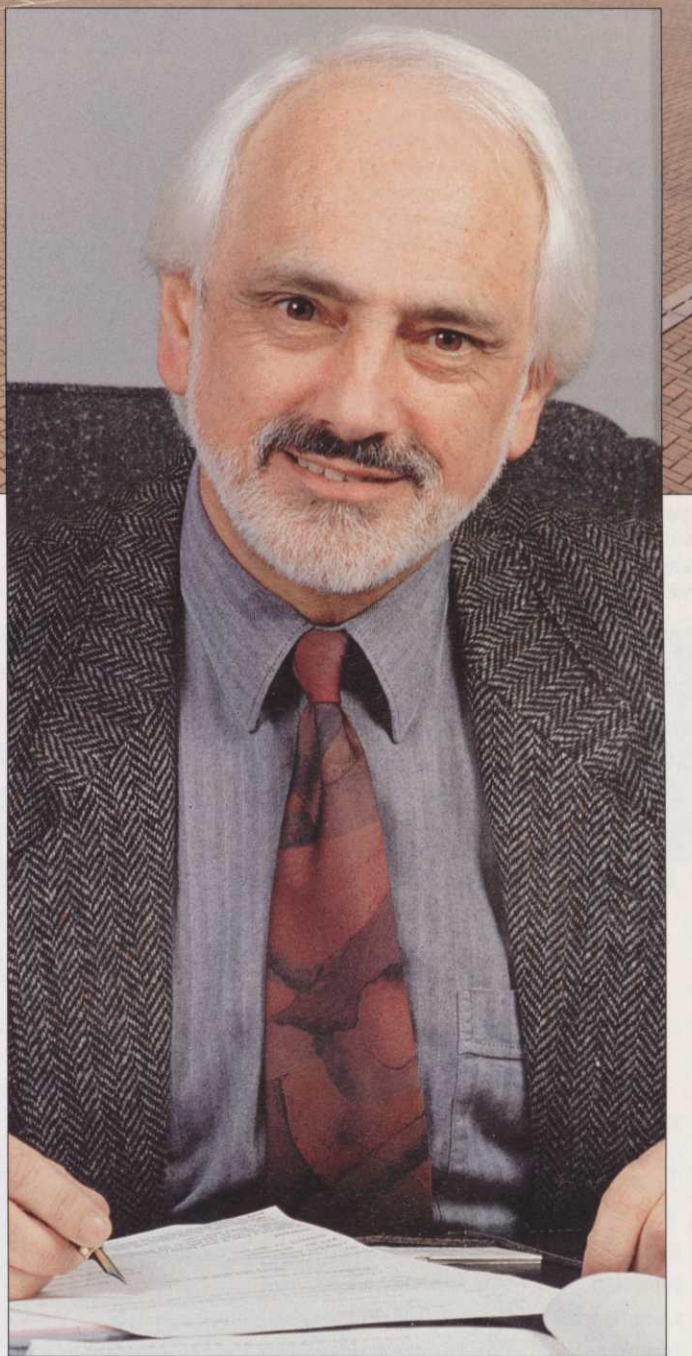
Jacobsen/Textron, the American conglomerate worth approximately £6 billion, is expanding its European operations with the help of a man who would never grab the limelight.

As managing director of Jacobsen E-Z-Go UK Ltd, he is a marketer who puts sales promotion and advertising way down his list of priorities and whose image is as far removed from Saatchi and Saatchi as you can get.

Yet René Orban took Jacobsen/Textron successfully to Australia, developed the Irish market and has seen a 100% increase in UK sales since he took over six years ago. Textron has now given him their E-Z-Go golf car range for the UK and made Textron Finance Corporation (TFC) available for the first time outside the

US under René's control. He must be doing something right! I set out to discover the secret of his success.

In 1989, after 30 years in the business with Kubota, Yanmar and Massey Ferguson, René was head-hunted by Jacobsen/Textron to manage its operations in the UK. Formerly under the control of Orag, the company's European distributor, Jacobsen had gained a bad reputation for supplying spare parts and suffered from lack of financial support. The parent company created a UK subsidiary at King's Lynn, bypassing the European operation and pumped money into the enterprise, air freighting parts directly from the US. By the time René took over, the Jacobsen name had regained a place in the



UK golf market, but there was a desperate need to consolidate.

"My immediate task was to regain credibility by creating a professional operation and managing the UK sales. Up until 1989, sales had been haphazard, with a mixture of direct selling from the main office and indirect selling through dealers."

René created an exclusive dealer network of hand-picked individuals and cut out direct sales altogether. Research showed that UK customers liked local access to products and relied on a strong personal rapport. Up until this point, René admits that the reputation of Jacobsen dealers in the UK had

been poor. "They came bottom of the list, both for supply and service," he said.

The dealers immediately became "stocking dealers", receiving new machines on the premises, with regular training from Jacobsen UK. René's four business managers (deliberately not called sales managers), were appointed primarily to support their dealers and develop new business. René insists that Jacobsen dealers are not customers. "There is only one customer – the customer," he says. "Without wanting to sound too American, we look on all our dealers as business partners."

By 1990, as the business moved to new premises in Kettering and a full-scale distribution centre was set up, dealers could expect spare parts despatched the same day (if ordered by 3pm), regular training on preventative maintenance, fitting and operation, spe-



Jacobsen has appointed two new dealers: Chelmsford Grass Machinery Ltd for the Essex and north-east London area and SCATS (Southern Counties Agricultural Trading Society) for East and West Sussex.

cially trained demonstrators ready to go anywhere in the country and support from their business managers, when approaching major clients. New product information was pro-

vided by *Turf Talk*, the company newsletter, which has grown from a four-page hand-out to a mini magazine.

This year has seen the launch of the customer service log book building on the success of the customer satisfaction survey. It's a form which evaluates every aspect of the customer's experience with Jacobsen from the "sales person's understanding of his needs" to the "overall rating of the product". All forms are fed into the computer with the results going back to the US for analysis before returning to the UK and René, the dealer and business manager. This vital information system which has been operating for over two years relies heavily on customer participation. Not everyone likes filling in forms, but the incentive – having bought your machine – is a free set of protective clothing.

René runs a tight ship. The entire Kettering operation, serving 22 UK dealers, carries just 20 staff, again, hand-picked. René chooses people he can work with. "It's important to exchange new ideas and concepts in order to develop," he said.

The head of Jacobsen Australia was also carefully chosen. Following his own marketing strategy of "research and information lead-

ing to the right decisions", René spent his first two weeks in Oz gathering information on golf courses before deciding on a direct selling approach, "But I also found the right man to run it," he said.

Looking back, René has seen a once conservative industry, content to plod along, change for something much more vital. "It's great now," he says, "Full of new ideas and concepts which just would not have existed ten years ago." These include the upgrading of greenkeepers, at last being recognised as professionals and not just someone who cuts grass.

Whether Jacobsen UK has been successful can be judged by the comments of one of our members who I talked to at Harrogate. Asked about the differences between grass cutting machinery on the market, he replied that there was nothing to choose between most of them but Jacobsen's service was the best.

Fundamentals

René will say that the fundamentals of business are the same, "A professional approach, creating the confidence to buy", but perhaps his secret lies in his personal system, evolved over the years which employs in his words, "The best use of our people resources and applying these to our products."

Considering the fierce possessiveness displayed towards his staff, the staunch back-up of his dealers/business partners, the commitment to training both within Jacobsen and BIGGA – René was one of the first to join the Golden Key Circle and the brains behind the Ecology Booklet out next month – perhaps it is the value and recognition of people which sets him apart.

As an employee or a Jacobsen dealer/business partner, a great deal will be expected of you in return for first-class support. As a customer, you can rest assured, for as the man says, "Selling is the ability to deliver."

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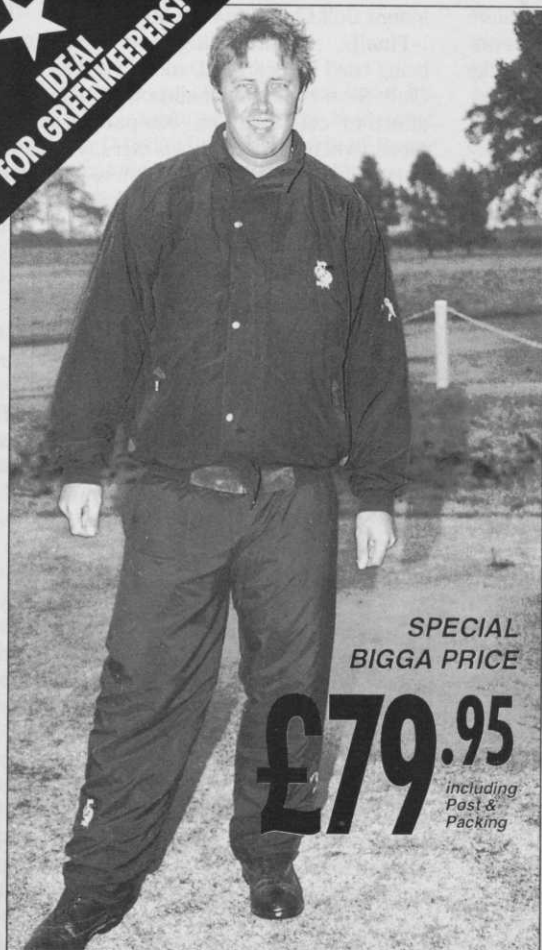
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Around the Green

Keeping in touch with news and comment from the regions

CLEVELAND

There was a good attendance for our February meeting at Darlington GC. Gerald Brady, regional manager for Rhone-Poulenc Environmental Products, talked about the new Guardian grass seed coating which prevents damping off and fusarium and the new selective weedkiller Spearhead.

Our membership is now 97. Congratulations, chaps! I hope to see many of you at Wearside GC on April 27 when our Spring Tournament gets under way at 1.30pm. Bring a friend or guest partner, it's a great opportunity to meet other greenkeepers and have a chat. Our two golf organisers are Bob Lawton and Chris Fiddel.

Saltburn GC has promoted Alan Reed to first assistant.



BRUCE BURNELL

EAST SCOTLAND

It is with regret that after 17 years as secretary of the east section, I have to announce the resignation of Willie Blair. Willie has been a stalwart member of both SIGGA and BIGGA, giving both his maximum support and time.

I have extra reason to be sorry as without Willie's guidance I would not have been a greenkeeper. Through the past few years Willie has not had it easy, but has always had a smile and willingness to help other members. I am sure I speak for nearly all members who came into contact with him when I say I will miss the shout of "I'll have a vodka, lime and soda." Thanks for all the work, Willie, and please don't be a stranger.

However, BIGGA needs to move on, so a big welcome to Robert Hogarth, our new man at the helm. Please bear with us until we get things sorted out and normal service will be resumed.

PETER ORMISTON, Chairman

...Greenkeepers on the move in east Scotland: Stevie Dixon - Newbattle GC to Kingsknowe GC; Graham Hobbs - Torphin Hill GC to Bathgate GC; Stuart Cruikshanks - Bathgate GC to Deer Park GC; Billy Hudson moves from first assistant to head man at Newbattle GC; Rory Campbell, assistant at Muirfield, takes over as head man at Torphin Hill GC; and Michael Osbourne moves from Newbattle GC to Murrayfield GC as an assistant.

Dates for your diary: The spring outing at the Glen GC on Wednesday April 12 will soon be upon us. So let's see a big turnout as this is the second qualifier for the Hayter tournament. Another skittles night has been arranged for you at Right Wing, Willowbrae Road on Friday April 28. I hope to see some new faces at this one. Andy Hastie, course manager at Dalmahoy GC, would like some volunteers for bunker raking duties during the Scottish PGA Championships at Dalmahoy on May 17-21. Anyone interested should contact me on 0721 722832.

EVENTS DIARY

April 26: Westurf, Long Ashton GC, Bristol

May 9: Drainage '95, Rockingham Castle Estate, Market Harborough, Leics. Tel: 01604 499662

June 21: South Turf, Motpur Park, South West London

July 20-23: The Open Championship, St Andrews

July 31-August 2: National Tournament, St Annes Old Links Golf Club, Lytham

September 13-14: Hayter Challenge Tournament Final, West Lancashire Golf Club, Blundellsands

Thanks go to Scottish Grass Machinery for an excellent tour of their premises and talk on the future of their company, with a super buffet thrown in too. The winner of the SGM quiz was Andy Forrest of Swanston GC. He will receive a sweatshirt and a bottle of whisky, presented by Roy Auld.

ROBERT HOGARTH

EAST OF ENGLAND

As I sit here trying to think of something to write to all of you East of England section members (quite a difficult task because I do not get any information regarding appointments, retirements or any other gossip sent to me), it crossed my mind that our section chairman, David Walden (ICI Greenkeeper of the Year), was probably mid-air somewhere over the Atlantic on his way to the Superintendents' Show in San Francisco (lucky blighter). Maybe our section might find it easier to nominate someone for the ICI Greenkeeper of the Year award in 1996. Having seen what David has accomplished, we should be inundated with head greenkeepers proposing to follow in David's footsteps.

A new golf fixture which will take place this year is a match with our neighbours, East Midlands. The first match will take place on their turf. The date and time are to be confirmed.

Membership in our section seems to have taken off. In the last month I have had ten applications to process. This brings us close to 100 members and can only be good for the section and BIGGA. It is especially good to note that Kenwick Park have had five members join, so see if you others can get fellow greenkeepers also to join.

New members that I would like to welcome to our section are: Peter Tubey, Mason Appleby, Robert Vickers, Geoffrey Henderson and Stephen Dobbs of Kenwick Park GC, David Sankey of Grimsby GC, James North of Sandilands GC, David Williams of Southwell GC, Jim Fulton of Mommersteeg Seeds and Matthew Bishop of Belton Woods GC.

Finally, you will all be receiving a fixture card of golf events and seminars in our region. This is with the help of Howard Storey and John Deere Limited. Many thanks to them.

Anything of interest please contact me on 0733 260297.

GRAEME MACDONALD

MIDLANDS

When I went up to Harrogate for BTME, it snowed heavily, and I thought it was great - as long as it did not come south. Having had so much rain in February, I was beginning to wish for 4ins of snow, to give the greens a break from the constant golf! Mind you, I have heard those two favourite comments over the last few weeks: "Why isn't the course open, we've had no rain?" and "The course should be closed, it's far too wet!"

I hope Midland Section members have entered the Zeneca Premier Greenkeeper Award, if not, ring HQ for details.

I would like to welcome all our new members, including: Roland Broadley, Andrew Minshall, Scott Whale, Ian Turley, Kevin Tregartha, Craig Roberts, Robert Rowson, Ray Harvey, Mark Shaw, Andrew Davies, Paul Dawson, Richard Erratt, Craig Tidmarsh, S Palethorpe, Ian Hughes, Paul Sewell and Mark Kite.

New trade association members are: Nick Bennett, George Attwood-Harris and Ivan Toon.

If anybody did not receive a fixture list and entry sheet, contact Sue or me, and we will send you copies in the post.

I hear Adrian Porter is moving back to Leicestershire to a new job from Crockett's Manor Golf Club. We wish him well.

Finally, an interesting new technique is being tried by Sean McDade of Harborne Golf Club. Sean is learning ballroom dancing in an effort to cut down on compaction on the greens when changing holes etc. I will keep in touch with Sean and let you know if the technique is working. Seriously, though, good luck with this new hobby.

KIM BLAKE

NORTH SCOTLAND

I wish I had kept my big mouth shut about the weather! Yes, it has still been very mild, but we have had more rain in the north this winter than I can ever remember, especially in the last few weeks. Even here at Tain on sand we have had to open up and rebuild drains long forgotten as they never had to do much. I fear for greenkeepers on inland clay-based courses. Let's hope for a good early spring.

New memberships are beginning to roll in now; here are the latest: Alastair Ross, Royal Dornoch; George Aitken, Peterculter; James Morrison from Turriff who actually works on a course in the Arabian Gulf; and Roderick Ogilvie, the proprietor of Broughty Landscapes. Keep them coming.

In the February magazine you would have read about Royal Dornoch head greenkeeper Robert Patterson's eventful winter with winning a set of golf clubs followed by breaking his ankle playing squash. Well, what they didn't mention was his amazing hole in one earlier in the winter at the 8th hole of his home course, which even off the winter tee measures 350 yards! Can any greenkeeper