

Alick moves to lead team at Hotchkin

Alick Mackay has been appointed Head Greenkeeper on the Hotchkin Course at The National Golf Centre at Woodhall Spa. He arrives in Lincolnshire from Machrihanish Golf Club having previously worked at Skibo Castle, Boat of Garten, Worthing and Royal Dornoch.

He will head at team of seven on the Hotchkin Course with another seven, under Head Greenkeeper, David Horsey, working on the new Bracken course.

"We are all excited by the potential of The National Golf Centre with one course already world renowned and the other, due to open next year, that will not be long in making its mark on the British golf scene," said Course Manager, Peter Wisbey.

"We are all pleased that such a well respected greenkeeper has joined our team," he added.

Don't be snookered by your bunkers

"We have had problems with our bunkers in the past," says David Gower, Course Manager at the Oxfordshire Golf Club, "But the problems are all behind us. The Programme which we are well on the way to completing will ensure that there are no further problems."

David Gower has only been in charge of this prestigious course since June 1 this year, having been the deputy for the previous five years. He puts the bunker problem; which elicited some unfavourable comments from a certain senior member of the European Tour during the Benson & Hedges Trophy, which has been played in May at the Oxfordshire for the past three years, down to the fact that the sub soil is a soft clay. We simply could not get a firm base and the sand we were using did not hold enough moisture. It quickly became mixed with the sub soil and we had the double problem of the ball plug-

ging and a very insecure foothold."

A programme was started to empty the problem bunkers and provide a firm base by putting down a two to four inch layer of broken stone and laying upturned turf on top of the stone before refilling with sand. "I wanted a sand which would hold some moisture and would be firm underfoot and in which the ball would not plug. The grain structure of a good bunker sand must be sharp and it must contain a good proportion of medium size grains. I was given a sample of HMC's ProSport Bunker Sand from the Leighton Buzzard quarry. We did a trial on a range bunker to compare it with what we were using and it was just what I had been looking for. It performed better than anything I had seen previously and that it was also very similar in colour."

There are 137 bunkers on the Oxfordshire course, some of them very big indeed. One is called

'Hell's Half Acre' and another is over 11/2 acres in area and has seven grass islands. "Bunkers should be designed to penalise the player not the greenkeeper." Says David: "None of ours have steep walls and that helps to make them maintainable. Having the right sand is very important. If it doesn't hold some moisture, irrigating can be a major problem."

The Oxfordshire will host the Benson & Hedges in May 1998 and the year after. "Hopefully, there will be no complaints about the course, especially the bunkers," says David Gower, "We have already renovated over half of the bunkers, and that includes all those which had to be due out to put in a firm base. There are about 45 still to be sorted out and they will be done over the winter. It will take about another 300 tonnes of ProSport bunker sand from Leighton Buzzard and that should complete the programme."

High on a hill

Midland Regional Administrator, Peter Larter's, walking trip in Austria nearly turned into a Busman's Holiday when he found himself on a golf course.

I've just had a holiday with friends at Ischgl in the Austrian Alps and, after three hard days mountain walking, we decided to have an easy day in the car. We had just survived some 25 hairpin bends descending from the Silvretta Lake, close to the Swiss border, when to our surprise just around the last bend we came upon Hochmontafon Golf Club on the outskirts of the small town of Partenen.

We just had to stop because the location was quite spectacular. We were given a warm welcome by the club management, and learned that the club was owned by four local men and was just coming to the end of its second season. The 9 hole fairly short (3 par fours and 6 par threes) but tricky course is at 1115 metres, and is surrounded by mountains reaching 2400 metres above sea level. The land for the course, became available when the previous owner, a farmer, passed away leaving the land intestate. The local mayor was sympathetic to the idea of a golf course and the project was launched.

We were shown around the course

by a proud Herbert Berger, one of the co-owners, and experienced some breathtaking outlooks when standing on the tees. Major hazards, apart from some outstanding rock formations, are cows who roam freely. Although the greens were small they were in very good condition, considering they spend five months under deep snow each year; the course is part of a downhill ski piste during the Winter! The land was natural terrain for a golf course and there were many interesting and challenging uphill, sidehill and downhill lies, the course would be a tough challenge to all standards of golfer, particularly challenging on the lungs! There are 120 members of the Golf Club, and the course is open to all who want to play.

The fairways are natural grass from when the area was farmland but the greens were laid with turf and withstand some very hard conditions. The tees, however, are constructed with astroturf, but future grass tees are planned. The day we visited it rained for the first time in six weeks, but they have plenty of water which is applied to the greens manually.

Our only regret was that we didn't have time to play, but a warm welcome and a schnapps would be waiting in the friendly clubhouse for any golfer who just happens to be passing!



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Sowing the seeds for the future

The Sports Turf Research Institute held its first grass trials in 1929, when the modern golf industry was in its infancy. Whilst it was recognised that greenkeepers needed to know which grasses to sow and how they would perform, it's safe to say that no-one could have predicted the demands placed on today's turfgrass mixtures.

Today, with courses played and mowed all-year round, the popular turfgrass mixtures are selected to withstand close mowing and trampling. Amenity grass seed breeders supply a wide range of mixtures designed to perform best under the specific conditions of greens, tees and fairways. Greenkeepers are well aware of what is on offer.

Of perhaps greater concern is the future of turfgrass mixtures for golf courses and the implications for greenkeepers, turfgrass breeders and research bodies alike.

While the general conditions are acknowledged, there appears to be a marked difference in emphasis between the commercial plant breeders and primary seed suppliers and the research bodies.

As far as breeders and wholesalers are concerned, the major consideration is providing a grass playing surface which can withstand close mowing and wear and tear and have high recuperative potential.

Research orientated bodies such as the STRI and The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research at Aberystwyth acknowledge the need for grasses which withstand close mowing and wear and tear. But, they are more concerned with shifting to and creating new turfgrasses which will perform well in the changing climatic conditions – increasing drought and corresponding water restrictions – and ecological considerations such as the spraying of herbicides.

Dr Andy Newell, Head of Turfgrass Biology and Environment at the STRI, says, "It has to be a major consideration now to produce grasses which will perform well in the future. Drought will become an even bigger problem than it is now. There have already been problems in recent years. Climate change is a problem

which won't go away and the problems of drought will get worse.

"At the highest level, the highest standards of presentation are expected and demanded. Television companies want to see green playing surfaces rather than parched, brown and dead looking grass areas. It isn't just the premier courses which are concerned, today's greenkeeper can be responsible for an investment worth anywhere between £2-20m and has to make decisions which can produce something good or gradually wreck a course.

"In respect of some problems, grass types we use now may not be the best type for the future. For example, bent grasses require more water than fescues to produce a good playing surface. If we can't use water, we may well have to reverse the current trend towards bents and go back to fescues.

"Maintenance is also important. Mowing, in particular, will affect the way grasses will perform. Slower growing grasses, which use less water, naturally require less mowing but what is done

needs to be done well. If grass is not cut neatly, with sharp, regularly lapped blades, a larger surface area is wounded and this leads both to greater water loss and likelihood of disease. It is also, quite simply, a case of having the right kind of mower to produce the kind of playing surfaces golfers demand."

At the same time as shifting emphasis over to existing grasses which require less water, research is also being done into Genetically Modified Organisms. Through gene transfer, grasses which require less water and spraying with herbicides can be created.

As Dr Danny Thorogood, of The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research at Aberystwyth, explains, "It is quite easy to manipulate most grasses through gene transfer. What we have to do is identify and isolate the useful gene. In some cases, the characteristics which we want to trans-

fer – dwarfism for grasses which require less mowing or resistance to disease for grasses which need little or no spraying with herbicides – are determined by a number of genes, which makes it a bit more difficult."

So, why aren't genetically modified grasses available to the greenkeeper?

Danny explains, "It's the implications for the environment which are the chief problem with Genetically Modified Organisms. What happens when GMOs get into the food chain, for example. The potential hazards as well as benefits of each gene have to be assessed individually before release in a commercial variety. As far as golf courses are concerned, the problems are very specific.

"Our research indicates that grass pollen can travel several miles and it's all very well breeding grasses which are resistant to disease and herbicide tolerant for the fairways but what about when the various weeds growing in the rough are pollinated? No greenkeeper wants the problem of herbicide resistant weeds growing on the fairway."

Realistically, then, it's the case that genetically modified grasses created through gene transference may be easy to create but are a long way off being commercially available to greenkeepers.

"But," Danny continues, "there is still a vast array of naturally occurring variation for characteristics in grasses growing in the wild. Plant breeders such as myself collect this wild plant material. We then hybridise it in complex crossing programmes to combine the useful traits such as drought tolerance, disease resistance, short dense growth and wear tolerance into a single variety."

How, then, does the concerned greenkeeper keep abreast of climatic and environmental considerations; what's happening in turfgrass technology and its implications?

The STRI held its first Cutting

Edge three day Golf Training Course for Head Greenkeepers/ Course Managers last month with the express purpose of putting delegates in the picture with regard to developments in turfgrass technology and implications for the future of golf courses.

As Dr Newell explains, "Good greenkeepers have always been well aware of the need to know what's available and what future developments are likely to influence their business. So although the response to the first Cutting Edge was good – with 16 Head Greenkeepers coming along – it was hardly surprising.

"But educating greenkeepers is only part of the whole picture. What needs to happen a lot more is for them to engage in real two-way dialogue with the technical people. Because, when you consider that it takes up to 15 years to create a new grass, for the seed breeders to respond to greenkeepers demands in general, as well as those caused by climatic, environmental and financial considerations they need to know what's required for the future today.

"To be sure, the enlightened seed breeders do take steps to educate their salesmen to understand greenkeepers' current needs and to encourage feedback when it comes to anticipating requirements. But there is still room for far greater exchange of information between greenkeepers and breeders. It's only then that the breeders can supply what the people at the cutting edge really want."

So, it seems that as far as the research institutes are concerned, the challenge is to adapt and create grasses to suit the inevitable demands made on them by the golf courses, brought about by a changing climate and growing concern over the environment. At the same time, it's a question of encouraging a climate of debate between greenkeepers, breeders and the research bodies.

Johnsons Seeds see things differently.

"When we have our regular meetings with the STRI we invariably end up agreeing that the only difference in our perspectives is one of emphasis," said Geoff Taylor, of Johnsons.

As far as the potential benefits of GMOs are concerned Geoff is





Sowing the seeds for the future

sceptical. He argues that despite the potential of gene technology the range of options available to plant breeders are still bound by the fundamental precepts of plant ecology.

"If grasses are modified by inserting appropriate genes, and traits such as drought tolerance, are fully expressed how will such an organism survive when it is faced with significant deficits or moisture/nutrients but is constantly subjected to the wear and tear and ultra close mowing expected by today's golfers?"

"Grasses which are more efficient at extracting and utilising nutrients than their contemporaries – especially nitrogen – are already undergoing trials. But such advances, despite their benefits are dwarfed by the climatic changes which are likely to be much greater than the capacity of GMOs to produce the higher levels of performance demanded."

So, where does that leave the greenkeeper needing to make commercial purchasing decisions but with an eye to the long-term health and performance of the course's playing surfaces?

As far as Drs Thorogood and Newell are concerned, the crux of the matter is that, in the words of Dr. Thorogood, "Farsighted companies with direct involvement with the greenkeeper on the one hand and the research scientists and breeders on the other, are in the ideal position to bring together the geneticists and greenkeepers to discuss what is possible and what is needed in the grass seed mixtures for the millennium."

Dr Newell's main concern is that greenkeepers beware of cheap grasses because they can become very expensive.

"Greenkeepers may save money on seed but pay out for extra maintenance, extra watering and extra fertiliser. If grass has to be replaced due to poor performance, this could be extremely expensive."

From Geoff Taylor's perspective, the crucial thing is that the products of plant breeders need to be integrated effectively with the technological development of mowers and other machines, along with chemicals.

"A holistic approach is the only one likely to succeed where superior management skills can maximise the full range of resources available."

Drawing breath before BTME 98

Yet another year has flown by with the New Year only three weeks away and Harrogate only six weeks away. Nineteen ninety seven started with the Learning Experience, commencing with the National Education Conference and the welcome return of two workshops. Workshop 1 on Golf Course Design, Construction and Maintenance was extremely popular again, so much so that we had to stop taking applications in early December. We, therefore decided to this workshop around the Regions, which has proved to be a great success. This workshop will be held at Harrogate again in January and, if you are quick, there are still a few places left. Workshop 2, Surveying and Levelling was, again, very successful and will be running in January. **New for 1998 will be a workshop on Irrigation and its popularity is such that it is completely full.** The National Education Conference will again be held in the Majestic Hotel, with speakers from all parts of the industry sure to offer something for everyone. The Seminar Programme returns to the Royal Hall for 1998. The Seminar Programme begins at 10am with a seminar presented by the Institute of Agricultural Engineers.

Unfortunately, Mr Jaime Ortiz Patino will not be able to attend on Wednesday 21 January, however he will be speaking on Thursday 22 January at 1 pm. This seminar is a must for anyone wanting to hear how Valderrama was prepared for the 1997 Ryder Cup. All three workshops, the National Education Conference and Seminars will, once again, attract Master Greenkeeper credits and BASIS Continuing Professional Development points. Please ask for details at the Conference Office or at Seminar Registration in Hall G.

Thanks to the contributors to the BIGGA Education and Development Fund, including those companies listed at the front of this magazine, we have been able to continue to provide a range of courses around the Regions at very low prices. This year has seen courses on Essential Management Skills, Recruitment and Selection, Health and Safety and Leadership, allowing more than 180 greenkeepers to gain impor-



Education Update

BY KEN RICHARDSON

tant knowledge which they can use in the future to provide better managed, efficient, cost effective, safe golf courses.

TORO sponsored both the Student of the Year and the Excellence in Greenkeeping Award for the first time in 1997. This enabled us to hold a joint final in October, when Steven Nixon from Wortley Golf Club and Ian McMillan from Hankley Common Golf Club were selected as the winners. Congratulations to them both. Ian was doubly successful as Hankley Common also won the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, in association with Amazon Ground Care and Rhône Poulenc Amenity, with Hankley winning £5000 to add to the prize of a Toro triple greens mower and Ian's trip to the USA. Full details of all 1998 competition will be available at BTME.

The next field guide, 'Grass Identification' is being distributed and will be available at BTME. Further field guides on 'Trees and Shrubs', 'Control of Mammals' and 'Basic Machinery Maintenance' will become available during 1998.

New for 1998 will be the BIGGA Refund of Education Fees Scheme. Watch out for full details of how and when to apply in the January edition of *Greenkeeper International* and on the BIGGA stand at BTME.

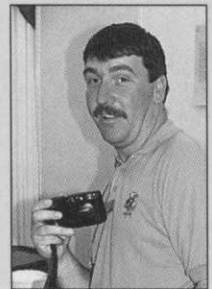
This year has been very hectic for Sami and me. We get immense satisfaction from seeing greenkeepers improve their knowledge, skills and confidence and we see education and training as the way to improve the status of greenkeepers and the greenkeeping profession. Remember, training courses, competitions and other training opportunities are staged for your benefit. Why not make a New Year's resolution to become more involved, attend courses and improve your status.

Sami and I hope that you all have a very happy Christmas and an educational New Year.

ASSISTANT GREENKEEPER

Profile

Usually the spotlight falls on the Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper at a Club. Now it is the turn of those whose work often goes unheralded to star...



Name: **Steven Evans**
Club: **St Enedoc GC**
Position: **Deputy Head Greenkeeper**
Age: **37(ish)**

1. How long have you been a greenkeeper?
Eighteen years

2. What education are you currently undertaking?
D32/D33 Just completed.

3. Which one task do you most enjoy doing?
Retvetting Bunkers

4. Which one task do you most dislike doing?
Pesticide/Fungicide Spraying

5. What job other than greenkeeping might you have ended up doing?
Collier

6. Who has been the biggest influence on your career?
Peter Gillard, Greenkeeping Lecturer at Pencoed College In Wales

7. What would you do to improve the life of a greenkeeper?
Encourage educational opportunities for all greenkeepers

8. What are your hobbies?
Playing pool, cricket and golf

9. What do you get out of BIGGA?
Belonging to a professional organisation, valued friendships on a personal and professional level.

10. What do you hope to be doing in 10 years time?
Greenkeeping and failing that maybe a professional photographer for BIGGA!

Put it down to the weather

I thought this experience of mine might help others in a similar position.

Two greens at my club had become infected with bleached yellow/white patches attacking the annual meadow grass.

With BIGGA Field Guide to Diseases in hand "Basal Rot," I thought, "But no black spot at the base of the grass stem?"

More expert help was needed, so I took the sample to the STRI and 48 hours later Mr Ormandroyd telephoned and informed me that it was not a disease or virus but etiolated growth of *Poa Annua* (Stress Disorder). He also said that the core sample was greening up nicely in the temperate climate of the lab.

His recommendation was an application of a liquid iron product to even up the colour.

I have therefore learned two important aspects of disease management, which are:-

1. Weather conditions in mid October have a vast effect on how the turf (*Poa Annua*) looks.

2. Always positively identify the disease problems (if any) before reaching for the fungicide bottle.

Nigel Potter
Meltham GC
Huddersfield

Temporary frustrations

It's that time of year again when golfers become frustrated to hear that dreaded words "Temporary Greens". Having worked hard all week, a member arrives at the Golf Club on Saturday or Sunday morning, only to find the Greens Staff removing the flag from the summer to winter Greens, mainly due to frost at this time of year.

The Greens Chairman, or Member of the Greens Committee, meet the Greens Staff to state that the frost will have thawed soon, so leave the flags on the summer Greens as there are members who can only play at weekends and don't want to putt on temporary greens.

As a very keen golfer myself, I can understand that statement being made but first and foremost the Greens Staff are qualified to make decisions, for whatever reason, to protect the course and I can assure members that they get no satisfaction replacing flags onto temporary greens. Although at times it's hard to

accept, it's about time some members respected the decision made at the time. After all what are qualifications all about?

As a greenkeeper myself, who came into the profession later than most, it concerns me deeply why there seems to be a situation, between greens staff and some members. Having discussed this with other colleagues they too have similar experiences at their places of work. Why? You've perhaps noticed that I've mentioned the word profession. Greenkeeping is very much a profession with ever increasing demands and expertise

As a member of BIGGA I was intrigued to read in the September issue of Greenkeeper International where Spain, Mr Jaime Ortiz-Patino, of Valderrama said, "Greenkeeping is a very respected profession in America but in Britain the greenkeeper is often not allowed in the clubhouse. This is beyond my comprehension. It is a highly professional and respectable career and it should be treated as such."

I ask myself is it Britain behind the times or just sheer snobbery extended from years ago?

For the members who genuinely care and want to protect the course – and I'm sure that includes most of us – may I suggest to members that they find time talk to their Greens Staff, I am sure we would welcome the opportunity to explain in greater detail the work in hand; let's face it, they're qualified to do so.

As an avid reader of most golf magazines, which I enjoy immensely, maybe it's time that the Editors introduced an article each month, conveying basic greenkeeping skills and why certain tasks have to be done at certain times of the year. This would surely help the members of clubs develop empathy with the Greens Staff and can only improve our courses long term.

Dave Blank
Newcastle Under Lyme, Staffs

Course was outstanding

I attended the recent Management Training Course at the Cheltenham & Gloucester Moat House Hotel and would like to make a few comments about it.

Frank Newberry was outstanding as a lecturer; he has a total grasp of his subject and was obviously well able to alter his delivery to suit greenkeepers – without anyone feeling awkward or pressurised in any way

As to your comments in the maga-

zine complaining about the lack of take-up of this training I agree it is a very great shame that ordinary greenkeepers feel unable to attend possibly through feeling that it is above them

Personally, I can't wait to sign up for the next one and have no doubt that both my colleague Wayne Vincent and I will attend further courses in the future, and would like our thanks to be passed on to the Golden Key sponsors in the meantime

No-one should feel in any way below the content of the course. Everyone has something to learn and to contribute

Paul Worster
Course Manager
Minchenhampton GC
Stroud, Glous

Many thanks from Denmark

I would like to thank the following people for their great and immense help during Flemming Andersen's and my own study tour to England in July of this year.

Flemming, who heads the greenkeeper education in Denmark, and I

visited the following golf courses and greenkeepers over 10 days and received a very warm welcome on every occasion.

We would like to thank David Austin, Sandiway GC; Justin Lee, Oaklands GC; Steve Worthington, Macclesfield GC; Anthony Davies, Prestbury GC; Jimmy McDonald MBE, Royal Lytham and St Annes; Derek Green, Royal Liverpool; Reaseheath College, Northrop College; Richard Campeys, Lymm GC, Prior Hayes GC, Portal GC and Knights Grange Golf Complex.

All the aforementioned will be pleased to hear that as a direct result of our visits we now have a very good base for our education in Denmark and as from 1998 we will be very close to the English system. Let me take this opportunity to thank you all personally and I hope it will be possible to visit again in the near future.

I look forward to seeing friends old and new at Harrogate in January and hopefully enjoy a cold one with you all.

Best regards for Christmas and the new year.

Chris Haspell
Course Manager Falster GC.

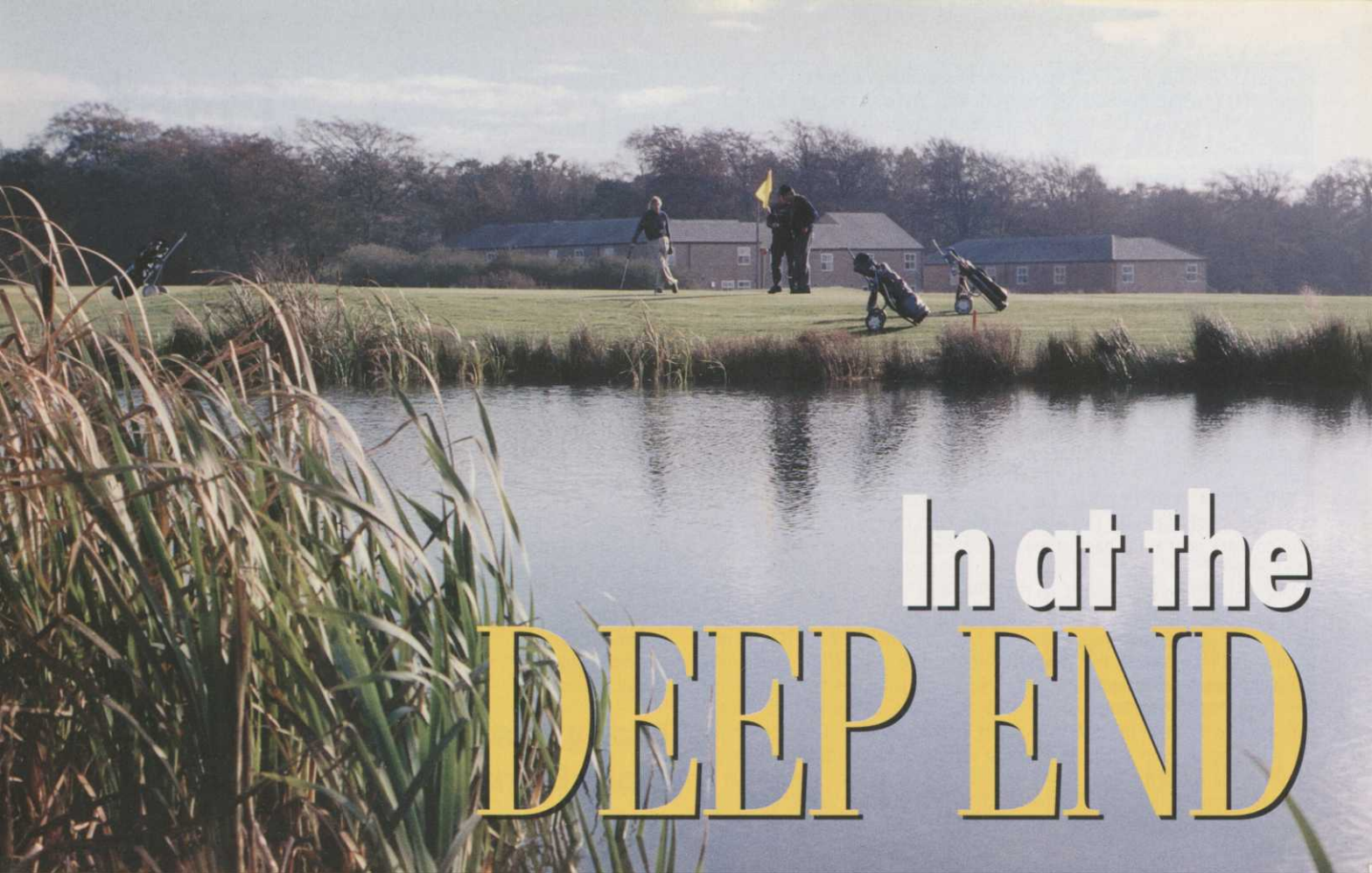
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In at the DEEP END

Graham Chambers is not one to shirk a challenge and, faced by a huge one, he has more than measured up.

There was a television programme, I think it was in the early 80s, called "In at the Deep End" where two guys who had been on "That's Life" were given a set amount of time to become marginally proficient in a particular skill.

It all built up to a climax where the "big boss" had to decide whether or not they were up to putting their new found talents to use at the top level. From one recollection among the skills one or other of them acquired were to become a ball room dancer, an auctioneer and an opera singer, while one of them had to direct a Bananarama pop video. There have been a few recent revivals of the format with different "stooges" but for what it's worth I still prefer the original.

I wouldn't be too surprised if Graham Chambers felt as though he had been selected to appear on the programme when he was appointed Course Manager of Longhirst Hall Golf Course, in Morpeth, just as construction was starting.

It wasn't just that it was the then 26 year-old's first job in charge of his own golf course – it was his first job in greenkeeping, and he arrived at Longhirst Hall direct from his previous job as

Store Manager of Morpeth's Superdrug.

It was more a case of entering the deep end via a triple twisting full pike dive off the high board.

That Longhirst Hall is thriving says much for Graham's ability to acquire new skills quickly and the owner's perception in seeing something in Graham which persuaded him that his new course, which opened for play on June 1 this year, was going to be in safe hands.

That owner is Tom Dawson, the golf loving Chairman and founder of Dawson and Sanderson travel agency, whose approach to the development and running of his own course is less than conventional.

The club encourages women to play off the same tees as the men;

operates a relaxed dress code and slow play is punished by the culprits having to pick up their balls and walk the distance they have dropped behind. Whether that would work in The Open or the Ryder Cup is perhaps debatable but it certainly keeps them on their toes at Longhirst.

"The boss has been a member at a lot of clubs and doesn't like being stuck in the traditional role of a golf club. He wanted a club local people could play not one where you couldn't enter the clubhouse if you were wearing a hat or didn't have a tie," explained Graham.

"It was always intended to be pay and play. They can come here in jeans and trainers and it's just £5 a round. We just want to get local people on so they can play,

or learn how to play, golf."

If people in the North East don't know where Longhirst Hall is exactly, they will certainly know of the famous landmark which previously marked the spot.

"The site was an open cast mine and boasted the biggest crane in Europe – Big Geordie – stuck right in the middle of it. The whole place was a bit of an eyesore to be honest," said Graham.

The site already included an excellent hotel, a tennis club, cricket fields and Tom Dawson's view was that a golf course would fit in well.

If it was an ability to learn quickly coupled with a tenacious desire to get things done which Tom Dawson spotted in Graham he is a remarkable judge of character because it is just those qualities which have shone through.

"When I came into the industry two and a half years ago my perceptions were like those of everyone else coming in. I was going to be cutting grass and that it must be a nice job in the summer," he laughs at his own naivety.

Being faced by a whole new challenge Graham took the only real option open to him. He threw himself into education.

"I started straight away and did my PA1 and PA6 before I even started on the construction. It left me totally drained. I passed but I had to study hard to do it."

Since then the fact that he now has a course to work on and put



Graham Chambers, right, with some of his team

'My ambition is to have the course considered one of the better ones in the area'

into practice what he has been learning at Kirkley Hall College.

"I went through Level II last year and I'm half way through Level III at the moment and it's going swimmingly. I'm also going to do a distance learning four year HND course, possibly at Elmwood, from next year.

"I definitely want to improve my knowledge of agronomy. In the past year at college we've been doing quite a lot of work with different cultivars and it's an area I'm very interested in."

Graham began working on July 1 1995 three months after construction work started.

"During the first year and a half there were occasions when I was totally gutted and couldn't face coming to work in the morning. With construction there just seemed that there were times when there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I had this vision in my mind that it would be a nice golf course to work on and it just seemed to be constant digging. It took a lot of getting used to," he confessed.

The course was constructed by Terry Reading Golf Associates and was a design-build.

"An outline drawing had been done but in the main the course was designed as we went along. In the original design plan there were three acres of lakes and by the end this had increased to 35 acres of water."

As the course was being constructed a complete set of temporary greens was included.

"These include the same root-zone, are fully drained and have irrigation," explained Graham.

"These are not only for winter use but will also be handy if working on the main green. The idea was to give our members and guests a quality putting surface throughout the year instead of merely cutting a hole in the fairway."

A grand total of 40,000 trees have been planted which will ultimately give definition to the holes.

"We have larch, Norway spruce, Scots Pine, lime and maple and I keep going out to see if they've grown any or work out how high they'll be in a year's time."

Another statistic to set beside that of the trees is 60 kilometres of drainage. "We've got our own trenching team," he explained.

"Our greens are USGA spec but

the fairways are all on clay so we don't have much soil to work with. We've had to verti drain and top dress to change the structure of the soil and they tend to need a lot of feeding in the summer because they dry up very quickly.

"We are experimenting with fairway irrigation on the 1st and 18th to see how beneficial it will be. If it's worthwhile the boss will probably go ahead with it."

John Hacker has been visiting Longhirst since the project started and is always available should there be any problems while Gary Munro, of The Wynyards, has also been useful in providing advice.

Graham joined BIGGA on the advice of Steve Pope, previously Head Greenkeeper at Tyneside Golf Club but now retired, who worked at Longhirst in the summer.

"He told me all about BIGGA and what I would get out of it and he's been absolutely right. I have been to Harrogate for the last three years, in the last two with the college but I'm going to spend more time there in January.

"The first time I went it just went over my head but the second year I had a little more knowledge but still didn't have a course to work on. Last year I really enjoyed it and met a lot of people in the business. Next year I'll be much more involved."

Graham admits that initially he was driven by a desire to prove the many doubters, who questioned the wisdom of proceeding with such an inexperienced team, wrong.

"As I've gone on that's changed and I'm doing it for myself. I want to have people come up and say how much they've enjoyed the course or that the greens were smashing today.

"My ambition is to have the course considered one of the better ones in the area. Lindon Hall is very, very nice indeed but it was built on existing parkland so had impact straight away. I've heard rumours that people were saying that our place looks very open but we're building from scratch and are targeting different people from Lindon Hall. We're looking at pay-and-play while Lindon Hall is targeting business people."

Graham's experience prior to joining the greenkeeping industry had all been in retail management having become a trainee manager at Finefare (now Gate-



way) before moving to the Coop and then to Superdrug where he was assistant manager of a busy store in centre of Newcastle before being given his own shop in Morpeth shortly before he was lured away to Longhirst Hall.

"What my previous jobs taught me was organisational skills – sorting out daily and weekly priorities and staff training which has been very important here with such an inexperienced staff.

"I like to be the approachable type of manager. If they've got any problems at college it's likely I will have experienced the same as I've been through the same course not long ago so I can help."

The team consists of Graham, his Deputy, Gary Smith who is also the mechanic and four youngsters two of whom have just completed their YTS and completely their NVQ Level II. One of whom, Stuart Wilson, is

currently the Student Greenkeeper of the Year at Kirkley College. Graham also continues to utilise the diverse skills of another five who had worked on the construction.

"There has been a lot of pain and heartache but we've achieved the basics of a golf course. The greens are good, the tees are excellent and we will be working on the fairways for years to come. Otherwise it is just a case of manuring and waiting for the trees to mature," explained Graham.

Then he can perhaps assist Tom Dawson on his next project, and it's a biggy.

"On land just next door to Longhirst he wants to copy the 18 best holes in the world. He saw a course in the States which copied the 18 best holes in America and he wants to go one better," explained Graham adding, "That's not until after the millennium though."

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Harrogate week, which for many begins with the National Education Conference – part of the Learning Experience, in association with Ransomes, is the event of the year for many in the fine turf management family whether

they be greenkeepers, or a member of any one of the related areas which bring people to the Conference and Show.

Among the changes this year is the inclusion of the new Hall G to replace Hall E, which keeps all four halls on one level and ensures a superior flow to the show.

Hall G is a state-of-the-art marquee which BTME takes over from the Toy Fair, the exhibition held at Harrogate the previous week.

Due to an amendment to his travel arrangements Mr Jaime Ortiz Patino will not be able to attend on Wednesday 21 January, however, he will be speaking on Thursday 22 January at 1pm. This seminar is a must for anyone wanting to hear how Valderrama was prepared for the 1997 Ryder Cup. ➡

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