



helps form close working relationships between club and company, with the mechanic benefiting from having a friendly contact to help with any ordering or technical queries regarding specific items.

Other aids to training are workshops manuals, parts catalogues and highly informative training videos.

These are the hidden benefits to be gained from appointing a mechanic and they help to keep the wheels in motion.

In-house training

With the building of a larger and improved workshop area at one of our clubs, we are taking the opportunity to design this area not just with all types of maintenance needs in mind but with the intention for the area to function as a training centre within American Golf.

Since this particular site is fairly centrally located, there is an opportunity to train newly recruited mechanics within the group and for an experienced mechanic or fitter to visit the centre and help with training.

American Golf see this as a further opportunity for the mechanic to work closely with the dealer. Learning is best as a two-way process and since we have a number of similar machines operating on different courses then what better way of providing feedback to the manufacturers?

The mechanic's input is vital to co-ordinate this information and pass on relevant details since many potential problems often only come to light well after the launch of a new machine.

The example of St. Mellion

St. Mellion International, which was purchased by American Golf this year, operated without the services of an in-house mechanic. Robert Brewer, course superintendent at this resort complex, was quick to hire a mechanic and this has made a significant impact on not only the improved performance of equipment, cost savings and quicker turnaround of repairs. It has also allowed other staff to concentrate on

the numerous different tasks involved in maintaining such a prestigious venue.

Working with the rest of the team

The mechanic's role at any of our clubs is to work closely with the superintendent by scheduling the timing and frequency of service work.

Involvement with the weekly work programme helps to determine when each item of equipment is being used and when it is available for servicing. Large wipe boards with a timetable format work well and help in the smooth running of each course.

Equipment breakdowns are inevitable but these can be worked into the routine depending on the degree of urgency.

Within American Golf as a whole, there is much operating similarity and one benefit of this is that as soon as a particular problem is discovered, information is rapidly disseminated to other users within the company via our voice mail system.

Networking within the group also helps us locate parts for machines which may not be standard items.

One recent example is that a mechanic found that glow plugs for a certain diesel powered mower were the same as those used in a well-known car but a fraction of the cost.

This information was passed on, with the result that all clubs using this piece of equipment have the part noted within their card index system. It is examples such as this which indicate how much time and expense a good mechanic can save a club by being resourceful and maintaining good records.

The future - mechanics are essential

The dependence on sophisticated equipment and a small but well-trained labour force is a vital element in the operation of the successful modern golf course.

Today's golfer is not just used to high standards but has plenty of playing options available.

A good mechanic is essential to achieve the necessary standard of excellence and we can expect to see more well-trained mechanics on the UK's golf courses.

THE BOY'Z FROM OCMIS.



ALWAYS ON THE PULL.

01460 241939
0131 220 2102

Membership benefits

Membership has experienced tremendous growth since 1987 when the amalgamated membership figure from the three associations stood at 1,200. Eleven years later, in 1998, membership had exploded to a record breaking 6,300 members and is still recording year on year growth.

Membership is not just for greenkeepers, it is open to anyone connected with the fine turf industry and BIGGA now has three membership categories:

Greenkeeper membership - for anyone who is employed on a full-time basis as a greenkeeper at a golf club.

Associate membership - for anyone who is not employed as a greenkeeper but is involved or works within the fine turf industry.

Student membership - for people studying full-time at college for a qualification in greenkeeping.

These categories ensure that everyone can contribute to the profession and benefit from the many services BIGGA has to offer.

Each membership category benefits from:-

A monthly copy of of BIGGA's award winning magazine 'Greenkeeper International' full of news, views, reviews, updates, section information, recruitment advertisements and editorial features. With a circulation of over 9,000, this is THE magazine for anyone working in the fine turf industry.

Social activities and networking:-

Members of BIGGA also become members of their local section. Each section organises events throughout the year varying from seminars and lectures in winter to golfing days and outings in summer. This is an excellent way to establish your own contacts and network.



For more information on the many other benefits that BIGGA membership can offer you, and for an application form, contact Tracey Maddison, Membership Services Officer on 01347 833800

It was all going so well, then it started to go wrong. The story of Ramside Golf Club is a gripping tale, as told to Scott MacCallum by Course Director, Roger Shaw...

Back from the brink



If I were a screen writer I reckon I would be sorely tempted to turn the tale of Ramside Golf Club, near Durham, into a blockbusting movie, something that would knock Caddieshack, Tin Cup, even Follow the Sun, into a cocked hat when it came to golf in the cinema.

It has everything. A story of hope and aspiration, an apparent success, a fall from grace, a mystery, a long torturous climb back, defying all odds, with a few more knocks along the way and, finally, a happy ending. What more could you want? Shakespeare couldn't have wished for a better storyline, and Spielberg? Well, you never know...

Back from the brink

Right: A view of how the course used to look

Below: Roger Shaw, right, with his Head Greenkeeper Harry Lees

Bottom: One of the mighty tee markers for which The Ramside is known



I don't know who you'd get to play Roger Shaw. He would have to be able to play the full gamut of emotions and cope with the north east accent. Gazza could produce the required water works, but he hasn't given up kicking a ball about a field yet, while Roger's a lot better looking than Jimmy Nail.

The story begins in earnest in '93 when Roger, then Course Manager at Brancepeth Castle, decided that after 10 years in the job the time was ripe for a change. He was in his mid 30s and had started to question where he was going with his career.

Taking the bull by the horns he telephoned Michael Adamson, a Brancepeth member, hotel owner and businessman.

"I'd known him from when I was a kid in Sedgefield. He owned a hotel and a couple of pubs and was a big character in the area," recapped Roger.

"I used to see him at Brancepeth and recognised him from my younger days in the pubs in Sedgefield. In the late 80s he had told me that he'd got land around Ramside Hotel - which the Adamson family owns along with

another family - and that he'd bought a neighbouring farm, which gave him about 240 acres, and that he was thinking about building a golf course."

At that time Roger advised him against going down his intended route, that of employing an American architect, on grounds of cost and around the same time the money market took a dive and the project was shelved.

Five years later and in '93, having decided on a change, Roger called Michael and asked if he could come and talk to him.

"He said, 'No problem. What about?' and I said I'd like to come and work for you. Then I asked if he was still interested in building his golf course. He said he was but that he didn't have a clue how to go about it. I said I had a bit of a clue and could we have the talk."

During that initial meeting Michael said that he was prepared to have a go but questioned Roger's decision to give up his job at Brancepeth.

"I told him that I was prepared to do that and he said that if that were the case we'd stand shoulder to



shoulder through thick and thin and that he'd back me if I backed him. Then we shook hands and that was that," recalled Roger.

He started in September of '93 and spent from then until the following February costing the entire project, selecting contractors and examining every single element of building a golf course.

"Michael and I looked at a number of architects and their work before selecting Jonathan Gaunt. Along with Jonathan we then visited The Oxfordshire and I pointed out the things Michael and I liked and wanted at Ramside. Complexes of tees, not aircraft carrier tees; bold undulating greens, but not over the top; fairly large greens and nicely shaped bunkers.

"I also wanted it to be maintenance friendly because, with 27 holes and a staff of eight or nine we didn't want to be fly mowing all day."

"Jonathan and I spent what seemed days and weeks plotting out the golf course ensuring that we had three looks of nine and then he went away and designed it and came back with detailed sketches."

Jonathan was their first major appointment and he was followed by Project Managers, Bob Horngold and Ian Martin; drainage contractors, MJ Abbott, and Par 4 Irrigation of Ripon to install the Toro irrigation system. They were joined by two shapers, a team of local lads for raking and a local firm to dig out lakes.

Roger also appointed Harry Lees, who had been his own boss at Billingham Golf Club, as his Head Greenkeeper.

"I ordered the materials and we had everything tested to meet USGA Guidelines. Just before work commenced we all had a site meeting and I asked everyone if they were happy with the whole situation and they all said that they felt they were getting a fair deal," explained Roger, 41.

Work started in March '94 and they finished the development on September 19 having built and seeded all 27 holes.

"We actually finished seeding in the dark, using car headlights, because the forecast for the following day was heavy rain and I didn't want to run out of time and risk going into the

following year."

They'd seeded in June '94 but they still decided that '95 would be a growing in year. However, as it developed so well it was decided to open for limited play in July '95.

Up until this stage everything had been copybook, and while credit must be given for this, it doesn't add up to a tale that would have got Quentin Tarantino licking his lips. However, what then befell Ramside might have done.

"It was all going so well we felt it was too good to be true, but no sooner had we thought that, then the wheels started falling off.

"We've got 14 lakes on the course but we wanted to keep them cosmetic so we decided to sink a borehole. At great expense we went down 140 metres and found enough water to meet our requirements for tees and greens. This was analysed and approved before we pumped it into a tank to be put through our irrigation system.

"It wasn't too long before we began to notice that greens were becoming a sick yellow colour. We looked at everything from our fertiliser

treatments, our rootzone but these were all quality products. We just couldn't put our finger on it.

"Eventually we thought we'd better check the water again but this time I sent it down to Scotts Fertilisers and asked if they would analyse it.

"I got an urgent fax back saying not to use the water as we'd scorch our greens. It was very high in salt, which hadn't been revealed by the original analysis, and we'd been watering our greens with one third solution sea water from a flooded mine shaft."

The bore hole was shut down immediately and they went on to mains water.

"But the damage was done and it was to take a long time to recover," recalled Roger, as he sat in his office.

"We'd gone from having a fantastic course at growing-in to one which was literally disintegrating in front of us."

Then because the greens were weak they were hit by Take-All which absolutely ravaged them.

"We lost 90% of the grass on them so I called in Neil Baldwin, of Service Chemicals, and he was brilliant. He took one look and put his hands in the air and said that it as the best



Right: From farmland to golf course in just six short months

Below: Take-all patch took advantage of the greens' weakened state

Take-All he'd ever seen - as though it was a great credit to us.

"He explained that we had two options, to use chemicals, which I didn't want to do, or to let it run its course and burn itself out. So that was our approach and we let it go into decline.

"That took two years and we had a hellish time in '95 and '96. We lost 70% of our greens completely, although we stayed on them, tried to present them as well as we could and informed people of the problem."

Just when they thought it couldn't get any worse it did, when they had a problem with a dosing system which had been installed to try and get rid of the water problems.

"It leaked acid through the mains and this was pumped onto about half a dozen greens around the pump

house. I would say that three of the greens were literally burnt to a cinder," said Roger.

"We were then at our lowest ebb, but really the only way was up and we agreed to work like hell to get things back on the rails.

"After two years of Take-All we got poa annua coming in, so the greens looked pretty ragged even then.

"We overseeded with creeping bent because we had seen how fast the poa encroached and the *Agrostis tenuis* bent just couldn't compete."

Ramside is always keen to try new ideas and be a little different - the tee markers for example, are huge engraved rocks from a quarry in the Lake District which range in size from four and a half tonnes to a mighty ten and a half tonnes - so when Roger heard about a new carbohydrate food

source he decided to give it a chance.

"We wanted to get the living bacteria in the soil so I spoke with Steve Lucas, of Cargills, about Fulcrum Blade. He told me he was confident it would do the job. We gave it the full treatment in '97 and we have been pleasantly surprised by the results and from being able to pull the plant out of the rootzone we now have root growth right down the tine holes into the stone carpet."

The course is now back on track, an extension to the hotel and a superb new clubhouse should be completed by Christmas and the course is rebuilding its reputation.

Looking back at last three years Roger is convinced he has come out of the experience a better Course Manager.

"I feel that I can now grow my hair again. It's been one hell of a learning curve. I've been here from day one, I've planned it, I've costed it, worked on it, grown it in then seen it die in front of me," said Roger, before adding, remarkably, that he wouldn't change anything that had happened.

"It brought the staff and me down to earth. We've taken big steps backwards and questioned what we've been doing. The guys, Harry, Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Craig Hardy, who did much of the growing-in and the rest of the team have been absolutely fantastic and supported me 100%.

"Our members have also been absolutely superb. They've been through it all with us and know that we've been working hard to get it back. A lot of them knew Michael Adamson and myself, and were confident that they had the right people running the job."

But seriously would he do it again?
"Yes, I'd certainly do it again but only for the same man."

Just like all the top movies. A possible sequel tantalisingly dangled in front of us before the first film has even been made.





An independant Company

TORO

Design, Supply, Installation, Service & Sales

NE England, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire,
Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and
Leicestershire

Contact:

EB & L Simms

Unit 18, Camp Hill Close, Dallamires Lane
Ripon, North Yorkshire HG4 1TT

Tel: 01765 602175/690598 Fax: 01765 603488

Ad Ref 27

SIGNAGE SOLUTIONS

from the company dedicated to the Golf Course

- Tee Markers
- Tee Signs
- Yardage Posts
- Entrance Signs
- Traffic signs
- Waymarkers

12
Rocky Ridge
 yds par si
 394 4 3
 388 4 3
 378 4 1

Sandblast Sign Company

Tel - 01357 440441

- Concept Design
- Manufacture
- Installation
- Refurbishment

Look no further, call today for information pack

Ad Ref 608

Kawasaki

POWERFUL. ECONOMICAL. VERSATILE.



THE COMPLETE UTILITY TASK FORCE.

Kawasaki Mules are lightweight taskmasters built to tackle the toughest utility duties. Available in three models, they help you do your job with the greatest speed, ease and comfort. To experience the power behind the work, call our freephone number or your nearest Kawasaki dealer.

Kawasaki

Call free for a brochure
0800 500245

Ad Ref 544

Tough on turf disease

- Rapid contact action.
- Immediately effective against a wide range of turf diseases including Fusarium patch, Red thread, and Dollar spot.
- Will not scorch or damage turf.
- Unique rainfast formulation allows application all year round but especially useful during the cooler months.
- Available in 1 litre and new 5 litre containers.
- The No 1. choice for turf professionals for over 11 years.



Tender on turf

NOW
AVAILABLE
IN 5L
CANS



 **RHÔNE-POULENC**

Rhône-Poulenc Amenity, Fyfield Road, Ongar, Essex CM5 0HW. Telephone 01277 301114 Fax 01277 301119.
ROVRAL GREEN CONTAINS IPRDIONE. READ THE LABEL BEFORE YOU BUY: USE PESTICIDES SAFELY. (MAFF 05702)



For details of your nearest Rhône-Poulenc distributor, call 01277 301116

Roland Taylor looks at the place gang mowers have in modern greenkeeping, and asks the question...

Do you wanna be in my gang?



The high profile that golf now enjoys has bought with it many changes – none more so than the way the course is presented. Modern landscaping has resulted in the introduction of sweeping vistas with, in some cases, almost aesthetic qualities.

Increased television coverage of golf has greatly influenced the appearance of the course especially the fairways and rough. One suspects that any media coverage places a great deal of pressure on all concerned to present an immaculate picture without a blade of grass out of place.

Do you wanna be in my
gang?



Previous page: Huxley's HD138TR Hydraulic Reelmower cutting Alresford Golf Club's fairways

Above: Ride-ons similar to the Hayter pictured, have meant that gang mowers are beginning to be phased out

All this visual hype has led to significant changes in the way fairways and the rough are now mown.

When one turns the clock back, the scene was a great deal different; the players of yesteryear must have been faced with a veritable jungle between tee and green. This often stopped play completely as the fairways turned into hay meadows. On links courses there was less of a problem as growth of grass throughout the summers was likely to be sparse. Hundreds of balls must have been lost and considerable time wasted searching for them. Sheep were often used as natural mowers. This begs the question as to whether mutton or lamb occasionally appeared on someone's table as the result of a stray golf ball.

The introduction in 1914 of Worthington's horse drawn mowers certainly changed all this. Suddenly there was machinery available that would control the growth so play could continue were once it had had to be abandoned to nature. There were, however, minor

drawbacks - these triple units were slow and on an eighteen hole course it must have been a continuous job throughout the growing season.

By the early 1920's the tractor had replaced the horse and the number of mower units in a configuration was between three and nine, thus speeding up the operation considerably.

While these units could handle semi-rough there was virtually nothing to deal with the rough - that was until the early 50's when Douglas Hayter launched his 6/14 tractor-drawn rotary mower.

Designed initially for orchards it soon found its way onto the golf course where it tackled the dense lush grass at the sides of the fairways. Once again the course landscape changed with neatly mown areas which had previously been left uncut.

Progress was marching on and inventive minds were coming up with new ideas. Hydraulic drives had been introduced on agricultural machinery and mower designers soon recognised the

benefits these systems offered. Up until this point, gang mowers had relied on ground traction to drive the cylinders; the new units took their power directly from the tractor. The mowing operation was once again speeded-up and because of the hydraulic lifting action the new units were much more manoeuvrable. This was a period that saw the introduction of tractor mounted PTO gang mowers and hydraulically driven units.

The next stage was to provide a complete machine with its own power source and the introduction of small diesel engines and hydrostatic transmission and drive systems proved to be ideal for this application.

This, plus the development of electronics over the last decade means some sophisticated pieces of equipment have been introduced.

Today's Course Managers and greenkeepers are faced with a different set of demands and standards to their counterpart of 20 years ago. As a result, an increasing number are turning to this type of mower for their fairways, which has meant a gradual decline in the numbers of gang mowers used.

From a manufacturers point of view every product has a life cycle. This can cover a short period time or span several years. At some point sales and economics will dictate that it is no longer viable to continue to produce a particular line. Some suppliers have reached this point, but at present there are still a number of well-established manufacturers offering trailed or mounted gang mowers - for how much longer, is anyone's guess.

For the rough the rotary mower is still the answer for most areas. In recent years there has been the introduction of flexible multi-unit rotaries these closely follow the ground contours and are designed to work on undulating terrain. Recycling rotary mowers have also begun to appear and these finely chop up the cuttings before returning them to the sward. Also