



**Scott MacCallum meets Master Greenkeeper John Wells who has shown that with hard work and application, the limit of a greenkeeper's horizons might not be where he thinks they are...**

# Reach for the stars

When John Wells began his career as an apprentice greenkeeper at the age of 16 he might have been forgiven for letting his mind race on a few years to what the future might hold in store for him.

As a teenager with no qualifications, having enjoyed school's sporting opportunities more than the academic ones, the possibility of reaching the position of Head Greenkeeper was a long way off, but by transferring the dedication and application he had shown on the sporting field to his greenkeeping career, he was confident that he might just pull it off.

Well, within five years John was a Head Greenkeeper and as we sat in the majestic surroundings of the Brocket Hall Clubhouse I was facing John Wells, Master Greenkeeper, Estates Manager of Brocket Hall, International Ltd, a man in charge of two teams of eight greenkeepers, three gardeners, a forester and all the security of the 543 acre site which boasts two superb 18-hole courses - the second of which he project managed, a six hole par-3 course and three hole short game facility.

"My career should be a perfect message for everyone who thinks he is just an average greenkeeper. Unless you work hard and push yourself you have no idea how far you can get," said John, speaking as a man who has very definitely practised what he preached.

"I left school with no qualifications because I wanted to play a lot of sport at school at the expense of my education so I've done most of my learning since leaving school," he explained.

"I went to night school one night a

week to study Business Management Level 4 Greenkeeping and General Horticulture, with a lot of additional reading in between time but I did it as I felt that I had the ability to run a team out on the golf course but I didn't understand budgets or have a lot of the management skills. When I worked for my Master Greenkeeper certificate there was also an awful lot of work outside my normal working hours.

"It is one step at a time. You have to go to look at what you want to become and then look at what you need to become that person," added John, who moved to Brocket Hall in 1992 having previously been Head Greenkeeper at nearby Welwyn Golf Club.

"A career is all about gradual progression and I can assure you it is not handed to you on a plate. It is something you have to work hard towards. It can start, as it did with me at the age of 16, just by proving your worth to the Head Greenkeeper and working hard, being conscientious and reliable. As you move on opportunities will arise to advance within the team," explained John, who added that reading magazine articles and bothering older greenkeepers for information will show a keenness and assist up the first rungs of the ladder.

"From there on get involved in BIG-GA, go to conferences and seminars and take what you learn back to your golf club. It is a form of progression. I didn't say at the age of 16 that I wanted to be an Estates Manager on a prestigious estate by the time I'd got to 40, but I took one step at a time and my career developed.

"As soon as you reach one level in your career you should be looking to get more information to develop on to the next level. I'm learning all the time and, with this new job I'm on a steep learning curve."

Having moved from a members' club to a larger proprietary operation where he has flourished John is well placed to comment on the differences between the two styles of club.

"I think one of the saddest things about greenkeeping is that there are a lot of talented greenkeepers running members' golf clubs who are not being allowed to develop fully as professionals.

"A lot of clubs don't hold their greenkeeper in high enough esteem for him to be respected by the people around him. If the greenkeeper was portrayed as a skilled professional the members would listen more and understand that a lot of the problems the greenkeeper is dealing with are inherited, the result of poor choice of materials or poor construction from many years before. The greenkeeper is therefore trying to put right problems many of which may have begun before his arrival at the club," said John.

He compared the role of the greenkeeper to that of the club professional, who is invariably held in high esteem at the golf club and judged on what competitions he has won or that he once qualified for The Open.

"The pro is often judged on how good he is at golf but that doesn't mean he will make a good teacher or run a good shop. A greenkeeper is always judged and often put down but ultimately he is more important than

# Reach for the stars

## Machinery Inventory

- 5 Allen Hovers
- 2 Allen National 68
- 1 Allen National 84
- 5 Allen Pro26 Strimmers
- 1 Billy Goat Truckloader
- 1 Bomford Bandit
- 1 Coremaster 12
- 2 Cushman Truckster 4 wheel
- 1 Cushman Topdresser
- 1 Cushman Turf Truck (Diesel)
- 1 Dowdesell Roller Mower
- 2 Ez-go Workhorses
- 1 Hardi Sprayer
- 1 Hayter Harrier
- 2 Hayter Jubilee No 1
- 1 Iseki TA45
- 1 Iseki TA 160
- 3 Jacobsen Greensking V
- 1 Jacobsen Smithco Sand Rake
- 1 John Deere 1200A Bunker Rake
- 1 John Deere 1500 Aercore Aerator
- 7 John Deere 220A
- 3 John Deere 2653A
- 2 John Deere 3235A
- 1 John Deere 4400
- 1 C/W 72 cutter deck
- 1 John Deere 5300
- 2 John Deere F1145
- 4 John Deere Gator Diesel
- 3 John Deere Gator
- 1 Kubota 3250 4-wheel drive
- 1 Front Loader
- 1 Back Hoe
- 1 Kuhn Rotovator E L 35
- 1 Little Wonder
- 1 Massey Ferguson 20
- 1 Massey Ferguson 240
- 1 Ransomes 350D (2WD)
- 1 Ransomes Hydraulic 5s
- 7 Ransomes Marquis 51
- 4 Ransomes Super Certes 151
- 1 Roberine 500
- 1 Royer Soil Shredder
- 1 Ryan Ren-o-Thin
- 1 Sisis Twin Play
- 1 Sisis Ultra Tiner
- 1 Stihl Chainsaw
- 3 Stihl BR 400 Blower
- 2 Stihl BG75 Blower
- 4 Stihl Br 400 Blower
- 2 Tornado Blower
- 1 Victor 403 Spreader
- 1 Wiedenman Terra Spike
- 2 Yamaha YFU ITW
- 1 Zetor 5245 (4WD)



the golf professional to the success of the business."

John did accept, however, that the situation has improved over the last 10 years and that now, at least, the majority of Head Greenkeepers at 18-hole members clubs have use of a company vehicle whereas a decade ago the figure was more like 10%.

"The portrayal of the greenkeeper's job has risen but still it nowhere near reflects the importance of the job he does."

Having spent 25 years in greenkeeping, and now having responsibility for 45 holes plus all the additional Brocket Hall Estate John has developed planning skills to ease the way towards a smooth running operation.

"From a practical point of view being a good forward planner is a huge advantage. The Course Development Plan is something which often catches out Master Greenkeeper candidates, I know it did me. We have five year machinery plans so why not have a five year course development plan?"

"Courses are judged by existing Master Greenkeepers so, when Gordon Irvine came and failed me on the golf course, my first reaction was to resent him, my second was to sit down and work on the areas on which I'd failed and my third was to realise just how much better a greenkeeper it was going to make me by doing these things."

To highlight the point he explained how his plan for the two courses worked.

"I have a plan for the whole year from week one to week 52 and I plan in each job that has to be done, with some spare columns to give flexibility. For example I might plan to put some fertiliser on in week 11, but it might end up going on in week 13 because of a cold wet spell, or it might be week 10 because we've hit a nice mild week and you know in greenkeeping that it's the right thing to do.

"Formulating the plan helps me to know when we have to bring our products on site so we don't have a shed full of materials sitting waiting to be used."

Also included in this plan are the heights and frequency of cut.

"I do my soil tests in November and do the plans for both the Melbourne and Palmerston courses in December.

Once I've organised the fertiliser programme I work out when all the other jobs are going on - the scarifying, the brushing, the hollow tining, top dressing etc. Bunker renovation work is also planned in for the last week in February, beginning of March where we edge the bunkers, check sand levels and getting everything in good shape for the start of the season.

With such a big combined team, operating under Head Greenkeepers John Moorhouse, who is also John's Deputy, and Mark Jennings communication is vital to ensure smooth running.

"Every morning we have a briefing where the day's jobs are handed out while every month we have a meeting where I talk about what is going on within the company as a whole. John will then report on the Melbourne Course; Mark, on the Palmerston; the Head Gardener, on the gardens; there will be a report on all the projects going on on the estate and one of the team will talk about what he has planned for the social side.

"Every two or three months we all go and do something while twice a year the company run something for the 150 employees. This tends to be an annual party which we have in early January and then in late summer when we have an activity day on the Estate," said John.

In addition the staff play 16 aside golf matches against both the men and lady members which is a great way to build





relationships with the members.

Brocket Hall has a history as illustrious as any stately home in the country. The first record of the house goes back to the 13th century and it was named Brocket Hall in 1440. It was the home of two serving Prime Ministers, Lord Melbourne and Lord Palmerston in the 19th century.

Golf became a part of the Hall when Lord Brocket decided that it was an ideal way for the estate to earn its keep and the first course, the Melbourne, designed by Peter Alliss and Clive Clark was opened in '91. Plans for the second course were put to one side while the future of the Estate was decided and moved forward when the current owners CCA International bought the lease for the Estate in '96.

The Palmerston Course was designed by Donald Steele and opened by Dame Kiri Te Kanawa in June last year.

The mid '90s uncertainty was obviously unsettling for anyone connected with Brocket Hall and Lord MacLaurin, currently Chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board, was appointed Chairman of Brocket Hall Ltd to look after the interests of the members and staff.

"When any course goes through troubled times and take over is talked about the greenkeeper always feels very vulnerable but in most cases it is the greenkeeping team which is safest. When new management take over they often see that it is the greenkeeping team which is very well organised and very

adaptable and it is the greenkeeping team which is required to lift the golf course. It is more likely to be the finance and marketing departments which are vulnerable."

He added however that hopes that, after working on a shoe string for an extended period, that money would be lavished on the golf course were rarely fulfilled.

"The new company will take a look at the place and you've got to prove to them that you are the right guy to develop the site and you have to put in place the reasons why you feel investment is required, often providing leasing options for consideration," said John, who often looks to purchase second hand machin-

ery to make the budget go further.

It was since the new owners arrival that John has really flourished, being Project Manager for the new course and working closely with Donald Steele, who was chosen from a short list of five architects because he was considered most suitable to work with chosen tract of land, to produce a course that has received acclaim from all quarters.

"The whole project went very smoothly and we came in just under the original budget cost," said John, who has fond memories of watching Donald plot the route through dense forest.

As we concluded the interview and John prepared for another meeting he added.

"I'd like to finish off by saying to every greenkeeper out there. Don't get comfortable with your lot, try to push yourselves because although a lot of hard work is needed, there is an awful lot of enjoyment. Never rest on your laurels, keep driving and see how far you can take it because the rewards are out there.

"I now get trips abroad, assessing other courses the company is involved with, and that is a great fun as well as a great education for me.

"One of the professions biggest mistakes is to think that once we've reached a certain level we've gone as far as we are going to get."

**Master Greenkeeper Anthony Davies MG, Course Manager at Prestbury Golf Club, was one of the BIGGA delegation chosen to attend the CGSA Conference and Show in Vancouver**

# BIGGA shakes Vancouver



Above: Recently voted the world's number one city, and you can see why

Far right: Raymond Day carries the flag for Britain

The visit to Vancouver, Canada for ten BIGGA Greenkeepers started last September. The trip was open to all BIGGA Greenkeepers whose only qualification was to own a BIGGA Blazer. The ten candidates were chosen after a rigorous interview conducted by the well known supplier of grinding machines, Bernhard & Co, who were the main Sponsor together with Officials from Headquarters. After a few short months the week to attend the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association's Convention had arrived.

All the party arrived at Heathrow Airport eager to board the Boeing 747 and head off to Canada. After

what seemed an endless wait, the big plane flapped its wings and we were off. Off to share and exchange views with our counterparts in Canada. The nine and a quarter hour flight wasn't too arduous the worst part was being subjected to 'Charlie's Angels' on the in-flight movie channel. As soon as we landed in Vancouver we were met by a guide who took us to our hotel and there to greet us were Sam and Peter from Bernhard & Co. Sam, who was a brick during the week, bought the team a very welcome drink and briefed us on the week ahead - and what a week was in store for us.

The next morning we boarded a coach and travelled a short distance to North View Golf & Country Club.

The 36-hole complex, was designed by Arnold Palmer and is described as a public course but with prestigious private club standards. The courses are laid out on 400 acres of land and cater for 65,000 annual rounds of golf. Both courses were in great condition for the time of year and it is no wonder that the USPGA have a Tour event there. The \$80 dollar a round courses are owned by two sawmill owners who leave the day-to-day running of North View to Dave Fair, the Superintendent.

Dave, whose working compound resembles that of Manchester Airport, has a large open service yard where stone and its like are deposited and swooped up by mechanical



loaders. The machine store, or should I say the 'hanger', was well stocked with various machinery. A total of 53 staff are employed to look after the two courses with every nine holes having their own team of Greenkeepers for that section who compete against the other members of staff who are then rewarded for the best nine holes at the end of each month. The list of machinery is endless so I will not bother to bore you with such details but just picture this:- seven Cushman's, eight Jacobsen Greens King, four Toro Reel Masters and three full time Mechanics working from a 60' x 40' repair shop. I didn't just envy Dave Fair, I wanted his job!

Over the next few days the BIGGA team attended the well organised educational seminars.

Their system is not too dissimilar to that of Harrogate but one thing was noticeable that the seminars were well attended by like-minded Greenkeepers whose intention was to exchange ideas and to listen and learn from their peers who offered advice willingly and freely - I told you it was like Harrogate! As soon as the seminars ended the Trade Show opened. The neatly arranged rows of machinery were gleaming in their entirety trying to entice the onlookers to at least talk about their golf course requirements.

The BIGGA team were welcomed

The North's  
Premier  
Groundsmanship  
Show!



THE INSTITUTE OF  
GROUNDSMANSHIP

# GROUNDINDEX 2001

## Exhibitor groups

- Landscapers
- Amenity Providers
- Plant, Tool and Equipment Suppliers
- Leisure and Amenity Consultants
- Fertiliser and Chemical Manufacturers
- Seed and Turf Suppliers
- Horticulturists
- Sport and Play Area Equipment Suppliers
- Colleges

## Buyer and user market sectors

- Local Authorities
- Sports Ground Managers
- Golf Clubs
- Amenity Providers
- Play Area Developers
- Outdoor Leisure Industries
- Greenkeepers
- Groundsmen
- Sports Clubs

**BE THERE!**

**AINTREE  
RACECOURSE  
LIVERPOOL**

**19 & 20 September**

For information telephone

**01695 550670**

...include **GROUNDINDEX**  
in your must do schedule

# BIGGA shakes Vancouver

Right: Clive and wife Sue pictured with world famous pop star - but who is it? (Answer at bottom of page)

on all stands and we engaged in verbal chit-chat and made many new acquaintances and desirable future contacts.

On the morning of our departure home, while working on a few notes in my hotel room and chatting with my room mate, Jimmy Richardson, on various pertinent subjects, he leapt from his armchair and, in his sometimes understandable accent, pointed out that he could feel tremors vibrating within. I jibed him and said that he had too late a visit in Gas Town the previous night - Gas Town being the local place to unwind.

Alas, however, he was right. On looking out of the bedroom window I noticed that the water in the swimming pool below resembled that of boiling water bubbling away in a pan. It was then that our hotel and other hotels within the vicinity started to move. The large pane glass window in our room started to creak and the sound of distant thunder rang in our ears. The vibration and swaying seemed endless but in fact only lasted some five to ten seconds. We switched the TV on and instantly the news headlines reported that Seattle and Vancouver had just experienced an earthquake and for all persons to stay calm. I can report that Jimmy and I were very calm for within seconds we were looking for ways out of the hotel. Just then a voice came over the tannoy reporting that we had in fact gone through an earthquake and for us to remain calm and stay in our rooms until further notice.

That really put Jimmy and I at ease.



Knowing that we had 24 floors above our bedroom we donned our coats and got outside. The local news reported that the earthquake had measured 6.4 on the Richter Scale - the highest yet in Vancouver. I didn't realise that ten Greenkeepers from the UK could make such an impact!

So what have I learned from this trip? I have realised that Greenkeepers who have never met before can become friends, exchange opinions and work together to break down barriers between local and international Greenkeepers.

What has BIGGA achieved from this trip? BIGGA was exposed on the international stage and was also successful in breaking down barriers and ten proud BIGGA Members assisted with the performance.

What did Bernhard & Co achieve from this trip? I cannot answer this question, the Company would have to answer this in their own words but

I go as far as to say that they sponsored the trip to allow the selected men the chance to travel to Canada, mingle with other Greenkeepers giving them the opportunity to listen and learn and to present their views on modern Greenkeeping in the UK today.

The highlights of the trip for me were to meet nine other like-minded Greenkeepers from home being introduced to the British Consulate General, making many new friends and surviving an earthquake.

On a final note I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my Section and in particular to Bert Cross for putting my name forward for the trip and to BIGGA for selecting me to represent the Association for which I was honoured to do so and a big thank you to Bernhard & Co for their generous sponsorship.

Lastly my thanks to Jimmy Richardson my room mate.

Below: Sam McLean of Bernhards pictured with the famous ten



Answer to pop trivia question: Spencer Davis of the Spencer Davis Group

## *How to stop the grass growing from under your feet.*



### **Longhand account.**

Trinexapac-ethyl is the active ingredient in Shortcut that works by redirecting plant growth. It specifically targets the gibberellic acid site responsible for cell elongation in grass. Not only does Shortcut inhibit vertical growth but actually diverts plant growth downward into the root system to produce increased food reserves and lateral stem development. This in turn produces a thicker, healthier sward that better equips your turf to withstand temperature extremes, moisture loss, traffic and wear and even helps in the management of *Poa annua*. American research has also established that Shortcut can enhance the performance of a fungicide when jointly applied and has no adverse effect on seedling development.

### **Shortcut version.**

A unique turf management tool that can reduce mowing frequency and grass clippings by half, improves turf colour and helps manage annual meadow grass.

  
**SHORTCUT**<sup>®</sup>  
*The Scotts Difference*

Scotts UK Professional, Paper Mill Lane, Bramford Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 4BZ. Tel 01473 830492 Fax 01473 830386.  
Always read the label: Use pesticides safely. Shortcut contains trinexapac-ethyl. R Trade marks of The Scotts Company or its affiliates.

*The Scotts Company is the worldwide leader in research, manufacturing and marketing of products for professional turf care, ornamental horticulture, field and vegetable production and domestic use.*

COMING SOON TO A COMPUTER SCREEN NEAR YOU...

THE FANTASTIC... THE FABULOUS... THE ALL-NEW...

# Kubota

## "ST ALPHA SERIES TRACTORS"

So real you can  
almost reach out  
and touch them!

It's an  
experience  
you simply  
cannot  
afford to  
miss.  
Even better,  
the ST Alpha  
CD-VIDEO is  
free on  
request.

### Kubota Performance Video ST $\alpha$ -30 / ST $\alpha$ -35

SLIP THE KUBOTA ST $\alpha$  CD-VIDEO INTO YOUR COMPUTER'S CD DRIVE  
AND WATCH THE ST $\alpha$  30 AND ST $\alpha$  35 TRACTORS MOVE MAJESTICALLY ACROSS THE SCREEN.

**JUDGE FOR YOURSELF THEIR LOW NOISE LEVELS**

(COMPUTER SOUND CARD AND SPEAKER SYSTEM REQUIRED)

WITNESS AN ALL-ROUND WORKING PERFORMANCE OF GREAT VERVE AND VERSATILITY.....  
ALL IN GLORIOUS, MOVING COLOUR WITH MUSIC SOUNDTRACK AND COMMENTARY.

To get your Free CD please contact Kubota at:  
Kubota (UK) Ltd, Dormer Road, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 3UN  
Tel: **01844 268111** Fax: **01844 216685**  
Email: **tomb@kubota.co.uk**

**KUBOTA**  
**PERFORMANCE VIDEO**  
**ST $\alpha$ -30 / ST $\alpha$ -35**



Roland Taylor examines the world of the fairway mower

# Fairway to heaven



Capability Brown the famous landscape gardener, left his mark on some of the greatest gardens in the UK. Part of his style was to create large vistas that drew the eye to a distant point and in a way this is exactly what the golf course fairway does. It concentrates the golfer's sight on his ultimate goal - the green. In doing so they should test his control of the ball and judgment as to where best to place it for the next shot.

They also link the landscaping and add an aesthetic quality to the overall scenery and are an important

element of courses that appear on television. Maintaining them has changed over the last two decades, especially the rough. In the past a wayward shot might finish up in virtually impenetrable grass or scrub. This often meant golfers spent considerable time searching for their ball. In those days there were fewer golfers and probably less pressure to speed up the play. The density and extent of the semi and deep rough is generally determined by each club's course management programme.

## Fairways

The objective is to create a uniformity of grass cover. Mowing frequency will depend on growth and prevailing weather conditions and height of cut should be such that the ball sits well on the turf. With such large areas to maintain there are going to be considerable variances in the ground contours, so care has to be taken to avoid scalping.

The first fairway mowers were single trailed units pulled by a horse. With the introduction of three and



five gang mowers the animal power was replaced with petrol or diesel power. Many courses still use this system today or variations of it. Trailed gang mowers rely for their cylinder drive from wheel traction and as such consistency of reel speed can vary due to ground conditions. With the advent of hydraulic systems, manufacturers found the solution to this problem by fitting motors to each cutting, thus producing a uniform reel speed regardless of the terrain. There was also another advantage by fitting hydraulic

rams on the carrier each unit could be lifted independently - a feature which makes transporting between sizes and getting through narrow entrances easy. There are still plenty of gang mowers trailed or power driven available for clubs that prefer this method of mowing their fairways.

Time does not stand still and the next phase of development saw the introduction of self-powered fairway mowers - the point we are at today.

Golf suddenly took off as a sport for all and golf courses suddenly sprung

up virtually everywhere, so the demand for specialist equipment quickly grew.

The advent of the fairway mower heralded a change in manufacturers interests in golf course machinery as up until then there had been only a few companies directly involved. Speed and efficiency were the key factors and in addition operator comfort became important and words such as fatigue began to appear.

Over the last few years the competitive element has made manufacturers