

Rachael and Gemma would like to welcome 53 new members to the Association and talk about the launch of the Privilege Platinum Card at BTME and ClubHouse.

Once again Gemma and I will be on the BIGGA stand at BTME and ClubHouse to answer all your queries regarding your membership. This year we are launching the Privilege Platinum Card as detailed in last month's magazine. The card allows you to get discounts in lots of your local shops and also National chains. Just ring the shopping helpline or log on to the website to find out where you can use your card. We will be issuing Privilege cards on the BIGGA stand (Q128) so if you have not received yours already then make sure you pay us a visit. We have negotiated lots of discounts in Harrogate especially for BTME and ClubHouse which should save you the money you pay for your subscription in this week alone.

Offers available on Production of your Privilege Platinum Card during BTME and ClubHouse

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Horoscope	Discounts on group bookings



Don't forget to collect your card from the BIGGA stand Q128

BIGGA welcomes...

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Glenn Herbertson, North
Jamie Lamb, East
James Macbeath, North
Campbell Mackay, North
Christopher Mailley, North
Mark Main, North
William Matheson, North
Jonathan Pendry, Central
James Shepherd, North

NORTHERN REGION

Carl Caffrey, North West
Richard Gill, North West
Owen Jones, North Wales
Warwick Manning, Sheffield
Andrew Nixon, North West
Richard Turner, North West
Robert Turner, Sheffield
Dean Wood, North West

MIDLAND REGION

Haydn Drinkwater, Mid Anglia
Michael Gould, Mid Anglia
Clive Jones, Midland
Nicholas Thorley, Midland
Richard Wakefield, Midland

SOUTH EAST REGION

Austin James, Essex

SOUTH WEST/SOUTH WALES

Stephen Green, Devon & Cornwall

Malcolm Howell, South Coast
Gareth Shugar, South Wales
George Simpson, South Wales

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fergus Scobie

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Carl Baalack, Sweden
Lars Baalack, Sweden
Timothy Powers, USA
Randy Scott, Canada

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Robert Finnegan, Central
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Gudgeir Jonsson, Austria
Martyn Snell, East of England

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Gordon Nimmo, Central
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Peter Bridgewater, Midland
John Carter, East Midland
Martin Edis, South West
Mick Hall, Northern
Adrian Handbury, Midland
Paul Harborne, Midland
Jonathan Hill, Kent
Iain Marsden, London

JANUARY'S MEMBERSHIP DRAW WINNER

Just introduce one or more new greenkeeping members to BIGGA and your name will be placed into a draw to win a fantastic BIGGA Clock/calculator/calendar and alarm. Our congratulations go to John Wheeler from Mottram Hall Hotel Golf Club.

Message of the Month Winner

Each month the person who has written the best message on the BIGGA Bulletin Board, which is found on the BIGGA website www.bigga.org.uk, receives an 18 litre Gelert Rucksack featuring a multi function organiser, 2 mesh pockets and a grab handle. (Rucksack supplied may be a different colour to that featured).

Our congratulations go to January's winner, Leslie Howkins from Cleethorpes Golf Club whose message was posted on the 2nd December under the 'Talking Shop' section.



ACTIVITY DAY WINNER

For the past year we have been holding an Activity Day prize draw for those of you who returned your renewal form before your membership expired.

Our final winner is Andrew Marsh from Dudsbury Golf Club who has a choice of at least 20 activities to choose from. Congratulations Andrew.



The Total Exhibition Experience

With BTME & ClubHouse on the Horizon it's worth taking a look at how to get the most out of this buying and selling opportunity. Pauline Thompson takes a look from both perspectives, the exhibitors who are selling and the visitors who are buying.

THE EXHIBITOR

Exhibitions should, if done well, include many different aspects of sales and marketing. It's a culmination of PR, advertising, promotion, presentation, selling, and interpersonal communication skills. It can be difficult to put all of these aspects of exhibiting together and make them work. However, having a clear objective about what you are trying to achieve, and knowing what your customers want from you when they visit your stand is a good place to start.

An exhibitor needs to make sure he or she gets a return on the investment. Along with the cost of the stand rental there are stand design costs, construction, show services and transportation. As well as the obvious exhibiting costs, an astute exhibitor will also have the added cost of pre-show and on-site advertising, telemarketing, direct mailings, training and of course post-show follow-up.

Exhibitors work very hard and spend a lot of time, effort and money in choosing, buying and planning their stand space in order to attract prospective and current customers. The main reasons for deciding to exhibit are to take orders; launch new products; to convert prospective customers into new accounts; to wave the flag and say "here we are"; to check out the competition and to entertain important clients.

It is important to remember that customers buy from people, not stands. It doesn't matter how good the stand design, if the interaction between people is less than professional or the post-show follow-up is inefficient, it may just be a missed opportunity, or it could harm a reputation and credibility.

THE VISITOR

In the same way that an exhibitor needs to be clear about his objectives, the visitor must be clear in his own mind about what he is trying to achieve in order to get the most value from his time at the exhibition. BTME & ClubHouse lasts for three days and comes round once a year. Having recognised the perfect opportunity to compare a wide range of existing and potential suppliers the visitor must maximise his time in order to gain the benefits on offer.

There is a lot to do whether it's finding alternative or additional suppliers, selecting products, placing orders, or investigating a new opportunity. All this plus networking and gathering market intelligence will keep the visitor very busy. Planning is the key to a successful visit, otherwise the people may not be available and time could run out. If more than one project is to be achieved it can be beneficial to concentrate on one project at a time and spread appointments over two or three days.

It is vital to make the best use of time and take into account travelling time, registration, obtaining a catalogue and finding a way through the halls, half a day can disappear before any business has been done. Serious discussions at the end of the day may be difficult as, not surprisingly, both exhibitor and visitor have had a long day. However, while the exhibition is open, there will always be a sales person available.

Visitors can easily become overloaded with catalogues, price lists and brochures. Make use of the carrier bags given out at the show, and, by travelling light, the visitor can collect business cards, and make notes to accompany them. The amount of information gathered during the course of a full day can be astronomical. It is always a good idea to summarise the key points at the end of each day in order to reap the benefits of the exhibition.

Sales people have an enthusiasm for their products and services that enables them to talk at great lengths about why the customer should do business with their company. A useful skill is being able to close a conversation when it has become unproductive without being rude, or causing offence.

Networking opportunities which take place in the hotels and bars between show days can be invaluable. Many stories filter back about how a good time was had by all. However, a fine balance must be achieved in order for the following day not to become a total write-off.

BTME & ClubHouse is a major event at the start of every season, with careful planning, exhibitors and visitors will be enabled to measure how successful their attendance has been.

Pauline Thompson is the BTME & ClubHouse Exhibition organiser and can be contacted at BIGGA HOUSE Tel: 01347 833800



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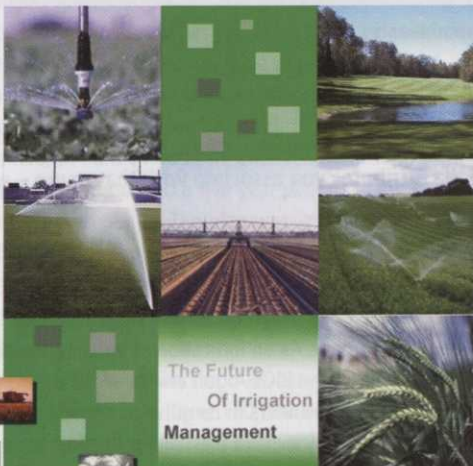
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Course Feature

In Safe Hands

Scott MacCallum travelled to Suffolk to visit Purdis Heath, a club which does more than most to look after the land in its care.



▲ The bunkers are a fine example of the combined work of the greenkeeping and conservation teams

Ipswich Golf Club, also known as Purdis Heath, is one of those excellent golf clubs which, once seen, you think, "If I lived around here, I'd love to be a member of that place". A James Braid designed heathland course with all the attributes you associate with that genre – attractive, natural surroundings, a well appointed clubhouse and everything run with friendly efficiency.

But the thing about Purdis which marks it out from every other golf club in the country, and demonstrates an approach to the custodianship of the land in their care which is exceptional, is the fact that Neil Sherman and Mike Dickens, two of Course Manager Norman Fenwick's highly motivated team of eight, are qualified conservation officers. There are some who feel that this is an extravagance and sheer indulgence on the part of the golf club, but Norman Fenwick uses the resources which Neil and Mike bring to great effect. After all, many clubs employ mechanics for their specialist knowledge!

Purdis Heath carries out a total area programme which embraces all aspects of the club's land. Norman, who has been at the club for just over four years, feels that programmes for turf quality and conservation overlap so much that there is not a dividing line between them.

As part of the successful team, General Manager, Neill Ellice and Chairman of Green, Brian Laws, both have significant input into the club's land management policy. As an indication of success, Purdis Heath is the only club to have won the BIGGA golf environment award twice – becoming the first ever winners in its guise as the Amazone Golf Environment Award in 1995, and then again in 2002.

The benefits are there to be seen with a huge variety of flora and fauna, including rare butterflies, birds, lizards, deer, foxes and a white squirrel who has made one area of the course home. The impetus for a more environmentally aware golf club came in the 1980's with a group of Committee members who fostered a real interest in the subject. One of them, Ron Squirrel, a Past Captain and President of the club, has a nature trail named after him.



▲ Back row: Brian Laws (Chairman Green), Graham Brumpton, David Barton (Deputy Course Manager), Neil Worger, Neill Ellice (General Manager). Front row: Neil Sherman, Scott Thompson, Norman Fenwick (Course Manager), Adrian Goode, Mike Dickens

At that time, Neil Sherman became the first Conservation Officer, arriving initially as part of his Otley College work placement, and working one-day a week, then two. He became full time when Norman arrived as Course Manager and then, three years ago, Mike Dickens, who was a mature student also at Otley College, joined the staff, bringing the complement up to eight.

"Bringing in Mike as a second Conservation Officer was a bigger step than taking on Neil full time, but the work that we have done has proved the benefits of doing it," said Norman, who introduces a northerner's common sense approach to all that he does.

The key question, though, must be, "What does a Conservation Officer bring to the table that a greenkeeper with an interest in the environment doesn't?" It is one which Norman is well qualified to answer.

"The biggest benefit you get is the specialist knowledge. As greenkeepers, we would know what to do when it comes to woodland management, but Neil and Mike have the knowledge to do that and how to take it forward to the next stage. It is not just woodland management but looking after the whole site so that it enhances the golf course," said Norman.

The point is reinforced by Neil Sherman.

"You need to have the vision of what you want in an area and decide what will work and look appropriate. You have to plan ahead and, with heathland, that means looking at the soil and checking if it will be adequate for Heather or Gorse to grow," he said.

On Norman's arrival at Purdis Heath, he and Neil, with support from Neill Ellice and Brian Laws, produced a five year plan to cover all aspects of maintenance from greens to ponds. The plan was important as a means of identifying the full diversity of habitat within the boundaries of Purdis, which supports acid grassland, heath, dry woodland, wet woodland, fens, woodland trails, rides (vistas) reed beds and ponds. This plan is updated on an annual basis.

Another project undertaken on the site is an extensive nest box programme for both birds and bats. Over 120 bird boxes have been erected around the course with most occupied every year. The bat population around the club's lakes is very good, with the County's largest known colony of Noctule bats (Britain's biggest species) located at Purdis Heath.

One of the main thrusts when Norman arrived was to improve airflow and reduce shade problems by canopy raising and scrub clearance.

"This has had a massive impact on all playing surfaces."

An example of this was the work which was done on the beautiful par

3 15th in removing the rhododendrons which had encroached to within three feet of the putting surface. Removing them vastly improved the quality of the green which had previously been extremely damp. It has also exposed James Braid's original landscaped contours around this green and restored its original character.

Having spent 10 years at the club, Neil Sherman has seen some of the projects come to maturity and around the course there can now be seen stands of Heather and Gorse at differing heights and stages of growth.

"I know in my mind that it takes time but always with these projects you want them to happen quicker. It's a case of having the vision in my head as to what will happen, and then waiting."

The work has been aided by success in the Environment Competitions with two polytunnels purchased after the first win which are used to grow Gorse and Broom in one and Heather stocks in the other.

"We use our home grown Heather stocks in small areas, like mounds in the centre of bunkers, otherwise we'd use our plants up too quickly on large areas. On those bigger sites we use the natural seed bank and also brushing material – the clippings from heather which we've already got around the course. We mow areas of heather as part of our annual maintenance and the material collected is then reused on the golf course so there is no wastage at all," explained Neil Sherman.

They also employ trial plots out on the course to identify which techniques are best for each area.

"We have tried using grasses, plain brushings and sieved material to get purer seed to use. The technique that might work best is dependent upon the soil in a particular area and the climate as well, which means we don't always get much re-growth of heather straight away. You know the seed is in there and it will come when conditions are right," said Neil.

Purdis Heath is more than just a heathland golf course with areas of woodland and wetland as well, but each area is treated with the same amount of care by the team. The club owns a 250 acre site and, away from the playing surfaces, they use the additional land constructively.

"We've created a new path through the woodlands and around our lakes and wetlands and worked on a new section of woodland to create features for people to look at as they walk. Among these is an area of hazel coppice which is part of the historic management of the site. Traditionally, the hazel was used to create hurdles for purposes of screening around the old duck decoy pond in the centre of the woods," explained Neil.

Neill Ellice is a man who gives 100% support to the work of Norman, Neil Sherman and the team.



▲ The new nature trail gives ramblers a very pleasant new route

"The members are starting to see the benefits and have done so over the last year. These projects are not short term and the danger is that most golfers want a quick fix and instant results, and certainly it took some brave Committee decisions to go down the route we chose," said Neill.

"The important thing was that Norman was able to put his vision across to the Club Committee. Having been on The Committee myself eight years before becoming General Manager, I can remember years of arguments about an odd tree here and a bough there. Norman convinced the Committee that the long term vision was certainly worth trying to attain, and he was able to explain quite lucidly how to go about that."



▲ One of two polytunnels paid for out of the winnings of the first Environment competition

But as everyone knows, convincing the Committee doesn't mean the job is done.

"Once the Committee was on board, half the battle was won, the second half was taking the membership forward and this is where the education process has had to come in," added Neill.

With that in mind, the club has produced a range of different methods of getting information to the membership.

"We have course walks with Neil and Norman, open events at which members can, for example, come down and see the equipment they've seen out on the course, how it works and what it is used for. We keep them up-dated with a quarterly Newsletter which includes a question and answer session between Brian Laws, and Norman, in which they explain some of the complicated techniques which are used out on the course," said Neill.

Brian also reinforced the point.

"Getting the message across is still a bit of a slog and it is often only read by the people who know anyway, but we're no longer getting the comment 'What's it got to do with golf?' that we got on the early days," said Brian, who has been Chairman of Green for three years.

Norman also has strong views about the matter of getting the message across. "We're not confrontational when it comes to communication. We just talk about the issues, but one of the problems is that people get emotional about it instead of just looking at the facts. My biggest benefit is that I've actually done it, so I can say, if you do it this way, that will happen in two or three years time or, if you do it another way, this will happen. My main objective when I first moved here was to ensure that everything we did was sustainable," said Norman, who is delighted that he enjoys an excellent relationship with Neill and Brian.

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▲ This vista, overlooking the lake, has been opened up by the team

"The General Manager is pivotal because he has to field the awkward questions from members. If he doesn't like fielding such questions, perhaps because the answer isn't what the questioner want to hear, it can become difficult. Neill can answer those questions but another Secretary/General Manager might not be quite so strong and pressure can then be exerted on the Course Manager. That is when things can start to crumble a bit."

Norman has nothing but praise for the work of his team and feels that they are in a win win situation, as are the club members. "In the event that any of the conservation work did not produce 100% of the desired results, then the worst case scenario would be production of increased areas of acid grassland, while the shade, airflow and root invasion problems would also be improved," said Norman, with Neill and Brian nodding in agreement.

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▲ The Squirrel Trail named after Past Captain and President Ron Squirrel

AN IRISHMAN ABROAD

It was February 2002, and I was studying at Elmwood College, when Mike Clark and Ian Butcher asked if I wanted to go to America to work on a golf course and gain more experience. Of course I was interested, and was put in touch with agronomist Bruce Jamieson, who explained to me about a practical and academic programme offered at the University of Minnesota. It was called the Minnesota Agricultural Student Training (MAST) programme.



▲ Work goes on at Hazeltine

The MAST programme was initially set up over 50 years ago to allow Swedish agricultural students to go to the USA and expand their knowledge in agricultural practices.

In 2001, the Toro Company, based in Minneapolis, through Helmut Ullrich and Barry Beckett, started an agronomy side of the programme, initially sponsoring two German students to work on a golf course and study at the University of Minnesota. The five students on my 2003 course were from England, Ireland, Germany and South Africa.

Bruce Jamieson helped facilitate my application and all arrangements and, fortunately, The Toro Company and the University of Minnesota accepted me as a participant in the MAST programme. So I applied for and got a J-1 work visa, which was processed within two weeks in Dublin.

So it was that I flew from Gatwick to Minneapolis on April 14, to embark upon such an exciting, if somewhat daunting, opportunity. Helmut and Barry met me in the USA, and accompanied me to the university campus for the MAST orientation session, which provided me with all the information I needed to live and work in the USA.

They told me I was to be placed at Midland Hills Country Club, located in St. Paul, the sister city to Minneapolis, and otherwise known in the USA as the Twin Cities area. Later, I met Course Superintendent Scott Austin, who introduced me to the other course staff and gave me a tour of the course and facilities. Scott had also made accommodation arrangements for me that were less than a mile from the course.

He asked what aspects of practical experience I felt I needed to improve upon, to maintain and run a successful golf course operation. He wanted to take time to make sure I would gain all the experience I could, and placed me

on every major project that occurred on the course. He also charged me with the responsibility of leading crew projects. After a couple of weeks in the USA I figured that owning a car was a must! I found a nice vehicle and settled in very well at Midland Hills, developing many friendships with the staff and members.

During the practical training period the university requires students to keep track of all aspects of their training and gives participants full monthly reports to keep both the University and students up to date. This is while also giving an opportunity to iron-out any problems that may occur during the training period. There is also lots of information to prepare students for the next academic programme, giving time to select classes for the spring term. There was a wide range of classes to choose from. I chose 'Turf grass Diseases', 'Economics' and 'Meteorology'.

Luckily for me, my time in the Twin Cities coincided with two major events held at nearby courses. The first was the PGA Championship at Hazeltine National, the other the Solheim Cup, at Interlachen Country Club. Both clubs have a lot of history when it comes to hosting high profile tournaments!

I attended both events. They taught me a lot about tournament preparation and the conditions needed for world-class events. Hazeltine National was hit with about six inches of rain on the Friday night of the tournament, which saw every bunker and low spot completely full of water. But I never saw water disappear so fast in the morning! I think every bunker pump in the Twin Cities was at Hazeltine that morning, along with the local fire department trucks that also helped with the pumping frenzy.

Amazingly, all was OK when the first paring stepped on to the tee on Saturday morning!

Following Christmas back in Ireland, I returned to the University of Minnesota. The classes were very interesting and the professors covered the subjects in great detail. The Turf Grass Diseases class was extremely interesting and included a lot of reading and taking part in practical laboratory assignments.

The University has a large agricultural and horticultural department with many valuable reference materials. All participants may work a maximum of 20 hours a week to earn spending money, and I continued to work at Midland Hills through the winter. This in itself was a unique experience – as it rarely rises above minus 15 degrees C in the winter!

On one day in particular, I think the thermometer in my car read minus 27 degrees C as I drove to work! A unique experience, but well worth it.

There is so much to do in the Twin Cities during winter. It gets really cold but people just get on with it. You can walk around downtown Minneapolis and actually never have to go outside, as there are structures called skyways that weave overhead through all of the buildings. It really is amazing architecture. In fact, Minneapolis has the world's largest network of overhead skyways.

The academic programme lasted five months and finished with final exams in mid-May. At that time, I bade farewell to Minneapolis/St. Paul and set off for the world-famous Baltusrol Golf Club in the state of New Jersey.