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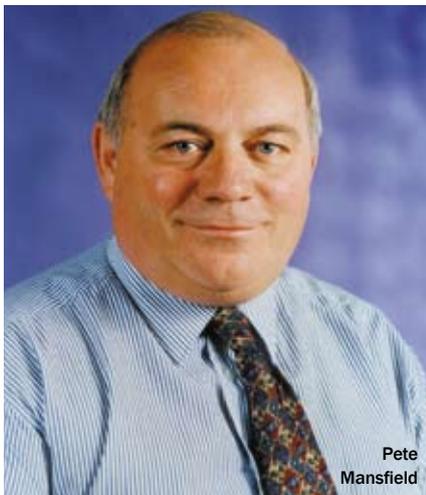
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FEATURE



Pete Mansfield

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

Scott MacCallum travelled to St Neot's in Cambridgeshire to meet Pete Mansfield, of Lely UK.

There can be few relationships that have been as harmonious and long lasting as that of Toro and its UK distributor, Lely.

Richard and Judy; Marks & Spencer; Ant and Dec – they've all been pretty good over the years but none have enjoyed the unbroken run of success more than the two and a half decades of America's The Toro Company and the St Neots-based, Dutch-owned Lely UK.

"We've been a distributor for Toro since 1983, so it is a longstanding relationship," explained Lely's General Manager for turf products, Peter Mansfield, who has been there every step of the way.

"In fact last year we celebrated 25 years together. It was quite uncanny as we had three

anniversaries in the same year. There was also 60 years of Lely itself, and 40 years of Lely UK. We had a big party in November for all the staff and our owner, Alexander van der Lely, brought his board of directors over from Holland to mark the celebration."

Lely UK was launched initially to cater for the agricultural market and its agricultural arm is still just as strong as its amenity division which took off when they joined up with Toro.

"We keep very close connections with Minneapolis. (Toro's worldwide headquarters). As a company we probably visit around four times a year and we support every meeting and training event that Toro holds, making sure that we send

over a reasonable group. Emails and phone calls take place on a daily basis and we treat each other much more like colleagues than business associates," said Peter, who is probably the Lely man who spends most time at Toro HQ.

Peter's main contact in the States is fellow Briton, Barry Beckett, Toro's Worldwide Marketing Manager, but such is the relationship between the two companies that all of the Lely staff know exactly which member of Toro staff to contact if they have a problem.

"There are a lot of people from both companies who have given many years of service and over the years most of us have met and know each other well."

Toro trusts Lely to run the UK arm and Lely ensures that no stone is left unturned in giving blanket coverage.

A UK and Ireland map behind Peter's desk is riddled with pins each signifying a dealership or service centre and each is supported by a Sales Manager. In total there are 23 main dealers and 13 service centres, while Lely itself also acts as a dealership covering the local Cambridgeshire patch.

"The map has evolved over the years. We tickle it a bit occasionally, moving territory lines slightly, for example, if demographics change or a new road improves accessibility within a particular area. All the territories need to be viable and for that we feel it needs to have at least 50 golf clubs in it," said Pete, who several years ago instigated The Commitment Programme for the dealerships.

"The aim of the programme was to look at dealerships, their business and support them into becoming more viable companies so they would grow over the years. We are conscious that we didn't want one dealership competing with another for business so the Regional Sales Manager is there to ensure that everything works fairly. Prices are set by us so there is parity across the network," explained Peter.

Dealing with a mighty organisation like Toro leads to some extremely sophisticated planning to ensure that sufficient product is available to customers in the UK without a huge surfeit clogging up the warehouses.

"For whole goods (complete machines) we are looking at a year out for ordering which we review every month. Our forecasting is extremely accurate as it is based on many years' experience and regular on-going discussions with our major clients. In our planning we identify the firm orders from the tentative orders and as the year progresses we continue to update our forecasting and keep talking to our customers to make sure we have the product ready for them when they want it."

Those orders are then shipped to the UK from Minneapolis, which is a huge logistical undertaking as the Minnesota city is hardly close to the sea. It's around 1500 miles from the east coast, while St Neots couldn't describe itself as a harbour town either, being just about as far away from the coast as any town in the south of England could be. Shipping normally takes 15 to 20 days and depending upon the carrier used it can arrive at one of a number of UK ports.

"At both ends lorries transport the goods to or from the ports," said Peter.

One of the interesting points that the Lely staff sometimes see is the different types of packaging that each country requires and which Toro has to supply.

"We have seen boxes destined for Australia that have been coated with green cuprinol and crates that have been waxed to meet specific conditions in certain countries. The disposal of packaging these days is a very sensitive issue and it is important that we adhere to the legislation," said Peter, as he took me around the 6.2-acre site.

Lely holds a huge supply of parts with three quarters of a million worth at any one time

and liaises closely with both Toro's main Parts Department, in Plymouth, Illinois, near Chicago, and the central European Parts Department, based in Germany.

"Our dealers order from us and if we have the parts in stock we guarantee to supply to them within 24 hours or overnight. If we don't have the part in stock we order it through the US and they link to Germany. Usually they can get it out to us the same day. If not, and it has to come from the US, we promise to have it to the customer within 72 hours. So it's 24 hours if we have it in stock and 72, maximum, if we don't," explained Peter, who added that Lely has a 96% first pick rate – part in stock – while Toro as a whole has an extremely impressive 99.2% first pick success rate.

"We ship directly to the end user as well which often saves us a day."

One element of Lely's day-to-day business which is becoming increasingly important is training and the company has a brand new on-site training facility that proves the point.

"We actually currently have two training rooms – our old 'dirty' one where we have grinding equipment and do mechanical courses and the new 'clean' one where we have a pool of computers and we do more management training, although we do have an option to bring machines into the building as well," said Peter, adding that a decision whether to remain running with two facilities or move exclusively to the new one was still to be made.

Last year Lely had around 800 people through the doors covering in-house staff, dealers and end-users. Ian Sumpter has been Training Manager since 2003 and it says much for the development of training methods and the commitment to the cause that a machinery distributor employs a full-time educator.

"Originally training used to be the remit of the position of Service Manager, who looked after warranties and dealt with teething problems and breakdowns of machines. Then he became Service and Training Manager and then eventually we had a dedicated Training Manager because the job became so involved.

"It has to be someone with the skills because we can train the product into the person but you can't train the ability to manage the training. It's a big job as invites have to be sent out, hotels booked and we have to organise buses to take people out to dinner etc. It all needs to be done."

Lely has a large training budget but some recovery of costs can be made through Government Schemes and some training can also be charged to the recipient.

"Some years ago this wouldn't have happened but thanks in part to BIGGA, which has done a lot in this area with the CPD Scheme, people are quite prepared to pay for training as they see that it is necessary."

Toro and Lely have always had education and training at the forefront of their thinking and nothing could highlight that more than the Toro Student of the Year Competition which has run since 1989.

"I think I missed the first three but I have been heavily involved in every one since then. Our Managing Director Graham Dale used to be a judge at the Final and I'd do the Regional Finals then I took on the Final as well. More recently I've dropped out of the Regional Finals and our Regional Managers have taken that on and I've concentrated on the Final," said Peter, who is normally joined as a final Judge by a Toro colleague, John Pemberton, BIGGA's Chief Executive, and the Chairman of the BIGGA Learning and Development Sub-Committee.

"We have uncovered some extremely fine greenkeepers over the last 20 years and I have watched young boys, and some girls, become grown adults. It's very rewarding. It would be over my dead body if we ever said that we couldn't afford to do the competition."

Toro is very proud of its Total Solutions programme offering a full programme of machinery, spare parts, irrigation systems and general expertise and it is not just a marketing boast that if a customer chooses to go down the Toro path they are welcomed into the Toro family and treated as such.

If the relationship between Toro and those people who buy the product is as fruitful as that between Toro and Lely has been over the last 25 years they will be extremely happy customers indeed.



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Mark Hastry (seated on the John Deere 3245C semi-rough mower) and the rest of The Heworth Golf Club's greenkeeping team.

FEATURE



QUALITY CONTROL AT HEWORTH GOLF CLUB

What needs to happen to ensure a new irrigation system does exactly what you want it to. Steve Mitchell reports on a club which has gone through the process and what was involved.

It's probably the last thing that a golf club finance committee would consider, especially in our climate, but a fully functioning irrigation system is the most important piece of equipment on the golf course – because without water, nothing grows.

So when Head Greenkeeper Mark Hastry was having problems with the irrigation system at Heworth Golf Club in Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, he was keen to get them sorted out as quickly as possible. The solution came in the shape of a new John Deere Aurora irrigation controller, the first commercial unit installed on a golf course in the UK.

The installation was carried out by Full Circle Irrigation Services, with equipment supplied by local John Deere dealer, Greenlay, of Cramlington, Northumberland.

Full Circle is in its second year of business, with directors, Robert George and John Grafton,

and three full-time employees operating out of premises in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire. Initially the business developed a customer base in the north-east of England, mainly through word of mouth and recommendations from greenkeepers like Mark, and the company has since been sub-contracted to work in Europe, including France, Ireland and Denmark.

Robert set up the business after working for another irrigation company in the north-west of England for nine years.

"Basically I wanted to work for myself, and I saw a gap in the market. I think there's always room in any industry for a specialist, personal and independent service at a reasonable price. I wanted to be service based, working face to face with customers and building relationships based on good workmanship and trust," said Robert.

The relationship with John Deere began when Full Circle did some initial work at Heworth, when Mark needed advice on the best way to get his

irrigation system working properly. This coincided with John Deere announcing its entry into the irrigation market, and director Geoff Lowes, of Greenlay, was looking for specialist help to get John Deere's new product range known and accepted in the area.

"Full Circle did a few jobs for me and got my original control box ticking over, but it really needed replacing," said Mark.

"The controller wasn't working as efficiently as it could, we had a number of electrical problems, and the system basically wouldn't allow us to do what we wanted it to. For example, some stations weren't switching on at night, so one of us would have to come down and turn the sprinklers on manually."

After Mark recommended their work, Geoff arranged for Full Circle to have a demonstration of the new Aurora controller.

"When John Deere asked the dealers to start promoting irrigation equipment, I felt straight away

we needed to find someone who could do the installations, as we just didn't have the expertise within the dealership," he said.

"Full Circle are a good fit for us and for the product range – we sell the parts and systems, and they have the specialist installation knowledge and experience. With irrigation systems, as with any other key piece of equipment, you have to know what you're doing, so we had to find the right people to provide the right service."

The original irrigation system at Heworth was installed in 1994, in two loops of nine, and currently covers all the tees and greens and about half the fairways on this flat, wooded course. The basic wall-mounted Aurora irrigation controller replaced the existing box, and new decoders and connectors had to be wired into each valve box to receive the Aurora's command signals. The whole installation took two and a half days to complete, including full insulation and resistance testing.

"Before we had the first demonstration, we hadn't seen the controller in action before," said Robert George.

"Obviously we wouldn't install a product we didn't know, or have confidence in but because the Aurora controller operates three-wire decoder systems, we were able to connect it to the existing system at Heworth and operate it. Our conclusion was, and Mark agreed, that it was a lot easier to programme and operate than the previous controller. Once Mark was happy with the system and the price, we went ahead and installed it.

"Now we carry an Aurora unit with us in our service vehicles, so we can wire it in anywhere and give an on-site demonstration of its main features and benefits.. Mark has the basic set-up, with all the programming done at the box, but he'll be able to grow the system in future as required – you can connect it to the internet and control the irrigation system from anywhere using a laptop, PDA, mobile phone... all the options are there."

The new system now controls 98 stations across the golf course, and offers Mark more programmes, multiple station starts and more control of his overnight watering schedule.

"I can now control our water management much better and more efficiently," said Mark.

"We're on a clay soil here, and with clay there are no in-betweens – in winter it saturates, and in summer it bakes. If you leave it too long between watering, the ground will crack, so you need to get the balance right. This is why it's vital to have an efficient irrigation system.

"The programme we use depends on the weather, naturally, but generally we like to set it off twice a night, starting at around 11.30pm. Because of the clay, we'll generally water for four minutes, stop for a while to let the water soak down, and then go again for another three and a half minutes or so. The greens are set up first, then we switch to the tees, then back to the greens, before watering the fairways. The fairway sprinklers are usually still going when we come to work in the morning.

"Now we've got the controller sorted out, the next job will be to overhaul the whole system. We now have a full service contract with Full Circle,



(Left to right): Director Robert George of Full Circle Irrigation Services, The Heworth Golf Club's Head Greenkeeper Mark Hastry, Director Geoff Lowes of Greenlay and Director John Grafton of Full Circle.



One of the new decoders that was wired into each valve box on the course at The Heworth Golf Club.

and this gives us a regular report on what needs doing next, for example where we have leaks and corroded gate valves, or where the heads are not turning properly. In an ideal world we would have all the work done at the same time, but we couldn't manage the cost of this on our annual budget, so this will be an ongoing project, probably over the next three years."

Robert recommends that golf clubs should look at regular updates to their irrigation system rather than try to replace everything at once, which is a very expensive option.

"With new products coming on the market, clubs shouldn't have to rely on costly old components and systems," he said.

"New irrigation technology and products can easily be introduced to existing installations, particularly on some of the older systems out there, and we always aim to use the best equipment for individual situations as no two golf courses are the same. We would always recommend too that people use specialist installers – you can't just throw odd parts at a system and expect them to work properly without professional help and advice.

"We offer a service contract so that clubs can have their system regularly checked and serviced. This means we look over the whole system, test the pump, every valve and sprinkler, and the general condition of all components. We then produce a detailed report with recommendations and full costings, and if anything needs replacing or repairing we work with the club to achieve this.



The Aurora controller is future-proof – the base unit can be fitted at any time with input sensors from ground moisture meters to evapotranspiration meters to a full weather system, for even more precise water management without the need for a PC.

Our standard contracts include decommissioning for the winter and a guaranteed response time from the customer's call."

As a greenkeeper working at the sharp end, Mark agrees wholeheartedly with this approach.

"Most greenkeepers have a budget to work to, and these reports definitely help me to manage my budget better. The golf club committee has to decide on any large investment, so the more information I can give them, the better informed their decisions will be.

"Basically, the Aurora system was fitted because I left it to Full Circle. They're the specialists, and if they'd said the John Deere controller wasn't right for me, I wouldn't have had it fitted. Their professionalism and workmanship have been second to none, so you can see why they're doing so well in this area. Even John Deere's own irrigation specialists were impressed when they inspected the installation."

CONTACT DETAILS

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Topturf – Tel:0870 8720081
Par 4 Irrigation Ltd- Tel:01765 602175
Oakdale T&G Irrigation – Tel:01427 874200
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WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL TURF WEED?

By Dr Terry Mabbett

Common daisy with its fleshy rosette leaves divides quickly to produce new plants and a matt of weed growth.

Turf is a man-made ecosystem, exploiting differences in height between growing points of broad-leaved weeds and turf grasses which escape the mower's blades.

Optimum-height, correct frequency cutting should eliminate all broad-leaf weeds but some species have a naturally prostrate habit and escape to survive and thrive in the turf environment. Over the long-term, mowing selects out weed biotypes best suited to turf, even though the species may not be naturally prostrate. Weed management requires an optimum height cut, because a cut too low can be just as damaging as a cut too high. Weeds like common daisy (*Bellis perennis*) and greater plantain (*Plantago major*) thrive in turf that is 'shaved' and compacted.

Many common and successful turf weeds display a completely different growth habit when not growing in turf. Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) hugs the ground, its runners slipping unobtrusively through the turf to root at regular intervals. Contrast this to 'natural' growth situations where creeping buttercup grows up to 45-60 cm high. Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) is one of the most prostrate of turf weeds but grows up to 30 cm high in long meadow grass. Bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) behaves in the same way, often using long grass stems for support.

The spectrum and frequency of broad-leaved weeds in turf clearly depends on status (e.g. professional or amenity) and corresponding management profile. That said turf weeds invariably display one or more characteristics of growth habit, reproduction and response to chemical control which allow them to successfully invade and compete in turf.

Growth habit

Common turf weeds including dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), common daisy, plantains and self-heal display leaves in rosettes at or just above soil level. Rosette growth avoids the cut while the leaves shade out and kill adjacent grass plants. For instance, the large toothed leaves of dandelion are super-efficient light blockers, shading out and smothering short fine leaves of turf grasses.

Weed niches created by rosette forming weeds are exploited and expanded through daughter plants produced directly at the fleshy

rootstock and stem (e.g. daisy and plantain) or more efficiently by running stems (runners) or stolons e.g. self-heal and white clover (*Trifolium repens*). These are major features of the matt forming weeds that create patches in turf over a short period of time.

Asexual reproduction

Runners that root provide weeds with an efficient and effective means of asexual reproduction and spread. Runners may be severed during mowing or raking but the new plant, now independent via its own root system, survives to form a new focus of



Dandelion. The long toothed leaves of dandelion are super-efficient light blockers.



The lance-shaped leaves of the ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) in rosette formation.

weed infestation. Weeds with running stems that root include white clover, self-heal and creeping buttercup. Slender speedwell (*Veronica filiformis*), regarded as the United Kingdom's worst turf weed, owes its wide spread to tiny pieces of runner rooting and establishing where they fall during mowing, or elsewhere if mowers are shared between sites.

Survival organs

Some turf weeds are equipped with food storage organs to survive drought and low temperature. Examples are the tap roots of dandelion and close relatives like cat's ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) and bulbs of the bulbous buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*). Perennating (survival) organs also play a part in asexual reproduction. For instance,

the underground part of the dandelion appears to be a swollen root but any attempt to dig out individual plants reveals another function. Pieces of tap root left in the soil form fibrous roots and develop into new plants, causing a cluster of small dandelion plants to grow from the failed attempt to dig out a single plant.

Another successful weed in this respect is the lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*). The weed is not widespread in turf but one of the most difficult to shift. Lesser celandine causes protracted problems in wet, shaded turf adjacent to grassy banks and woodland which is its natural habitat. Underground at the base of each plant is a cluster of tiny bulbils each with the capacity to produce a new plant, especially if detached and spread by digging.

Sexual reproduction

With proper management turf grasses and broad-leaved weeds rarely get the chance to flower and set seed. That said many broad-leaved weeds in turf have been selected out (by mowing) to flower just above ground level. This together with long flowering periods, including ephemeral (year-round) flowering, short seed-maturation times, minimum germination requirements and ability to exploit tiny germination sites in turf means sexual reproduction does play a part in weed establishment and spread.

Most broad-leaved turf weeds readily exploit other habitats to generate large seed banks from which plants like the wind-borne 'pappus' of the dandelion migrate into turf. Successful turf weeds can exploit small germination sites including tiny patches of bare soil caused by wear and tear, or holes left by physical removal of individual weeds. Worm casts provide ideal and ready-made germination sites, especially when the seed has been ingested by the worm during burrowing under the turf, and deposited intact inside the cast.

Drought resistant weeds

Predicted effects of climate change on UK turf due to hotter and drier summers and the need for drought resistant turf grass species and varieties is widely discussed. Relatively little attention is paid to how turf weeds will behave and fare, and especially those which are naturally drought resistant. At the end of dry summers white clover, bird's foot trefoil, lesser trefoil/yellow suckling clover (*Trifolium dubium*) dandelion, cat's ear and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) will be thriving in drought stricken turf. They persist throughout the drought and then fast off the mark in autumn when rain starts to fall, forming large



Successful turf weeds can exploit tiny germination sites like worm casts. Dock (*Rumex*) shown here.



A major weed of turf that spreads by creeping stems which root at intervals.

weed patches in the still struggling turf. Bird's foot trefoil, dandelion and cat's ear have deep tap roots, while the finely divided waxy leaves of yarrow have low transpiration potential.

Resistance to chemical control

Selective herbicides have revolutionised turf weed control by allowing managers to overspray the turf and kill broad leaved weeds without harming turf grasses. Some weeds are more susceptible than others even with the same herbicide product. Recommended application rate (litres of product per hectare) and stage of weed growth up to which the herbicide can be applied differs between weed species. Product labels may additionally cite specific weed species for which only moderate control can be achieved with recommended rates.

There are no hard and fast rules but yarrow and slender speedwell are among the most difficult weeds to control with the current range of approved herbicides. A particular weed species may be hard to control because the foliage is difficult to wet, for example yarrow with finely divided and waxy leaves, or because the weed's metabolism is inherently resistant to herbicide action. This appears to be the case for slender speedwell which has only ever been adequately controlled by one or two specific herbicides.

Grass weeds

In theory other grasses should be the most successful and most difficult to control weeds in professional turf. Selective herbicides will solve most broad-leaved weed problems but can do nothing about coarse grasses like timothy (*Phleum pratense*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*), meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) and cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), all regarded as weeds of professional



White clover is one of the most drought resistant weeds of turf.

turf. Perhaps the most interesting in this respect are various *Poa* species. *Poa* can be a legitimate and valued component of turf in some situations but a weed in others, depending on turf status and nature of the soil base on which it grows.

The only real option is to exploit any differences in soil, water and nutritional requirement between turf grasses and weed grasses. *Poa* can be marginalised using a so-called 'starving-out' strategy. Some managers squeeze out *Poa* by 'turning a blind eye' to anthracnose disease (*Colletotrichum graminicola*). *Poa* is measurably more susceptible than bents and fescues to anthracnose thus allowing natural biological control to reduce the incidence of *Poa* in professional turf.

Field woodrush (*Luzula campestris*) looks like a grass but belongs to the family *Juncaceae*.

However, like true grasses (*Graminae*) field woodrush is a monocotyledon and is mostly resistant to the action of the selective herbicides designed for use in turf.

About the Author

Dr Terry Mabbett has experience in grassland agronomy, and tree protection in forestry, horticulture and amenity. He has worked as consultant and technical writer in these fields for 20 years with a strong focus on pest, disease and weed management.



Creeping buttercup spreads unobtrusively through turf on runners which creep over the ground and root.

ON HIS TODD

BIGGA's new National Chairman, Peter Todd, found his way into the industry through a circuitous route but has made up for lost time since. He chats with Scott MacCallum...

There is an array of different routes into greenkeeping. Some people arrive through a love of playing the game of golf; others have followed their fathers into the profession, while some have had a complete change of career direction.

Peter Todd, BIGGA's new National Chairman and Courses Manager at The London Club, found his way into greenkeeping when he was forced to give up a weekend gardening job. He missed it so much it proved to him just how much he loved the outdoor life and encouraged him to change his life path.

On leaving school and joining multi-national company, Reed International, Peter started off in their logistics division, later moving into sales and negotiating contracts with clients. Alongside his career with Reed, Peter also worked at weekends on a four acre private garden in Loose, Kent, a job he had done for eight years until his move north with the company prevented this continuing.

The valuable commercial experience gained with Reed is something that, coupled with his passion for greenkeeping, Peter believes will be a useful benefit during his year as Chairman.

"Working at a proprietary club where commercial considerations as well as greenkeeping matters are constantly in focus fits entirely with my thinking."

A very solid grounding on several areas of business life at Reeds, coupled with an excellent education at Maidstone Grammar School has since helped Peter in his greenkeeping career.

"I'd spent seven years, working for three different divisions of Reed – within the Logistics and Industrial Packaging fields– and thoroughly enjoyed it. The training was excellent and I progressed to the stage where I was the youngest person on the sales team and left negotiating directly with large companies.

"However, when I was given a area covering from Liverpool to Hull and everything north of there, I came to the realisation that I didn't want spend my life in a car. Giving up my outdoor job had been a real wrench when I moved north and made me realise it was time to change direction before it was too late to re-train."

Having taken the decision to leave Reed, Peter signed up to study for an HND in Landscape Management Course, at Merrist Wood College, in Guildford.

"Initially I didn't want to narrow my focus as I didn't know in which area I wanted to specialise



but George Shiels was the Vice Principal of the College at the time and I talked with him about golf course construction and in my studies saw the early stages of plans for the Merrist Wood golf course.

"I soon recognised that a lot of people involved in horticulture were extremely passionate about working outdoors with nature but were actually struggling to make a decent living. The leisure

industry was growing fast and seemed to offer more opportunities. Having decided that a move into golf, which was booming at the time, would be good sandwich year work option, I set about finding a job.

"George (Shiels) put me in touch with three of the largest golf construction companies in the UK and I met with them all, before being offered the chance to work on the construction of what is now