



membership fees rising over the period that they got the equivalent of a year's free golf and the club got the money to install the system," explained Allen.

Water to a limited number of tees was introduced around four years ago.

Perhaps the biggest project the club has undertaken came around the turn of the millennium when all 18 greens were rebuilt over three winter programme years.

"We had thick heavy clay under the greens and they didn't drain very well at all while inevitably we got a build up of thatch. We decided to renew four of the worst greens to begin with and did the majority of the work ourselves.

"We hired a JCB and a driver while we cut the turf, we drove the dumpers, put in 220 tonnes of root zone and 200 tonnes of stone then relaid the turf.

"It has paid off because whereas before if it rained for a few hours I knew we'd be brushing water off the back of the 12th or 1st greens now

we can have a thunderstorm and it's drained in 15 minutes."

The work did coincide with the worst day of Allen's working life, the eighth anniversary of which fell the day after my visit.

"We discovered that five of our greens had been covered with weedkiller. We sought advice and tried to hose the greens off and while we initially thought we'd saved them a week later they turned brown, yellow black and muddy.

"Tests showed that the rootzone was infected down to eight inches and we had to dig up the greens and rebuild them – three of which had already been done under the rebuilding programme.

"We searched for any signs of empty weedkiller bags and whoever did it knew to walk backwards to prevent it getting on their shoes, but the police could never find who was responsible and we could never find any motive for the attack.

"We had to buy more turf and rootzone and it took about three



ABOVE: The Greenkeeping Team at Llanmynech Golf Club

years for the greens to return to where I would want them to be."

Llanmynech is a SSSI site and Allen has two work closely with CADW – Conservation and Development of Wales – on anything he wishes to carry out on the golf course.

"I can't put so much as a spade into the ground without getting permission from CADW first and it can take up to three months to get a decision from them," explained Allen.



The willow trees were planted in mounded earth to avoid digging any holes

“In fact, they have spot inspections and during one I was asked how the 150 markers were attached.”

He has built up a close working relationship with the Agency over the period and knows that any attempt to bypass the system would result in a breakdown of that relationship and no permission for any work in the future.

“It does mean we have to plan everything well in advance and can’t have a Green Committee one evening and go about actioning what has been decided the next morning.”

CADW does have an appreciation of the benefits golf has brought to an area which otherwise would be inaccessible to many, but the right side of the second fairway is an example of what sometimes needs to be done.

“We had problems with balls going into a garden and it was decided that we need to plant some willows to stop it from happening.

“Because we put holes into the ground we had to build a four foot high mound of soil and plant the trees into that,” he said, adding that he works closely with his Chairman of Green, Brian Suckley, who is also Chairman of Finance.

Another issue arose while they were erecting the JSRs for the new

Maintenance Facility.

“We need permissions for that and they had someone on site to watch the work being carried out. While we were digging the footings they found an ancient skull which stopped the work for three months. The skull was dated back to 780BC and was regarded as a significant find and is now in a museum in Cardiff but the club had to pay for the archaeological fees while the dig was carried out on the site and that cost us an additional £4000.”

The club brought recognition to the area when it won the Welsh Award in the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition in the year 2000.

Allen is no mean golfer himself having played on the same County Team as Woosie, Sandy Lyle, Peter Baker and others and against the likes of Paul Broadhurst and David Gilford- Ryder Cup players all, and he is particularly proud of breaking Woosie’s Llanmynech course record at the Captain’s Day of 2007 with a six under-par 64. He is quick to add that it came just 10 days after hollowcoring and top dressing the greens – “A great advert for doing the work in August,” he is quick to add.

“Gareth Woosnam texted his brother with the news and I got a very nice letter from Ian, on Ryder

Cup headed paper, congratulating me and saying he’d be back at some stage to claim it back from me.”

The green staff is currently four strong with Allen, Allen Evans, who has been at the club for six years; Matt Lewis (Allen’s son) who has been at the club for four and a half years; and James Hampson who has been at Llanmynech for 18 months. Allen and Matt have both achieved their Level IIIs and James is currently under training all through Reaseheath College.

The club is in the process of building a short Academy Course, cut out of a former forested area of the club, and aimed at local school children, but offering members the chance of honing their shots games.

“It has been funded through Visit Wales and their Ryder Cup initiative. The Academy is in the Welsh part of the course – otherwise we wouldn’t have got money for it – and we’ve put in several artificial greens as it is another area for us to maintain and we wanted to limit the amount of additional work it would give us.

The club is hoping that Woosie will open the new Academy next year.

Perhaps he might take that opportunity to reclaim the course record from his old friend.

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# First Welshman Is Youngest Ever Toro Winner

Scott MacCallum meets Rhys Norville, the 2009 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year

**The 21st Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Competition was notable on two counts. Not only did it produce the youngest winner in the history of the event, it also saw the first ever Welsh winner.**

If that hints at a remarkable young greenkeeper, then you'd be on the right lines as 21 year-old Rhys Norville is just that.

Rhys, an Assistant at Newport Golf Club, in South Wales, won his place in the seven strong final at the regional interview stage having been nominated by Coleg Gwent where he has just completed his NVQ Level II.

The final held at BIGGA HOUSE involved the completion of a course report on Aldwark Manor's golf course, and a further interview covering all aspects of greenkeeping and knowledge of BIGGA, conducted by Pete Mansfield, of Lely; Bruce Jamieson, of Toro; Jeff Mills, BIGGA's Learning and Development Sub-Committee Chairman, and Sami Collins, BIGGA's Head of Learning and Development.

After a full day for all concerned the announcement was made at 5.30pm and Rhys was congratulated by his fellow finalists – Martin Finegan, an Assistant at Waterville Golf Links and Colaiste Stiofain, in Ireland; Richard Jenkinson, who is currently working on the construction of the new G-West course, near Gleneagles and Elmwood College; Benjamin Burrill, Assistant at Ilkley

GC and Askham Bryan College; Oliver Pennington, an Assistant at La Moye GC, in Jersey, and Myerscough College; Adam Wise, an Assistant at Richmond GC, in London, and Myerscough College and Peter Leach, Deputy Course Manager at Exeter G&CC and Myerscough College.

Benjamin and Adam were the joint runners-up winning all expenses paid trips to Harrogate Week, next January.

"As we were waiting for the announcement to be made my heart was pounding. I certainly didn't expect my name to be read out as the standard of the finalists



**"I was 16, had finished my GCSEs and was playing golf every day, and felt that golf was what I wanted to do with my life."**

was so high. All the guys were great and everyone had such a lively personality. I must admit I was in a state of disbelief when it was my name that Sami read out," said Rhys, as we spoke the morning after a celebratory meal and visit to the bowling alley.

Born and bred in Newport, Gwent, Rhys caught the golfing bug from his father as a 10 year-old, joining him on visits to Tredegar Golf Club where he was a member.

"It was when I was 16 that my passion for the game really took off. I'd finished my GCSEs and was

playing golf every day and felt that golf was what I wanted to do with my life."

Strangely though, it wasn't Tiger Woods, or Ian Woosnam or Bradley Dredge who Rhys saw as his role models, but Lee Padgett, the pro at Tredegar at the time.

"As part of the Dragon Sport programme at school I'd been doing some coaching and I'd always had aspirations to teach. So I thought I could put the two together and become a teaching pro," he explained.

When Lee left to take up a post in the United States Rhys' desire to go down that particular path receded

a little, but with golf still coursing through his veins he joined the Newport Golf Club greenkeeping staff under then Course Manager, Angus MacLeod.

"Initially I viewed greenkeepers in much the same way as most golfers, as grass cutters, but I've always had an inquisitive nature and thirst to learn so I felt that joining Angus and the team, would stead me well as part of my overall plan to become a pro but I found that I really enjoyed the work."

However, he was tempted back down his original route, when Paul



Mayo, the 1987 Amateur Champion, and pro at Newport, offered him a job.

"I thought all my Christmases had come at once. I worked with Paul in the shop and did some teaching for about 10 months, but that time led me to the conclusion that I could have a better career by going down the greenkeeping route," explained Rhys, adding that BIGGA has to take a lot of credit for there being a more defined career path.

A vacancy on the Newport Greenkeeping team, now headed by Paul Handy who had been Deputy under Angus McLeod, came up and Rhys was able to relaunch a career that less than two years later saw him collecting the plaudits at BIGGA HOUSE.

"I cracked on with my NVQ Level II – I was lucky as I'd picked up quite a bit from my initial time in greenkeeping so I had some background.

Speaking with Rhys it is easy to see why the judges selected him as 2009 Toro winner. Although only recently turned 21 he talks with an intelligence and measured maturity of someone older and he possesses an extremely clear focus on his career.

"The Toro Award will give me something to concentrate on in the short term – particularly the eight week study trip to the States in January and February – but for the medium to longer term I do have some ideas.

"I'm on the Support Team for the Ryder Cup next year, which was made possible as I'm local to Celtic Manor, but I'm conscious that I only have experience of parkland golf courses and I'd really like to go and see how heathland, links and resort courses work.

"I'd also like to take a year out and experience warm weather courses somewhere like Portugal or the States then come back and get a job as a Deputy Head," he said.

"From an educational point of view I'd like to get my Level III and then start on a Foundation Degree at Myerscough. The great thing with Distance learning is that all I need is a laptop and I can travel and keep up to date with the work."

Another ambition he has is to get his current 3 handicap down to scratch. Over the last two years, with the bad weather, I'd gone up to 4 and did well to get it down to 2 at one point while he recently won the Strokeplay Championship at Tredegar Park, where he is still a member.

Outside of the golf club he was a member of the Newport Youth



Council, until recently, working with the local Council to create opportunities for young people in the town.

"We sat down as a group to discuss ideas and make proposals to Newport Council which we thought would be of benefit. I'm fortunate to come from a good background so it was good to be able to help those who perhaps didn't have the same chances as I had.

"We persuaded the Council to set up an office in the town centre so 16-25 year olds could drop in and use the internet and receive help writing CVs. There was also help for family problems and advice if people wanted to take up a sport."

Looking back, Rhys has a number of people who he credits as influences and mentors in his life.

"I have a few people who I've





**LEFT PAGE**  
**TOP:** The three winners .  
**MIDDLE:** Benjamin Burrell and  
**BOTTOM:** Adam Wise with Pete  
 Mansfield

looked up to and learned from. Initially there was Lee Padgett, at Tredegar Park, who taught me golf and who was always keen to do things the right way. There were no quick fixes and he built my swing in the proper manner – no short cuts.

“I really learned from the passion and drive that Angus MacLeod brought to greenkeeping. He wanted everything to be the best it could possibly be and I think that is a great attitude to have. He was fantastic. No short cuts and no second best. Angus is now at Belton Woods, in Lincolnshire, and I’m going to go and see him on my way home today.”

Another man Rhys who credits is Paul Worster, Course Manager at Minchinhampton GC, and BIGGA’s current Vice Chairman.

“I have attended a couple of seminars that he’s spoken at on promoting the environment and they were a big influence on me. He has been involved with ecology for years and it was brilliant to see some of the things he’d done.”

Rhys is very appreciative of BIGGA and the opportunities membership brings him.

“I really enjoy the Section events, playing golf and mixing with the other members. It is great to be able to chat with Course Managers and Golf Club Secretaries at events. He was also delighted to receive good luck messages from, among others, South Wales Section Secretary, Steve Chappell, and Regional Administrator, Jane Jones.

“I’d very much like to thank my Course Manager, Paul Handy, Rus-

sell Thomas, Secretary at Newport, and everyone at the golf club for all their help and support.”

Rhys spent much of his time following the announcement with last year’s winner Matthew Wormald, getting the low down on what to expect during his eight week trip to the States.

“Matthew was really helpful and I’m looking forward the trip and all the experiences that it will bring. My girlfriend, Becky, is very supportive and excited for me although it won’t be easy for either of us to be apart for such a long time.

“I’d like to thank BIGGA, Toro and Lely for all the work they did to organise the competition and I look forward to representing BIGGA as Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year over the next 12 months.”



# Reinventing the Wheel

BIGGA members have been heavily involved in the development of a new winter wheel for Powakaddy trolleys. Lee Manvell explains how the whole processes evolved

**Electric trolley use has been on the rapid increase since the turn of the millennium. However, a source of great frustration for golfers, greenkeepers and golf course owners alike is the fact that there hasn't been a universal solution for regular winter use.**

Now through the work of Powakaddy, in collaboration with BIGGA, a new winter wheel solution seems set to give winter golf for electric trolley users the green light.

The new winter wheels have taken their 'open tread' design inspiration from lawn protection products and have been subjected to a rigorous and comprehensive testing process in conjunction with a BIGGA advisory panel of Course Managers. The result is a ground breaking product that should gain widescale approval from greenkeepers; increase winter revenue for Course Owners, Managers and on-course retailers and, perhaps most importantly, allow an ever growing category of golfers to play regularly throughout the winter months.

Terry Hale, Powakaddy's Chief Executive is delighted with the end product and the ongoing consultation with BIGGA.

"Our designers felt as though they were on to something with the new design but we were very keen to engage with the experts at BIGGA and draw upon the knowledge of their members to help us in the design and testing process. John Pemberton and his team have been extremely helpful throughout the process and I am confident that greenkeepers up and down the country will be pleased with the end product".

Soft turf and electric trolleys have never been happy bedfellows.







Above: Four stages of prototypes  
Below left: David Wood supervises the saturation of some ground in preparation for the test  
Below right: The test produced minimal denting  
Bottom right: The concentrated use test





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