



Chairman's Word

National Chairman, Andrew Mellon, gives his thoughts for the month

An enjoyable week in Harrogate

I am not long back from an enjoyable week in Harrogate attending BTME. It was great to catch up with so many friends, get lots of excellent education from first class providers and see first hand all the innovations coming to market from our many suppliers.

I have been invited by the Board to remain as Chairman for a further year in order to complete and implement the strategic review. It will also allow for some continuity between the Board and the CEO as Jim has not been in place for a full year. I will do my best to ensure that members' interests remain at the forefront of all matters that the Board consider.

I'd like to recognise and thank my employers, Elmwood College, and my team at the golf course for supporting me while I undertake this role. It goes without saying, but I must, that the support of my family is essential, as it is to so many of us working in this Industry.

While we sometimes struggle to get the balance correct due to the commitment required of the job, their support and understanding of the demands placed upon you must never be taken for granted, and they should always come first.

The outstanding success of the exhibition was a fitting way to celebrate 25 years of the Association. Many of the founding members were in attendance. I'd like to thank them for having the vision to form the Association, which has helped all of us working in the industry today, raised the profile of our work and provided the vital education to enable us to constantly develop professionally. It has continued to grow and develop due to the support and hard work of many members at Section, Region and National Level. Those who engage and utilise the many member benefits and support provided, demonstrate that this work is worthwhile.

I would like especially to thank the staff. As is the case in many organisations, they do not always receive the recognition they are due. I've had the privilege of working closely with them over the last two years, as Vice Chairman and Chairman, and I've witnessed the dedication and commitment they provide to ensure the Association delivers what the members need. We were

fortunate to have excellent leadership through our two previous Chief Executives, Neil Thomas and John Pemberton, and I'm confident, even more so after BTME, that Jim Croxton has the qualities to ensure we continue to grow and develop successfully.

An Association is nothing without its members, I was so proud to witness the professionalism of all our members attending the show. The enthusiasm and hunger to learn more is inspirational and I saw many young members who, I'm sure, have a bright future.

I'd like to thank the many Trade companies and Golf Industry Bodies whose support to the Association has been essential in helping us progress to this stage. We work in a great industry and the camaraderie which exists comes to the fore during this week.

The feedback we received was very positive, and the increase in visitor numbers certainly created a really good atmosphere

The enthusiasm and hunger to learn more is inspirational and I saw many young members who, I'm sure, have a bright future

within the halls. I'd like to thank our fellow Associations who were represented, from Australia, Canada, Ireland and the United States, as well as FEGGA. Their willingness to work together with us to better support all our members should show some interesting developments in the near future.

The generosity shown by all at our 25th Anniversary Dinner raised over £2500 towards the Chairman's Charity, "Make Leukaemia History". Gerry Considine, who spoke at the dinner, has sent a letter of thanks and further information, which is printed elsewhere in this magazine. Sincere thanks also to the members and clubs who donated such valuable prizes for the charity raffle.

We were privileged to have Ken Schofield CBE propose a toast to the Association and his recognition of the contribution

our members have made to the game of golf was a very humbling experience. Our President, Sir Michael Bonallack, gave a very fitting response and also paid his own tribute to the work of BIGGA. His continuous support is of enormous benefit to the Association, for which we are extremely grateful. I'd like to thank Ransomes Jacobsen who sponsored the event and especially David Withers for the kind words and sense of humour that he brought to the occasion.

Last but certainly not least I would wish to thank and recognise Mark Dobell, from the R&A, for serving as Guardian on the Board for 13 years. His guidance and experience has been invaluable.

We wish him all the best in his retirement. Also to Archie Dunn, Auchterarder Golf Club, Scottish Board Director, who has served faithfully for five years showing great commitment and dedication in representing the members.

George Barr, Worthing Golf Club, steps in to the vacant Guardian role. His previous Board experience and many years of involvement at Region and Section level will be of great benefit to the Board. Stuart Greenwood, The North Berwick Golf Club, takes over the reigns from Archie Dunn, again bringing many years of experience at Section and Region level. Both will serve the Board with the best interests of the members at heart.

The progress made in 25 short years has given us a great foundation. With gratitude and respect for those who brought us to this point, I look forward to making every contribution I can to ensure we build on our success and I would encourage all members to play their part.

**Here's to the next 25.
Andrew Mellon, Chairman 2012.**

Greenkeepers Training Committee

David Golding, GTC Education Director, updates us on his work with the European Greenkeeping Education Unit (EGEU)...



As we celebrated 25 years of BIGGA during the recent Harrogate Week, it was very rewarding to see how far the greenkeeping sector of golf has progressed since those days when there was no professional body, only volunteers and Honorary Secretaries running the three former greenkeeping Associations, BGGGA, EIGGA and SIGGA.

I hesitate to go even further back into the history of greenkeeping, as I felt old during Harrogate, when those involved in the pre-BIGGA days kept reminding me of days and events past!

Volunteers are still very much at the heart of any successful Association but I know from my experience, the day to day dedicated professional administrators, coupled with the efforts of the volunteers, make a brilliant cocktail for success.

Without the many volunteers who willingly support the GTC I know my job and that of Fiona's would be much more difficult.

It is not only the volunteers on the GTC Board but those individuals, who are on the three GTC Advisory Panels that help us to maintain greenkeeping National Occupational Standards, monitor the Delivery of Programmes and assist with Marketing the GTC's "products".

Too many to mention individually, however a full list of current volunteers can be viewed on the GTC website but a personal thanks to all of you.

It is through the collective work of all who are associated with the GTC, that John Holliday, GTC Finance Director, and I were invited to join the Board of the European Greenkeeping Education Unit (EGEU).

This relatively new organisation has been established through a Special Project funded initially by the European Golf Association (EGA), the Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers Association (FEGGA) and The R&A.

A working group has established

a set of occupational standards and I am pleased that both the EGA and member Associations of the Federation of Golf Greenkeeping Associations (FEGGA) have adopted the three levels of standards, which will be maintained by an Advisory Group administered by myself and approved through the EGEU Board.

The key to the success of this Special Project will be the advice and support the EGEU and its advisors can give to golf developing countries where there is little or no structure for greenkeeper education, training or qualifications.

The EGEU, now fully financially supported through a short-term special project by The R&A, has already played an important advisory role for several countries looking to establish their own structure and system of greenkeeper training.

Without looking to impose the British model of establishing an employer led GTC on other countries, our advice would always be to involve the Golf Union or Federation in a country together with the Greenkeeping Association, if there is one.

The establishment of a Centre or Centres similar to the structure we have maintained in Britain is also advised but at all times, quality of the delivery has to be paramount.

Whilst in Britain to date we have worked closely with colleges and one private company to deliver the formal qualifications, other countries, especially those new to golf who have no college or Institute to deliver greenkeeper education, are considering a golf club as a Centre for education and training.

It is really what "best suits" each country and it really comes back to having Standards and access to quality education and support documentation.

The GTC Board has approved the use of GTC products such as the Training Manual and Learning Materials being translated, under a strict licence and copyright agreement, but again this was following a formal request from a golf developing country.



The GTC is funded by:



Contact Details

David Golding
GTC Education Director

01347 838640
david@the-gtc.co.uk

GTC
Aldwark Manor
Near York
YO61 1UF

www.the-gtc.co.uk



You can follow the GTC on
Twitter @TheOfficialGTC

A spin off from the initial request was that the country is also looking to register their trainees for a British qualification!

That request is a clear indication to me that the British formal qualifications for greenkeeping have great respect and credibility throughout the world.

We are also aware that several of the GTC's Quality Assured Centres and Training Providers are already involved outside of Britain and there is no doubt there will be further opportunities to export their expertise, training programmes and products over the coming weeks, months and years through the GTC and EGEU.

It is the experience of the GTC and its advisor network that is acknowledged through the project and we hope that the EGEU over the next few years, becomes recognised and established to promote best practice in all matters greenkeeping throughout Europe.

Visit the EGEU website www.egeu.eu to see how Standards and Advice are the focal points of the organisation





Learning & Development

Sami Collins, Head of Learning & Development,
with an update on education issues

Wow, that was quite a Harrogate Week! The last of the L&D teams energy was taken up doing a little jig following the most successful education event that BIGGA has ever presented.

We saw 2359 visitors through the doors of the Queen's Suite, representing a 17.4% increase on last year's Continue to Learn attendance. Working on the attendance figures and multiplying it by the number of hours we scheduled (152.25 hours) we delivered 3,894.50 hours of education over five days.

It's not surprising that Rachael, Jane Jones, BIGGA's South West and South Wales Regional Administrator; Simone Staples, Events and Education Manager from the Australian Association – AGCSA, and I were all exhausted by the end of the week.

With many sold out workshops and seminars full to capacity - and beyond on several occasions! I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the speakers and companies who delivered workshops and seminars on BIGGA's behalf. An event such as Continue to Learn would not be possible without their experience and expertise.

The initial planning for Continue to Learn 2013 is now underway. If you have any suggestions please email them to sami@bigga.co.uk.



Higher Education Scholarships
(supported by Ransomes Jacobsen)
The last scholarship of 2011 was awarded to:

Martin Turna – HND in Golf Course Management

I am delighted to announce that Ransomes Jacobsen has agreed to continue to support the Higher Education Scholarships in 2012 by pledging a further £8,500 to the fund. Applications are now being considered.

An application form can be downloaded from the education page of the BIGGA website.



Gold Key Individual Members:
Steven Tierney MG,
Andrew Campbell MG CGCS
Ian MacMillan MG, Ian Morrison
Andrew Turnbull, W J Rogers
Frank Newberry, Sam Langrick
Antony Calvert, Espen Bergmann
Silver Key Individual Members:
Steve Dixon, Richard McGlynn
Douglas Duguid, Ade Archer
Jaey Goodchild, Graham Wiley
Michael Beaton, Paul Jenkins

The funding provided by Gold and Silver Key Sponsors is used to produce training and career aids, DVDs, CD Roms, field guides and provide refunds for training fees and subsidised learning and development courses. The funding also helps support seminars, workshops, courses, the lending library, careers advice, posters and manuals.



Contact Details

Sami Collins
Head of L&D
sami@bigga.co.uk

Rachael Duffy
L&D Administrator
rachael@bigga.co.uk

01347 833800 (option 3)
www.bigga.org.uk



New Field Guide Additions

At Harrogate Week we launched additions to two of our existing field guides:

Trees & Shrubs on the Golf Course, Golf Course Grasses

The additional pages for the Grasses field guide includes:

Meadow Foxtail, Small-Leaved Timothy, Quaking Grass, Marram, Purple Moor-grass, Bristle-Leaved Bent, Upright Brome, Yorkshire Fog, Sweet Vernal Grass, Cocksfoot, Red Fescue, Sheep's Fescue and Bentgrasses.

The additional pages for Trees & Shrubs now includes:

Sea-Buckthorn, Beech, Elm, Birch, Hornbeam, Guelder Rose, Sycamore, Dogwood, Sweet Chestnut, Spindle, Wayfaring Treed, Blackthorn, Horse Chestnut, Ivy and Heathers.

The additional pages are available to members, free of charge. To get a copy of the new pages, please email rachael@bigga.co.uk or telephone the Learning and Development Department on 01347 833800 (option 3).



Safety Management System

sponsored by Ransomes Jacobsen

Last month we announced the launch of the new Safety Management System. BIGGA and the GCMA have spent several months updating the system to make it much simpler to use. Available through the Members' area of the BIGGA website, the updated system allows users to download and save to their own computers, Risk Profiles, Risk Assessments and access to Hazard information for seven areas of the golf club: *Greenkeeping Activities, Maintenance Facility, Golf Course, Clubhouse, Kitchen, Pro Shop, Fire Safety*

The original SMS will remain available for several months and users will be contacted with information on downloading and updating their Risk Profiles.

Golf Industry Show

For those of you attending the Golf Industry Show in Las Vegas at the end of the month, don't forget to drop by and say hello. The BIGGA stand number is 2707 located near the International Resource Centre.



BAILLOY APPOINTS NEW TECHNICAL SALES MANAGER

Bailloy Products has announced the appointment of Phil Chadwick as its new Technical Sales Manager.

Phil has worked with the Bailloy team for 17 years – 10 of which were spent in his previous role with the company's product distributor Lely UK, where he offered technical support across both the Bailloy and Toro irrigation brands. But

with Phil's particular passion for Bailloy's Gemini-Trident Irrigation (GTI) system, this specially-created position was a natural progression of his technical expertise and dedication to contractor and customer support.

Commenting on his appointment, Phil says: "I've always had a bit of a soft spot for GTI – in fact, I've been affectionately known as 'Mr GTI' at times! This new challenge allows me to specialise in a smaller product range, as well as offer more direct, dedicated support to GTI

contractors and end-user customers. I'm also looking forward to having more input into product development."

Phil's role will see him develop sales, nurture contractor relationships, and provide training and support to end-users as part of Bailloy's active business-expansion programme.

In the long-term he is also keen to extend the high standards of product knowledge and installation among UK and Ireland contractors into Europe and other countries worldwide.



Promotion for Nick

Having given 22 years service, Nick Darking has been rewarded with promotion to General Manager of Surrey based Charterhouse Turf Machinery

CTM are the UK arm of Redexim, the Dutch manufacturer of many leading types of groundcare equipment including the iconic 'Verti-Drain' aerator.

Nick, 41, began working in the workshop in 1989 and has moved up the sales tree through being a Demonstrator; Territory Manager and latterly Sales Manager.

"Nick has been our 'man on the ground' for over 22 years now and it is fitting that he steps up to General Manager status. His solid understanding of our unique product range has helped the company maintain its market leadership in Aerators, especially large scale ones that we have pioneered," said Herman de Bree, Sales & Marketing Director.

In any spare time that Nick has he likes to play a round of golf and take in as many music concerts as he can.

"Now having the responsibility of being General Manager will limit free time, but will be worthwhile as we project CTM into the next phase of its history," he said.

FGM Claymore to distribute Walker range



FGM Claymore Ltd has been appointed UK Distributor for the Walker commercial, zero-turn, out-front, direct-collect mower range.

"We are delighted to have secured this agreement, the Walker range has a reputation as a premium brand offering quality, performance and reliability," said Managing Director, Paul Butterly.

"We are very excited about the addition of the Walker name to our stable and welcome enquiries regarding dealership opportunities.

"We are also actively establishing all necessary sales support and spare parts infrastructure to deliver the best service possible for the UK professional grounds care sector," added Paul.



A FIRST CLASS ADDITION

AJ Scamblers has confirmed their appointment as dealer for the AS Motors ride-on and pedestrian commercial mowers range throughout the Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and North London region.

Ed Scambler for the company

commented: "We see the A S Mower commercial range as a first class addition to our expanding professional groundcare offering."

Scott Lelliott of PSD Grounds-care hands the first part of the AS Motors stock order to Gordon White of Scamblers



Speedcut celebrates 35 years

Speedcut Contractors celebrated 35 years in the sportsturf business at BTME.

The company completed five major football projects last year and built golf course tees, greens, ponds and bunkers at major golf clubs, including Foxhills Golf Club and Resort and Kingswood.

Other golf clubs worked on included, among many others, Staverton Park, Piltdown, Sandown Park, Wimbledon Park in London, Worthing, Sundridge Park, Lee-on-Solent, Nizels, The Oaks, Lingfield Park and Burgess Hill Golf Centre.

"This has been one of our busiest years ever," said Speedcut Managing Director Dick Franklin, who founded the business at his Oxfordshire base in 1977.

"BTME is very important for us because it is an opportunity to meet up informally with many clients and machinery suppliers who we work with during the year."

What's your number?

Our regular and random profile of an industry figure continues with this month's lucky number...

Name: Adrian Abbott
Company: MJ Abbott Ltd
Position:
Technical & Sales Director



How long have you been in the industry?

I have worked for the company since 1988, but I didn't set foot on a golf course until 1995.

How did you get into it?

Working for a family business, my career has pretty much followed the company's progression. In the early days, I worked as a mechanic looking after the plant and equipment. I was then the Workshop Manager before working on one of our first irrigation projects at Disneyland Paris in 1991. I then headed up the local water engineering department before becoming the Technical Director overseeing system design and the aftersales support for all our irrigation customers.

What other jobs have you done?

Mechanic, Workshop Manager and Water Engineer.

What do you like about your current job?

I have recently changed roles and now head our direct sales division and oversee our recently launched webshop. This has taken me fully out of my comfort zone and I am really enjoying the new challenge, particularly the procurement of new product lines and the increased contact with our customers.

What changes have you seen during your time in the industry?

The relentless progress in computer and pump technology. When I first started supporting irrigation systems, not every customer had a phone line at the maintenance facility, let alone an internet connection! Now I can support the irrigation controllers and pump stations of more recent clients from my smartphone.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have a young family of three girls and have become a taxi service to take them to a myriad of parties and other activities.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?

Hopefully still in the industry and with a full head of hair!

Who do you consider best friends in the industry?

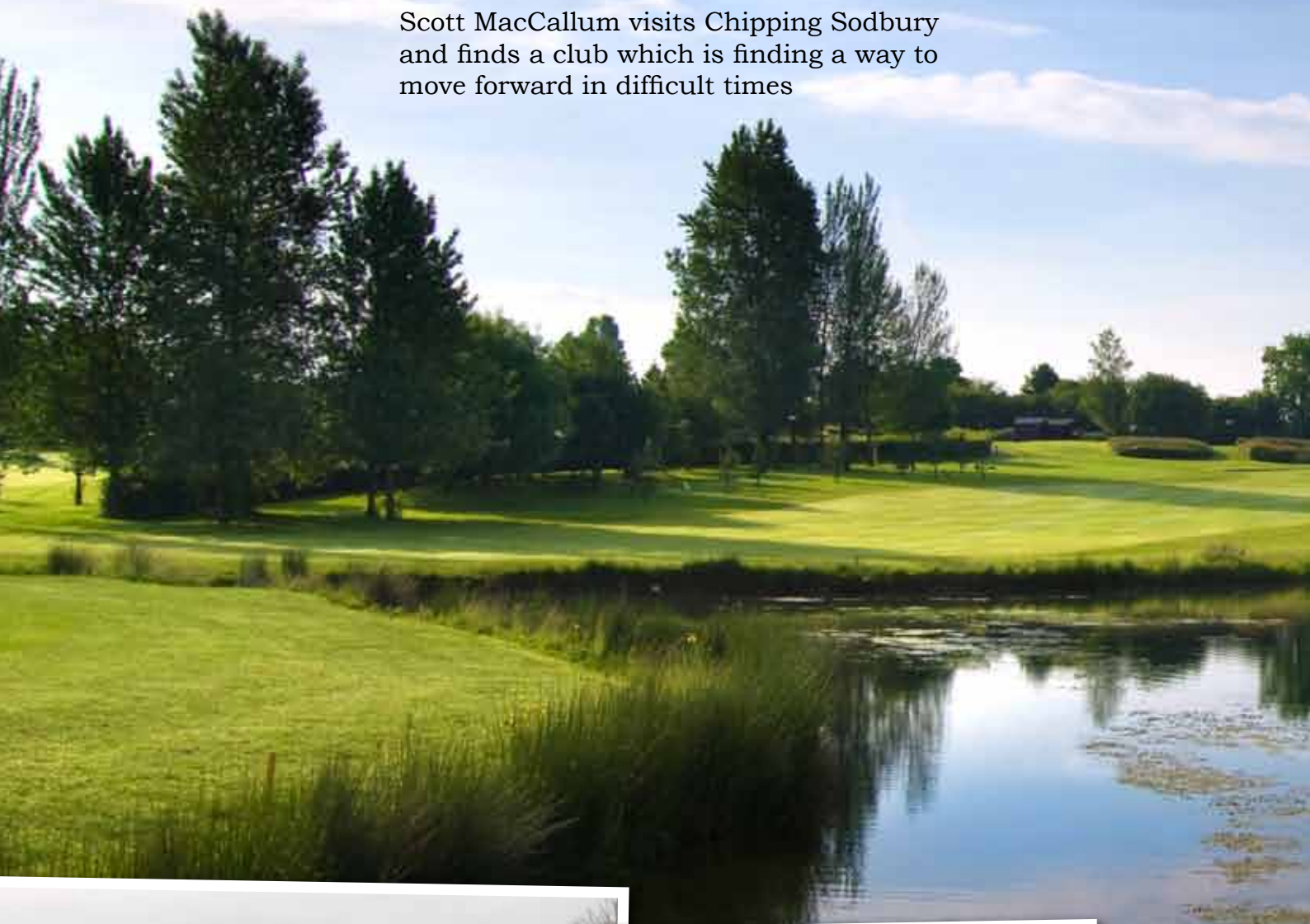
Over the years I have made numerous friends with both suppliers and customers. I have also enjoyed watching green keepers that I worked with years ago progress and become course managers in their own right.

What do you consider to be your lucky number? 3

Find out who Adrian has picked next month

Finding the key to progress

Scott MacCallum visits Chipping Sodbury and finds a club which is finding a way to move forward in difficult times





LEFT: MJ Abbott working
MAIN IMAGE: 9th hole
RIGHT: MJ Abbott putting in
Irrigation systems



Arriving in Chipping Sodbury Golf Club's car park on a mid week morning in early January, off season, what struck me was the activity.

There was barely a parking space to be found, while a glance out to the golf course highlighted a course full of players, comfortably working around the diggers and 360s which were doing the donkey work on a large irrigation installation project.

You didn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that here is a successful go-ahead golf club. But how is it able to ride against the tide, at a time when many clubs are struggling to make ends meet?

Club Manager, Bob Williams, doesn't claim to have all the answers, but he has been extremely pro-active in identifying the problems and coming up with potential solutions.

One thing he is very sure of, however, is the need for the Club Manager and the Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper to have a good and close working relationship.

"The golf course is the most important asset any golf club has," said Bob, who works extremely closely with Head Greenkeeper, John Keenaghan, as well as the Club Chairman, Mike Darby.

"I do think this is where a lot of clubs get into difficulties – when the relationship between the two main people in the club is not cemented and they are not moving forward, together and at the same level," said Bob, who also wears another hat as Chairman of the EGU Marketing & Sponsorship Committee.

That level of commitment has led to the investment in a new Toro irrigation system; however, it is the

preparatory work that has gone into changing the club and making it all possible that is particularly impressive.

"About three years ago we got to a stage where we felt that things had to change or the club was going to be faced with serious problems. Membership was declining, and the lack of new enquiries was becoming a worrying factor, it was a trend that we just could not allow to continue – and survive!" said Bob, who added that at the time the club operated a straight forward full, five-day, junior plus a number of senior categories.

"After reviewing the options and looking at what was happening in different parts of the country we managed to persuade the committee and the membership that we needed to review and change our membership structure completely. The main change was the introduction of the 'Flexi-Play' category, which at that time, was £350 per year, plus £10 for every round played – an ideal opportunity for the 35-50 age group who cannot justify £800 and only play once every weekend.

"We marketed this category as 'F100' with the intention of limiting the number to no more than 100. It was important that this category did not see themselves as being discriminated against, hence the 'F100' members have always been entitled to full voting rights.

Full membership was marketed as 'F1', and to emphasise that this was the pinnacle of the membership categories a number of add-on benefits were created including free range balls throughout the week, two free lessons with the pro each year and a discount busi-



MAIN ABOVE: 6th hole
INSET ABOVE: John Keenaghan (left) with Bob Williams (right)



ness card which gave discounts to local companies," explained Bob, who also explained that a Family membership had been introduced with children up to the age of 14 becoming a junior member at no additional charge.

With the new categories in place for the last two years on-going research has revealed that 'Flexi-play' members average approximately 15 to 20 rounds a year, which ultimately suggests that their membership is costing around £550 per annum.

In needing to counter the high weekend usage the club also reduced the membership fee for five day memberships as an encouragement to senior members to play between Monday and Friday, thus freeing up the weekends for those unable to play during the week. This then allowed the final piece of the membership jigsaw which was designed as an incentive for younger members who wish to play at weekends.

"We then created the 'Golf Club 18-30' category which is a reduced



“We created the ‘Golf Club 18-30’ category, which is a reduced fee that increases year by year until the age of 30. The objective to reduce the age profile of the club, which at present is having positive results”
Bob Williams

fee that increases year by year until the age of 30. The objective to reduce the age profile of the club, which at present is having positive results. A lot of the younger guys who are members of other sports clubs in the area have joined, and for the last few years we have run an inter sports club golf tournament, which has proved very popular,” said Bob, who revealed that the club had brought in 88 new members in the last year.

But this is not a time to let the grass grow under their feet (excuse the pun), the intention this year is to profile their green fee charges between high usage periods and off peak.

“We will have a peak time Wednesday and Friday when visitors will pay the full fee. If you want to play Monday, Tuesday or Thursday you will pay another fee and after 2.30pm it will be another rate. In the summer after 6pm you will be able to play for just £12.”

Having set about revamping the membership structure the on-courses issues could now be

addressed in earnest. John had been coping with a failing irrigation system for several seasons – the early ‘80s Watermation system coming to the end of its useful existence, helped along the way by a freak weather event.

“We think we had a lightening strike which took out the automated system about three years ago. A power surge burned the computer right out and took out all the decoders,” recalled John.

The consequences of this were that for the last two years hand watering or manually operating the irrigation was the only way forward. “We were able to use the sprinklers on the green but we had to turn them on and off by hand and, as you lose so much by evaporation doing it during the day, I ended up working through the night just watering greens.”

John would start around 11.30pm – driving to a green, turning on the sprinklers, letting them do their stuff for around 10 to 15 minutes before switching them off and moving on to the next green.

“I’d get finished around 6am, go in, brief the team before going home for a sleep before getting back to the course a couple of hours later. At its worst I did it for two weeks in the late spring early summer of last year, these were desperate times that needed desperate measures, fortunately it wasn’t a dry summer,” said John, a BIGGA member for 15 years.

Knowing this was not a situation that could be allowed to continue for too long, Bob, together with John, began looking at ways of funding a new system.

“When we had the blow-out we didn’t have the cash to put in a new system straight away and we took that conscious decision to hand water and hope that we didn’t have a burning hot summer,” said Bob.

“We then had to make a decision whether to go for another year knowing that it was extremely labour intensive and the system, which was failing, might not hold out for another year.”

To move the process along Bob commissioned irrigation consul-



ABOVE: Irrigation system layout
MAIN ABOVE: New 16th hole



“The golf course is the main product of a golf club. We had to make sure that the product was right”
Bob Williams



tant, Roger Davey, of Irritech, in 2010, to draw up plans and specifications for a new system.

“It meant that even if we couldn’t afford it at least we’d have the drawings in place and we’d be ready to go when the time came,” he explained.

The decision to go came last year and the contract was put out to tender.

“The view was that it was essential, we couldn’t fudge it for another year and we had to fund it somehow. We’d held the English County Finals in 2009 which was a great success. Chipping Sodbury was on the map and there was no point in letting it slip back,” said Bob.

“The golf course is the main product of a golf club and then everything else falls in behind it. We had to make sure that the product was right.” But finding the funding for such an extensive project was not a simple process and a degree of lateral thinking was employed to make it happen.

“We work closely with a local brewery and organised a loan in the form of a retrospective discount for the beverage that we would be buying from them.”

That raised a significant sum but was still a long way short of the lowest tender that had been received for the irrigation contract.

“We had in mind what our financial ceiling was, so more work was needed. We decided to remove tees from the irrigation system, at least

for the time being, leaving it just as greens and approaches, and by doing this it meant that we were in the ball game,” said Bob.

Then, with their existing five year Toro agreement coming to an end, the club negotiated a new deal, including the irrigation materials which generated an extra discount. This, coupled with an additional agreement with Toro’s financial arm, brought about another favourable deal over the next eight years and meant that the financial target had been reached.

Or it would have been had it not been for the VAT partial exemption issue.

“A membership club doesn’t charge VAT on fees so therefore it can’t claim all of its VAT back so that meant that we were going to be around £20,000 short. “To compensate we went out and sold a number of Life Memberships which took us over our target,” said Bob. Having secured the finance MJ Abbott was awarded the contract, on a fixed price basis and work started in December.

“I was secretary at Long Ashton Golf Club when we did a similar irrigation project about ten years ago and I would say that potential contractors are an awful lot more competitive now. They have had to sharpen their pencils otherwise the work would be priced out of everyone’s market.”

With work due to be completed

this month or early next, John is excited about the new system.

“It will transform the course. We are based primarily on clay and this has meant that our approaches are prone to cracking in dry weather. With the ability to water I’ll be able to top dress and overseed them and bring the height of cut down, which will be a huge improvement with the added bonus of being able to use them as temporary greens in the winter. At the moment they have had to go on lush areas around the green,” said John, who felt that it was far easier to hand water tees than greens and approaches without being interrupted or get in the way of golfers.

An infectious enthusiast for the industry John arrived in it slightly later in life, having started out as a carpenter, but he has wasted no time catching up. “I took up golf at Filton Golf Club when I had to retire from rugby as a consequence of fracturing my skull twice. Head Greenkeeper, Nick Wilson asked if I’d build him a driving range bay which I did and then started helping out on the course when I could.

“The building trade was quiet at the time and Nick asked if I wanted to join the green staff and that was it. I took quite a pay cut but I was put on Level 2 at Cannington and really found a passion for the work,” said John, who is now a category one player and playing off a handicap of 4.

His route to Chipping Sodbury, initially as Deputy, came via Filton, The Kendleshire, The Players and the Manor House at Castle Coombe, and he was promoted to Head Greenkeeper five years ago.”

He has also been a member of several BIGGA Open Support Teams and credits that for some of the course preparation he was able to employ for the English County Finals.

In addition to the irrigation project an on-going tree removal programme is being carried out. “We have a lot of leylandii planted to give quick definition in the 60s and they are coming to the end of their time and we are removing them and replacing them with indigenous trees.

“We have taken out over 250 leylandii and 30 poplars and planted over 450 native trees in the last five years,” explained John.

Chipping Sodbury Golf Club is a fine example of a regular members’ golf club where the management team is pulling together for the greater benefit of everyone.

It shows just what can be achieved.

MAIN ABOVE: 3rd hole
INSET ABOVE: Chipping
Sodbury team