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Industry support vital as floods test resolve

Watching the recent scenes of flooding around the country has been horrendous; it has had enormous impacts on many industries and yet again golf is adversely affected.

Whilst course closures at this time of year should not have too adverse an impact on the golf club business, the recovery work could be expensive and with golf still suffering the effects of the economic crisis, a faster start to the season would have been far more desirable. It has been heartening to hear that yet again greenkeepers have been helping their comrades with offers of equipment, support and manpower.

Sadly this further setback is likely to push more golf clubs towards redundancies or even closures. Now more than ever, it is vital that our members have a strong relationship with their employers, are in tune with the needs of the business and are seen as providers of innovative solutions rather than presenting additional problems.

The Association is here to help any member affected, don't hesitate to contact your Regional Administrator for advice and assistance, the network of support in the industry and within the membership is excellent.

Following a vibrant BTME it was interesting to travel to America for the Golf Industry Show. There was definitely cause for further optimism with increased exhibition space sold and visitor numbers up. Our meetings during the week with fellow Associations and industry partners were all extremely encouraging.

It was a pleasure to spend time with the ten members who made up the annual BIGGA Delegation to the show courtesy of Bernhard and Company. They were a credit to themselves, their employers and the

Association. I'd like to take this opportunity to formally thank Stephen Bernhard and his company for his continued long-term support of this fantastic member development opportunity.

They picked up a host of contacts, expertise and knowledge from their trip. In fact, see page 20 to read how Tom Brearley secured a once in a lifetime opportunity to volunteer at the 2016 Ryder Cup!

The Delegation were not the only BIGGA members attending, there were scores of British greenkeepers in town as well as our many American and International members all taking advantage of the excellent educational conference put on by our friends at the GCSAA.

It was interesting to note that the GCSAA are focusing on the difficult transition from Assistant Superintendent to the top job. Aiding ambitious Assistant Greenkeepers and Deputy Head Greenkeepers has long been a priority for BIGGA - but making the leap into the hot seat is still a daunting one for many. This month we carry a fascinating study of how Andy Pullen at North Wilts Golf Club has successfully managed the various challenges involved having recently taken this very step.

Enjoy the read.



Jim Croxton, Chief Executive

MARCH 2014

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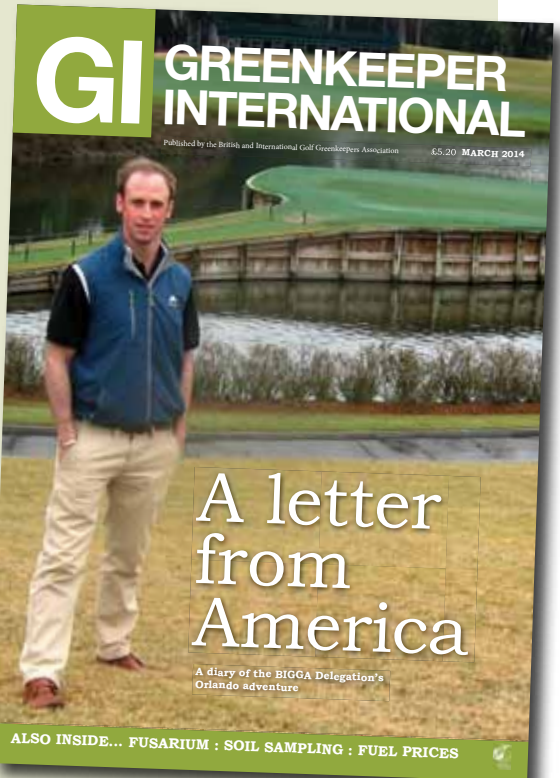


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British and International
Golf Greenkeepers Association



Chairman's Word

New BIGGA National Chairman, Chris Sealey, gives his thoughts for the month

From Florida to floods

Firstly, it's great for me to look back on a record breaking BTME with real pride. Very positive feedback has continued to come in from visitors and exhibitors alike and we can all now reflect on a hugely successful week for the Association.

It was the perfect way to start the year, and I look forward to catching up with more members and people within the industry over the next 12 months – you don't always get the time at BTME, particularly as it was so busy this year!

It's been a whirlwind start to my time as Chairman, and a real tale of weather contrasts as I enjoyed temperatures in the mid eighties at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, then had to don the wellies and waterproofs on my return home.

The GIS was fantastic, and I sensed a similar buzz to that present at BTME. I think the turf industry worldwide has had enough of tales of economic depression and there's a real sense of positivity returning to the industry. Although it seemed a little smaller in scale than my last visit in 2008, it was an excellent show with the varied exhibitors looking very busy – similar to BTME in many ways, even down to the Halls being particularly packed on the Wednesday.

The BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernhard & Co, were a credit to the Association. They were professional, switched on and got on very well together. They also represented a real cross-section of clubs from across the UK. In just one example of what a superb development opportunity being a member of the delegation is, Tom Brearley met greenkeepers from Hazeltine National, venue of the 2016 Ryder Cup, and may get the opportunity to volunteer during the tournament itself. What better advert could there be for getting involved?

I visited two golf courses in Orlando – Orange County National and Shingle Creek Golf Club. They were both pristine and Shingle Creek in particular was brilliantly presented. Mind you, it must be easier to present a golf course when you have beautiful weather, dozens of staff and all the machinery you could dream of! The customer service was something else, we were welcomed by Shingle Creek



“The course is greener than I've ever seen it at this time of year, everything is still growing”

employees when we drove in, in the car park, walking the course – in fact I think I met more people in the first ten minutes there than we have total staff at Chippenham!

I also attended various meetings with the GCSAA, GEO and many of our sponsors amongst others. I have to say we were looked after superbly throughout the week by the GCSAA, they also genuinely valued our input and my personal thanks go to them for the hospitality and friendliness we all encountered. As always, my thanks also go to Bernhard & Co for their continued support.

At Chippenham, we've been closed on and off for the last few weeks and it's currently a case of damage limitation. I'd like to get out and give everything a spike but it's just been too wet. The main tasks have been pushing water off our temporary greens to try and ensure some play is possible, and rodding drains – not exciting but essential. It's vital for us to remain open when we possibly can, as well as everything else we really value the money the new clubhouse generates here and obviously takings are severely hit when the course is closed.

The course is greener than I've ever seen it at this time of year, everything is still growing as we've not had the temperatures to chill the roots. I'm praying for a dry, cold snap with a north easterly wind and I hope that everyone across the country experiences much better, drier weather as spring approaches.

I did manage to get to watch my team Bristol Rovers after I returned from the States – and normal service was resumed when we conceded a goal within ten minutes! The real star of the show though was the groundsman in getting the game played at all after the weeks of relentless rain. I think at times we can get wrapped up in just thinking about golf, but it's been so tough recently for all turf managers whether they're looking after a golf course, rugby pitch, bowling green or football ground. At the very top level it's not too bad as the resources are there but further down the line when you have smaller budgets, fewer staff and less machinery it's a hard job, so everyone needs to pull together.

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GOOD MOVE FOR MASTER GREENKEEPER PHIL

One of BIGGA's Master Greenkeepers has been appointed Course Manager at Goodwood's two highly acclaimed golf courses.

Phil Helmn MG, former Golf Course and Estate Manager at Heythrop Park, and who featured in GI back in June last year, has taken the reins at the West Sussex venue.

Phil will be working closely with Andrew Brown, Head Greenkeeper of The Downs course, and Simon Berry, Head Greenkeeper of The Parks course, along with the rest of the greenkeeping team.

Phil's extensive experience includes the construction and grow-in of four courses. One was in Florida under the direction of distinguished golf architect Tom Fazio, the second was in Cyprus designed by Tom Mackenzie of UK based architects Mackenzie and Ebert, The Watermark

Club and finally Heythrop Park Resort. Phil's early career saw him work at Morecambe Golf Club, Camberley Heath and Collingtree Park.

He said: "I have been a greenkeeper all my adult life and I love my career choice. Goodwood is a quality brand and specifically the golf courses are highly ranked and revered. It will be a fantastic challenge to help Goodwood improve even further on its recent successes and ranking.

"Myself and the entire greenkeeping team have some big plans for the future so it's an exciting time to be here."

Phil joins Goodwood at a significant time as the James Braid designed Downs Course celebrates 100 years of golf this year, and to mark the occasion Goodwood will be hosting a number of high profile events throughout the season.



LIVERPOOL FAN IN OLD TRAFFORD CHARITY ABSEIL

A greenkeeper Liverpool fan is putting football rivalry to one side for charity when he abseils 140 feet from the roof of Manchester United's Old Trafford ground!

Paul Pearse, Head Greenkeeper at Warrington Golf Club, was undergoing a check-up in April 2012 when doctors noticed a lump indicating testicular cancer, and which had begun to spread. He was operated on within days, and after nine weeks of chemotherapy and a further two months of recuperation he was given the all clear last year.

Now Paul, who says he doesn't like heights, is to plunge 140 feet from the 76,000 capacity stadium's roof in aid of The Christie, an organisation which raises funds for vital cancer research and treats more than 40,000 patients each year.

Paul said: "I wanted to give something back so that other people suffering from cancer have a better chance to be as fortunate as I've been.

"I know some people would gladly chuck a Scouser off the top of Old Trafford but I'm doing this willingly, and hopefully the rope will be sturdy! I'm not a fan of heights and I'm not looking forward to that moment when I have to step off the stand at all, but it's all in terrific cause which is obviously very close to my heart.

"Basically I would urge every bloke to check themselves regularly. As it happened my lump was found when I was having a general check-up, but if you do find something unusual go straight to your doctor, catching it early is so important."

Paul's abseil will be on Sunday 23 March and you can find out more and sponsor him at justgiving.com/Paul-Pearse – all contributions will be very gratefully received!

PHIL'S 'TRACTOR AID' TO FLOOD-HIT SOMERSET

A Course Manager who combines his greenkeeping role with his job as a farmer has ridden to the rescue of a flood-hit Somerset farmer after seeing his plight on TV.

Phil Rowbottom is a BIGGA member, head man at Woolley Park Golf Club and member of the National Farmers' Union – and was moved by a TV interview with Somerset farmer James Winslade who has lost 800 acres of his 840-acre farm to floodwater, with the water chest-high in his kitchen.

James managed to save his 500 cattle but had lost all of his cattle feed. So Phil joined forces with neighbour Andrew, an agricultural contractor, and loaded 25 tons of cattle feed on to their tractors. They then set off from Phil's proprietary golf club near Wakefield, West Yorkshire, at 5am on February 13 to make the epic 225-mile journey to Bridgwater, which is at the heart of the badly affected Somerset Levels.

Travelling at a top speed of around 30mph, 'Tractor Aid' arrived 11 hours later to meet a grateful James at nearby Sedgemoor market.

Phil said: "I've been watching the news for the last few weeks and saw what a mess the Somerset farmers are in. I saw an interview with James and you couldn't fail to be moved by it, even more so as a fellow farmer. The water was chest-high in his kitchen and he has lost almost everything, and the pictures showed the only way he could get to his farm was by boat.

"I just thought as a fellow farmer, I could help him, and the thing he really needed was cattle feed. James's feed which he had been storing over winter is now rotting in sheds, it's terrible.

"I don't have any cattle on my farm but I borrowed some feed from local farmers and set off. The support we had on the journey from the public has been fantastic, it makes me really proud."

Meanwhile the rest of Woolley Park's greenkeeping team – Phil's son John, Andy Scaman,



Richard Thompson, Stuart Mason and Pete Colley – have been working to keep the course open despite 100ml of rain in January.

John said: "Golf and agriculture are inextricably linked as they are both so dependent on the weather. If golf courses are underwater for too long the grass rots, and it's the same with crops in farming. We've been hit by the relentless

rainfall as so many other golf courses have, but luckily our site drains well and is high up.

"We made a few calls and mentioned 'Tractor Aid' on Twitter and it's gone on from there. We felt Somerset had been neglected by the media so hopefully this has reminded everybody of the seriousness of the situation down there."

Their amazing journey has caught the public's imagination

with Phil even being interviewed live on the BBC's 'One Show', BBC Radio 2 and in local newspapers.

Phil featured in Greenkeeper International last June when we focused on his combined role as Course Manager and farmer. Woolley Park is a 27-hole facility, and the adjacent farm's main function is drying and storing grain for local merchants and farmers.

AIRBORNE CHALARA SPORES DEBATE

A Conference* held in London appears to have 'laid the ghost' of long distance airborne travel of ascospores of the ascomycete fungus *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus* (imperfect or asexual stage *Chalara fraxinea*) to rest, while raising the possibility of another unexplored avenue of transcontinental movement for the fungal pathogen and disease.

Arguments in favour of long distance airborne travel of *Chalara* ascospores from continental Europe and into Eastern England rely heavily on circumstantial evidence relating to the high concentration of reported disease outbreaks in East Anglia. The long distance movement and survival of completely different fungal spores in other parts of the world is used as supporting evidence.

The arguments used against rest on a clear mismatch between long distance air-borne movement with the time lines and distance lines of *Chalara* outbreaks and spread of the pathogen across Europe over the last 20 years, coupled with the known high susceptibility of the ascospores to UV (ultra violet) light and desiccation.

Speaking at the Fraxback Conference Dr Anne Chandelier presented detailed results from *Chalara* spore trapping research carried out in Belgium which throw light on the situation. By trapping *Chalara* ascospores up a vertical profile she showed spore concentration was thirty times higher at 0.5m than 3.0m above ground level. Lateral movement for the majority of spores was no further than 50 m from the point of liberation.

Dr Chandelier showed that *Chalara* ascospores liberated from apothecia (fruiting bodies) on fallen ash leaf stalks are concentrated at only 0.5m from ground level, indicating little opportunity for lift off into the atmosphere and subsequent long distance dispersal in air currents. Moreover any 'high flying' spores would clearly be exposed to correspondingly high levels of UV light and stronger drying out forces compared with the same spores close to ground level.

In these respects the *Chalara fraxinea* situation is completely different to that for *Phytophthora ramorum* the spores (sporangia) of which are released from infected foliage at the tops of tall Japanese larch trees.

Defra's claim that *Chalara* ash dieback arrived in the UK via airborne spores from Europe is clearly questioned by these findings. Evidence supporting the airborne movement of viable *Chalara* ascospores from continental Europe and into the United Kingdom would clearly exonerate Defra from accusations that they acted too slowly in banning the import of infected ash planting material.

However, there appears to be one unexplored avenue of *Chalara* entry into the UK and a corresponding avenue of 'escape' for Defra. Apart from the role of infected ash planting material, comments made by Dr Chandelier's about infected ash leaf stalks being capable of producing apothecia (*Chalara* fruiting bodies containing ascospores) for two to three years after leaf fall raises the spectre of another avenue of disease entry into the United Kingdom. Could infected ash leaf stalks attached to the wheels of European vehicles be responsible for spreading *Chalara* ash dieback and providing a hitherto unrecognised and unexplored route of entry for *Chalara* ash dieback into the UK?

After all this was considered to be the most likely mode of spread of horse chestnut leaf miner (*Crameraria ohridella*) across Europe and into the UK, with dead horse chestnut leaves containing live overwintering pupae adhering to the wheels and bodywork of transcontinental vehicles.

Be that as it may, you still have to explain why *Chalara* ash dieback took almost exactly 20 years to move the 1000km from Poland to the Pas de Calais region of France and exactly what articulated lorry loads of wine from France, cheese from the Netherlands and bacon from Denmark were doing inside ancient East Anglian woodlands.

* FRAXBACK is a 4-year action plan initiated in 2011 and funded by 'COST' (The European Cooperation in Science and Technology). Generation of a comprehensive understanding of *Chalara* to produce practical guidelines for pan-European sustainable management of *Fraxinus* (ash) species are the aims.

Dr Terry Mabbett

