



Peter Billings, whose father was Head Greenkeeper at Chevin GC in Derbyshire, had a keen interest in golf from an early age. He was Head Greenkeeper at Ruddington Grange GC by the tender age of 21 and played golf to a handicap of six. His skills soon gained the attention of the new owners of nearby Cotgrave Place (as it was formerly known) six miles east of Nottingham city centre.

Peter was offered the opportunity in 1989 to finalise the construction, grow-in and then manage this 27 hole parkland course which opened for play two years later.

He held this position until 2005, working under the ownership of American Golf (AG-UK) from 1996. During this time, the club was extended to 36 holes, giving members the choice of two first class golf courses.

After a three year spell in property development, Peter returned to Cotgrave Place in 2008 as Course Manager. By then, Crown Golf were the third new owners, having acquired the course from AG-UK. In 2010, the club was again sold, this time to a 'local' business consortium before being bought out by the present owner, Alan Hardy, a year later.

During this time the club was renamed The Nottinghamshire and has undergone numerous changes both on and off the course. In his 22 year tenure as Course Manager, Peter has worked at the same course, but under four different owners, each with differing objectives.

A major step forward

Although each change of ownership ran relatively smoothly, they were worrying times for employees as job security can never be guaranteed.

Since around 40% of golf courses within the UK are 'commercially' owned, the buying and selling of golf clubs is becoming more common. To find out more I asked Peter for his thoughts on these periods of uncertainty and how he managed these changes.

"The lead up to the first change early in 1996 was a worrying time for myself and my colleagues because it was becoming more obvious that finances were an issue. We were operating out of old farm buildings at the time and having to make do with temporary repairs to equipment. At one stage when we couldn't afford any more diesel, we managed to syphon off a few gallons from an old excavator to enable us to cut greens and tees. When I think back, these were tough times.

"When American Golf came knocking at the door it was like Christmas. They were fairly impressed with what we produced, working with very little, so they were optimistic about what we could achieve given a reasonable level of resources and input.

"Although I probably didn't realise it at the time, it proved to be a turning point for myself and the club. I was given the opportunity to develop and improve the course and implement plans, procedures and a budget in an organised and structured manner.

"This was an exciting time and two years later we were given the funds to build another nine holes, bringing us up to 36, while also moving our maintenance operation into larger converted premises."

Dark clouds on the horizon

Peter continued: "Up until 2003, we had good stability in virtually every area of management within the club while members' playing rights were guaranteed. The level of resource in terms of equipment,





staffing and materials was sufficient to deliver a good product and there was a good flow of information and communication to keep members informed of what was happening at their club.

“Staff training was working well and although we were a little distant from the other 20 or so clubs in the group which were predominantly in the south east, we felt very much part of a large organisation.

“Early in 2003, AG-UK was acquired by Goldman Sachs and although things carried on in much the same manner, all expenditure had to be justified several times over.

“Most, if not all capital expenditure ceased and there was a slight unease again when it was made known that the group was likely to be sold off.”

A temporary change in direction

“At the start of 2005 Crown Golf acquired AG-UK and for both club and staff, the transition was relatively smooth. However, funding remained tight.

Fortunately for me Les Howkins MG, who took on the role of Course Manager for three years at Cotgrave

Place, was heading to London and the job became vacant again.

“This time I was interviewed along with several other candidates and fortunately I was reappointed. Les left Cotgrave in good condition and I began to implement other procedures to add to those already in place. It was easy to pick up the pace again after a quick update on products and equipment.

“A large landfill operation was underway on nine holes, plus raising the range by a substantial height. This improved the course and helped fund improvements to the clubhouse. Although the level of funding could have been better, staffing levels remained the same and I was back on familiar territory, in a more stable environment.”

All change again

“By late 2009, Crown Golf started to consolidate their business in the south and it was only a matter of time before the club was sold.

This time we were more apprehensive. It was unlikely the club would be bought by another management company since all previous sales had gone to individual buyers.

“A Nottingham-based business consortium purchased the club in

2010 and changed its name to ‘The Nottinghamshire’ with a new image and branding.

“There was a general feeling of optimism within the club once the new owners presented their plans and objectives for the course and clubhouse to a meeting of 200 members.

Time would tell whether or not this could be delivered since a significant level of investment would be required.

The routing of the ‘Open’ course also changed which meant that the 9th became the 18th and finished in full view of the clubhouse.’

TOP LEFT: Recently built lake, complete with island drop zone
INSET ABOVE: Transplanted trees by Civic trees to protect new back tee
ABOVE: Astro-turf section at back of 14th tee
TOP RIGHT: Demanding tee shot from the 4th
RIGHT: Cut away section of 5th green showing profile
RIGHT BOTTOM: 1st green and lake timbers 24 years later

Turf Master One Ltd is grateful to Peter Billings and The Nottinghamshire for their support in producing this article.



Moving forward

Listening to Peter's account of his experiences, I was eager to find out what happened next. He explained: "After one year of minimal activity, Alan Hardy became the sole proprietor and almost immediately we stepped up a gear.

"The club was to become a 'destination' and more of a commercial business which would focus on weddings, parties and conferences.

"A new MD, Bill Mackenzie was hired to drive the business and I now liaise with Bill on a daily basis while meeting the owner as and when there are course issues or development plans to discuss; the latter being significant.

"The club has gone from strength to strength, increasing both membership and visitor play. Significant changes have been made to the clubhouse to meet the new objectives and it is now a modern club – it's buzzing.

"Since 2011 we have built eight tees, extended or created four lakes, several bunkers, new paths, transplanted numerous trees with a tree spade, altered one green and re-landscaped the side of a stream.

"This has had a positive impact

on the club and the members are blessed with continuing investment.

"We now have a Trilby tour event which is featured on Sky so the club is well recognised in the East Midlands and beyond.

"The club are also proud to have been selected as hosts for the English Girls' Open Championship in 2016."

Summary

I asked Peter to summarise his time at The Nottinghamshire.

"The key objective for the current owner is to deliver quality - on time. It is my responsibility to deliver that on the course.

"We have regular business meetings to ensure profitability and customer satisfaction and there is a good flow of information.

"I need to inform my bosses on agronomy matters while understanding their business needs. It's a two way process, learning from each other.

So what advice would he give others faced with ownership change?

"Don't be afraid of change, it may turn out for the better.

"Embrace it and put forward your ideas, be proactive, implement effectively and be professional."

about the author



Laurence Pithie MG

Laurence Pithie MG runs his own training and consultancy company, Turf Master One Ltd. With 42 years in the golf industry, Laurence has used his experience and knowledge to produce a number of recent 'case study' articles.



Luke who's talking

TORO

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Luke Turner, from Willingdon Golf Club, won a trip to America when he triumphed in the annual competition last October. Here he recounts a fantastic seven weeks of dodging polar vortexes, intense studying and gaining an appreciation of American sport

As the plane taxied from the terminal early on another rainy January morning being the 25th winner of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award finally felt like it had become a reality.

The day before I left the UK, the weather forecasters described north eastern USA as being gripped by a 'polar vortex'! I thought this may have been American over dramatisation of a slight cold snap.

But after being stuck at Detroit airport and having my connecting flight massively delayed because my luggage was stuck as the luggage hold door was frozen shut it was clear that they were serious!

Finally after a second flight, a bus journey, a walk through the snow and the coldest temperatures I have ever experienced, I was at the Comfort Inn, my home for the next seven weeks.

The following morning I was up and about at normal work time as

over breakfast I was keen to meet some of the other guys on the course. I got chatting with a few of them and was soon offered a lift to school by Pat Simmons, a greenkeeper from Salem Country Club. Pat and I became good friends over the length of my trip and he, along with two other greenkeepers called Nate Rand and Willem Geldenhuys showed me around, introduced me to American sports, and guided me through my winter stay in New England.

Following the eventual journey it was fairly easy to settle into a routine. Our days at UMASS were split into four two hour classes covering a range of topics specific to golf course turf management.

Plant physiology, weed science, soil science, entomology and pathology formed the backbone of the course. As well as our core subject professors we had a number of additional lecturers. Current and retired course superintendents,



a golf course architect, an arbor consultant and a USGA agronomist lectured regularly about their speciality areas.

Exams and tests were daily features and evening revision sessions in the hotel were commonplace. As the course progressed the revision sessions became more intense as did the friendly rivalry over exam results between the group of us which now included Australian greenkeeper Luke Jorgensen. This playful rivalry really pushed us all to get the most out of the course, while our friendships were also being cemented on evenings out, day trips and weekends away.

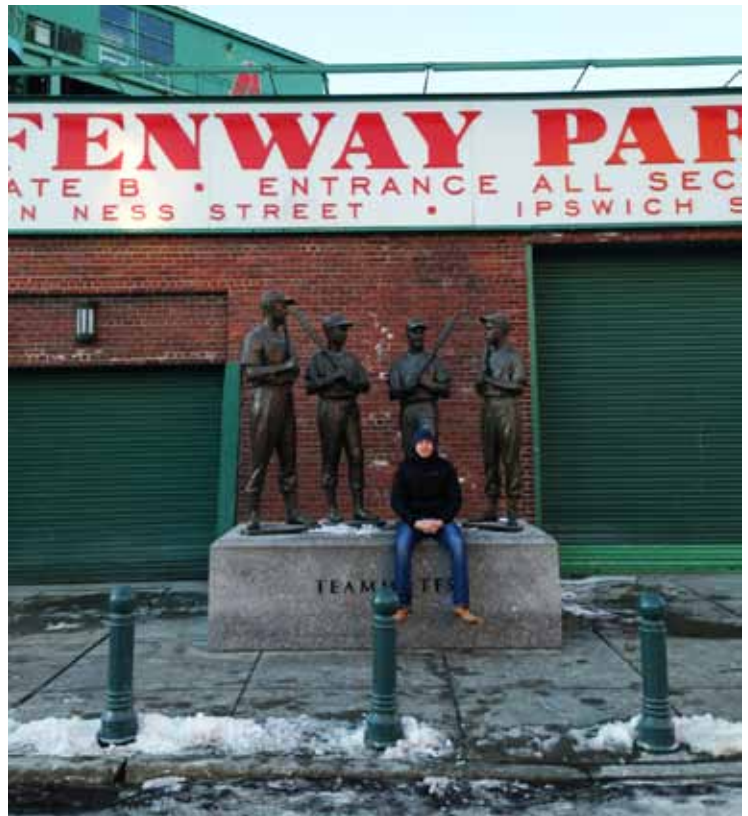
At the beginning of February I was scheduled to attend the GCSAA show in Orlando but the weather had other ideas. I arrived at the airport in Connecticut in plenty of time aware that a winter storm was expected the following day, but it arrived early and ruined any chances I had of making it down to the show and warmer weather for a few days.

I was sat in airport departures as around two feet of snow fell in as many hours. It continued to snow for the following two days and school was cancelled - even the awesome New England winter weather infrastructure couldn't safely cope with the storm. I was truly disappointed to miss the show but I'm confident I'll make it to one in future.

Although not able to make Florida a group of us did spend a day in Boston and a weekend in Rhode Island. We watched a Boston Celtics basketball match, visited Fenway Park and then spent a day exploring coastal Rhode Island.

The weeks passed by fairly quickly in a blur of revision, exams and evenings out watching college sport. We became regulars at the university basketball and ice hockey games where with Pat's guidance I learned that hockey culture and rugby culture are not too dissimilar.

Graduation day was upon us



before we knew it, bags were packed and goodbyes said after what was the most incredible seven weeks of my life. Winter School 2014 will certainly stick in my memory for a very long time and the skills and information learnt will remain useful and with me throughout my career.

The final days of my trip were spent in Minneapolis visiting Toro's headquarters and factory facilities. The tours were outstanding and it was such an eye opening experience to see behind the scenes of the machinery we all use everyday.

Every person we spoke with in and around the facilities had such pride in the jobs they do and the equipment they produce for us, the end user. I only had four days in Minneapolis and it was soon time to pack up and return home. My time in the city had flown by and my whole trip was coming to an end.

I really would like to thank Toro,

Lely and BIGGA for organising the award and the trip. Academically it was fantastic and I made some life-long friends and excellent contacts along the way.

I cannot emphasise enough how much I recommend any greenkeeping students to apply for the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year award and experience the trip I've just returned from. If you do go just remember, when you think you have packed enough jumpers, pack more!



TORO.

Remember the closing date for 2014 nominations is Friday 23 May. See the BIGGA website for more details.



Managing pesticide storage

Another chance for you to earn BASIS points as Graham Paul looks at the safe storage of pesticides

For those whose job requires them to use pesticides, the chemical store is an important feature of the working environment.

Since the Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR) came into force in 1986 it became a legal requirement to store chemicals in a secure and safe manner that will not harm animals, the environment or pollute water. Storage of pesticides within the demands of the regulations can be achieved in a variety of ways; the chemical store can be a purpose-built structure, either standing alone from the rest of the maintenance facilities or as a sectioned-off part of a building. Alternatively, pesticides can be stored in special secure cabinets that have been adapted for the pur-

pose, or manufactured as chemical storage units.

A permanent purpose-built store must be constructed according to the specifications contained in the regulations. It must be resistant to fire, capable of containing leakage and spills and it must provide dry, well ventilated, frost-free conditions for storage that is secure from unauthorised access. The regulations relating to fire resistance state that materials used in the construction of chemical stores must be resistant to fire for at least 30 minutes. However, this does not include the roof. Retention of leakage and spills is usually achieved with the use of bund walls that physically surround the storage area and are sealed to prevent the egress of liquid products. The capacity con-





tained by the bund must be able to accommodate a volume of leakage or spillage greater than the capacity of the store; normally 110% of the total contents but in environmentally sensitive areas this needs to be 185%.

When the COPR came into force, many pesticide users found they did not have chemical storage facilities that complied with the new regulations and some chose to purchase a steel cabinet specifically designed to comply. One of the first such cabinets offered for this purpose was the 'Chemsafe' manufactured by Horstein Farmery. They initially produced two sizes a 200L/200kg model and a 70L/70kg 'mini Chemsafe'. Today there are many different chemical storage cabinets available – you can even find them on Amazon!

Some organisations with a lesser budget opted to convert a chest freezer or other type of metal container to provide storage. This is still a viable solution, provided

All chemical stores must be labelled with a general hazard sign to alert emergency services of the potential risks involved in dealing with incidents such as fire or security breaches in the vicinity of the store. The Hazard triangle sign must appear on the entrance to the store and all doors leading to the outside. 'No smoking' or 'Smoking and Naked Flames Forbidden' signs should also be displayed on the exterior door of the store. This applies to purpose built stores as well as cabinets.

The siting of chemical stores is critical to safe operation and for purpose-built stores requires consultation in the planning stage with local emergency services, the local authority planning department and the Environment Agency (EA) or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) in Scotland.

Some general rules on store location apply to all types of store; it must be at least four metres away from combustible materials such as



BASIS

Left: No smoking sign, danger sign and an Armourgard Chemical Transport box

Top right: How NOT to enter a storage cabinet

Below: Special boxes can be secured in a vehicle for transport

Right: Wetting agent pellets do not belong in a chemical store

Main images: The chemical store at Thorndon Park Golf Club



it meets the specifications published by the HSE in the guidelines AIS16 (See Ref. 1) Purpose built storage cabinets may have a sump or an internal bund to retain leakage and spillage below the level of the shelves on which the products are stored.

Converted chest freezers and other cabinets that do not have a suitable steel lining can be fitted with an internal steel tray to act as a bund located below the product shelf. Alternatively the whole freezer or cabinet can be stood inside a bunded area or in a steel tray bund. For all types of cabinet storage, whether purpose-built or converted, the capacity of the spillage sump or bund must be at least 110% of the capacity of all products stored within it.

flammable liquids, piles of timber, hay, straw and fertilisers. It must also be sited at least four metres away from domestic dwellings and potential sources of ignition such as welding or grinding machinery.

Stores should not be sighted where they might contaminate water such as wells, drains, water-courses, and areas that are liable to flooding. Most of these criteria will be considered during the consultation stages when a new permanent store is being planned but some additional rules apply to the siting of cabinet stores. They must not be located in domestic dwellings, offices, retail areas, staffrooms or places where food is prepared or consumed. Also, the access to a store must not be through any such area listed above.

Pesticides should never be carried in the cabs of tractors, self-propelled sprayers or other vehicles. For transportation, vehicles must have a floor-to-ceiling bulkhead separating the driver and other occupants from the load space. Alternatively a small quantity of pesticide concentrates may be carried on vehicles in specially constructed secure cabinets e.g. Transchem' box

These special containers must be kept locked when the vehicle is unattended and all contents must be returned to a chemical store within 24 hours.

Operating a chemical store

Make sure that staff understand the need to wear protective clothing when accessing a chemical store.

All staff working in the vicinity of a store should be trained on how to deal with an emergency situation such as a fire or spillage. It is advisable to provide equipment for dealing with leakage or spills and this should include a brush and shovel, absorbent granules and impermeable containers to accommodate any leaking packs.

Keep the store tidy, removing waste cardboard packaging and maintain an accurate stock list. Remove any items that have been placed in the store that do not need to be in there, e.g. wetting agents. They occupy vital space that might be needed for pesticide products and cause unnecessary exposure of staff to potential contamination.

Store powders above liquids to avoid contamination by leakage and keep products away from direct sunlight but ensure that there is adequate lighting to enable staff to read labels etc.

Carry out a regular check on the contents of the store to ensure that products are used in rotation and, most importantly, that products no longer approved are earmarked for disposal. Use a marker pen to write on the label "DO NOT USE". When product approval is withdrawn there is normally a specified 'use-up' date, so that the user can avoid unnecessary disposal costs. Ask your chemical supplier to keep you informed when products they have supplied are scheduled to be withdrawn.

Special instructions for storing gassing compounds used for the control of vertebrate pests such as moles

These can only be stored by someone who has been trained and certificated for using gassing

compounds. These products are extremely dangerous to humans and animals when they become moist, as they give off highly toxic phosphine gas. The safest way to store gassing compounds is to keep them in their original packaging, tightly closed inside a small, locked metal container that is clearly labelled "Gassing Compound - DO NOT OPEN" This locked metal container is then stored inside a locked chemical store.

Disposal of empty pesticide containers.

Empty pesticide containers should never be re-used for any purpose unless it is to replace a damaged or leaking container of exactly the same product. Always consult the product label for advice on disposal. Make sure the container is completely empty before rinsing.

Triple rinsing is normally recommended as a thorough rinse but some viscous formulations may require more. Carry out the rinsing as soon as the container is emptied and before topping up the spray tank with water to achieve the desired level. Rinse the cap and seals as well as any contamination on the outer surface of the main container and add the rinsings to the spray tank.

Some containers are not suitable for rinsing (for example, paper sacks and cardboard cartons) these should be emptied completely and stored securely, as if they still contained the pesticide, until they can be disposed of through a licensed waste-disposal contractor. Rinsed empty containers should be stored upright in a separate, secure, weatherproof area; away from stored pesticides or in a separate part of a chemical store room, until they can be sent to a licenced waste contractor for disposal. Ask your chemical supplier for details of waste disposal services they can supply.

Special instructions for gassing compounds.

Always read the label for specific instructions on disposal. In general, you must not rinse or clean empty containers that hydrogen cyanide gassing powders or Aluminium, magnesium or zinc phosphides have been supplied or kept in; because of the dangerous gases they give off when they come into contact with moisture. Handle and store empty flasks as if they still contained the product and dispose of them through a licenced waste contractor.





SELF ASSESSMENT

Use the questions below to check your understanding of this topic. Readers can claim BASIS points by visiting the 'BASIS Points Article' section on the Sherriff Amenity website – www.sherriff-amenity.com and answer the questions correctly.

1) What capacity of leakage or spillage (% of total stored contents) must a purpose-built store be able to retain when sited in an area that is not environmentally sensitive?

- 185%
- 100%
- 110%
- 90%

2) When deciding where to locate a new pesticide storage cabinet, how far should it be away from a mower cylinder grinding machine?

- 10 metres
- at least 4 metres
- 3 metres
- 8 to 10 metres

3) Who is legally allowed to store gassing compounds for mole control on a golf course?

- The Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager
- The Club Secretary or Club Manager
- Anyone who holds PA1 & PA2 or PA6 NPTC certificates
- Any person who has been trained, and who holds a certificate, to use gassing compounds.

4) Which of the following statements is true regarding converted chest freezers?

- They are not suitable for storing pesticides.
- They may be used for storing pesticides providing they meet the specifications laid out in the guidelines issued by the HSE (Agriculture Information Sheet No 16)
- They can only be used for storing fungicides
- They may be used as temporary stores for pesticides, provided they are painted red.

5) How long may pesticides be stored in a vehicle transport box?

- 24 hours
- One week
- up to 1 month
- four days





Jonathan Harmer,
Managing Director
at Farmura Ltd,
writes for GI

Bacteria, fungi and life in the soil

Bacteria, Fungi and life in the soil are suddenly mainstream topics. There is now keen interest by turf managers in more balanced and sustainable management programmes – a management style promoted by Farmura for over forty years!

Why has this occurred? Environmental legislation, withdrawal of chemicals, increasing cost of inputs including water – an increasingly scarce commodity for many.

There is also a growing desire to become more sustainable on the golf course from turf management through to wildlife and habitat conservation. The huge interest in the STRI Golf Environmental Awards, of which Farmura are one of the sponsors, demonstrates this. Finally a realisation that golf budgets are not ever growing but are now in real terms, at least for the foreseeable future, diminishing.

What then is balanced management?

We believe that best results

are achieved by combining good cultural methods, organics and synthetics - no different than a doctor recommending exercise, meat and vegetables. The turf manager is the conductor, to use a musical metaphor, adjusting these to suit his situation. A links course will have different requirements to a new sand construction but the principles remain the same. Leading on from that there is a system dependency with a healthy plant needing healthy soil biology which in turn creates the soil which feeds the plant and so on. There is a clear symbiosis between the plant and the soil.

Balanced and Sustainable Management

This brings us on to one of nature's most amazing and yet taken for granted creations - the soil. We use it, abuse it and most of the time take it for granted and don't give it much thought. Yet the soil is where it all starts and is very much alive



or at least it should be. Soil is a complex and dynamic living world of bacteria, fungi, yeasts, protozoa, algae worms, insects and a host of other organisms.

The statistics are staggering! Thirty grams of soil can have a surface area of two and a half hectares. The bacteria in a handful of soil can exceed the population of the world. There is more diversity in a handful of healthy soil than in the entire Amazon rain forest and up to thirteen thousand species of bacteria can be found in a gram of soil. A word of caution before you start counting however.

Peter Shaw head greenkeeper at Munchen Friedhof in Germany. In "Leading Courses of Germany" ranked no 1 over last 5 years. Farmura customer for over 35 years in UK and Germany