

DO NOT REMOVE FROM CLUBHOUSE

ISSUE THREE Spring 2019

YOUR COURSES

Understanding golf course preparation



PITCH MARKS

WE LOOK AT GOLF'S
POTHOLE PROBLEM

TPC SAWGRASS

HOW THE INFAMOUS
17TH IS MAINTAINED

SUMMER SPECIAL

CHAMPIONSHIP READY
WITH SUMMER ON THE WAY, HOW ARE
COURSES PREPARING FOR THE SEASON?

Proudly presented by  **BIGGA**
British and International
Golf Greenkeepers Association

Supporting Your Course

The Continuing Professional Development and world class education BIGGA provide would not be possible without the assistance of BIGGA Partners and BIGGA Education Supporters. Ensuring our members stay at the forefront of the turf management industry takes considerable investment, and we are hugely grateful to the following for their ongoing support.



WELCOME

WELCOME to the third edition of Your Course magazine, which we hope will provide you with an insight into what it takes to present a golf course in the United Kingdom today.



With the 2019 season upon us, I hope you'll have plenty of opportunities to get out and enjoy some fantastic golf, with everything the nation's courses have to offer you.

Greenkeeping as a profession very much began in the UK, with pioneers such as Old Tom Morris leading the way in Scotland. In the century or so since, UK greenkeepers have pushed forwards, developing new ways of managing their courses, earning the respect of the wider golf industry and putting their heart and soul into ensuring golfers have the best possible playing surfaces to enjoy.

As you stroll down the fairways this summer, take a moment to reflect upon how the long, hot summer of 2018 may have had a lasting impact upon the course as you see it today. Are there bare patches of earth, where moss has grown but there appears to be little grass?

If that's the case, you can be assured that your greenkeeping team did everything they could to keep the turf alive. Hopefully your club supported them as much as they could have?

At BIGGA, we're working hard alongside our partners at The R&A and other golf industry bodies to identify the challenges our golf courses will face over the coming decade, through a project called Golf Course 2030.

Our changing climate and other factors will almost certainly necessitate changes in the way golf courses and clubs are managed and operated.

The roadmap will take a lot of work from everyone within the industry, but we're up for the task of ensuring that golfers will be strolling down fairways, admiring their beautiful surroundings, for many years to come.

Jim Croxton – chief executive officer, BIGGA



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NEW COURSE

3

YARDS

525

METRES

480

PAR 5

S.I. 3



NEW COURSE

4

YARDS

380

METRES

347

PAR 4

S.I. 7



NEW COURSE

8

YARDS

499

METRES

456

PAR 5

S.I. 5



It's question

TIME

You asked the questions,
we asked the greenkeepers.
These are their answers...



F you could ask a greenkeeper one question, what would it be?

That was the poser we put to golfers across a variety of social media channels and we were soon flooded with enquiries.

We picked out the best and put them to a quartet of course managers, hailing from all over the country, to answer.

Our panel consists of Gordon Brammah, course manager at Hallamshire, in Yorkshire; Thomas Flavelle, head greenkeeper at Cosby, in Leicestershire; Iain Macleod, course manager at Tain, in the Scottish Highlands, and Antony Kirwan, course manager at Romford, in Essex.

Here's what they made of your queries...

WHY CAN'T YOU GET OUT AND SWEEP THE SNOW OFF THE COURSE SO IT'S STILL PLAYABLE?

Iain: The physicality of that – even for a course with a large staff – would be almost impossible. It's not just a case of clearing where the greens are, you'd have to clear fairways, tees, the lot. It's something that just couldn't physically be done. Even if it was possible, if you've got snow you've got adverse weather conditions. Should you even be allowing golfers to go out and play when harm

could come to them?

Gordon: The age old one. The simple answer is you will cause more problems long term than you are solving. To start using greenkeepers' time to be clearing snow off a course where, in a few days' time, it will have gone anyway is just not very productive. That time can be better spent servicing machinery, repairing course furniture and a thousand and one tasks that are much more efficient than clearing snow.

Antony: You could be compacting an ice layer and ripping the grass plant every time you move the snow where it has frozen. It's a waste of your staff's time and money.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD HOLES BE MOVED AND WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES OF MOVING A HOLE TOO OFTEN?

Antony: It's down to course policy and the volume of wear and traffic on the course. Go to a resort course and you might have to move the holes every day because the foot traffic round the hole wears it so much. You might go to a smaller club and they might only need to move it once or twice a week. It's a time consuming job.

For us, it takes one person two hours to change the holes. If we did that every day we'd have to allocate 14 hours of labour every week. It has implications on time management and using your staff.



Left: Our panel say that clearing snow from a course is not a productive use of a greenkeeper's time and could actually damage the course



Iain: It's generally dictated by the amount of staff you have. At Tain, through the winter, it might be once a week or once a fortnight and in the main competition season twice a week. If we have a golf week, or a major tournament, it's daily. You have to tailor it to what time you have. We only have three full-time staff and in June, July and August we do it twice a week.

Thomas: We like to move the holes as much as is deemed

necessary. For a big tournament, four days in a row, I would move the holes every single day. During the summer, generally, we move them once at the start of the week and either on the Friday of a tournament or the Saturday – depending on what the staff levels are. Through the winter, we may move them only once or twice a week and that would be very weather dependent. If we move the holes too much, particularly during the winter, we won't see the recovery around those holes

MEET THE PANEL



Antony Kirwan, course manager at Romford, in Essex



Gordon Brammah, course manager at Hallamshire, in Yorkshire



Iain Macleod, course manager at Tain, in the Scottish Highlands



Thomas Flavelle, head greenkeeper at Cosby, in Leicestershire

“I have been in the industry 28 years and playing golf for 35 and the etiquette of the game has declined.” – Antony Kirwan



quickly enough before we start to run out of hole positions around each green.

Gordon: We have relatively small greens and you have to avoid severe slopes, worn areas and previous hole placements. When you take that into consideration, each green only has a limited amount of placements on it. Is moving a hole really so important that we should do it to the detriment of the green quality?

WHAT IS THE ONE THING GOLFERS DO THAT MAKES YOUR JOB HARDER?

Gordon: Expectations are higher now, all year round, than they used to be. Just managing those expectations can be difficult. If you don't take into account things like funding, staffing levels and weather patterns, all those things do put pressure on the greenkeeper. If members can support the greenkeeping team by speaking to them and gaining an understanding of why things are done in a certain way, that will ease the pressure placed upon the greenstaff.

Thomas: There does seem to be a lack of understanding about how a golf course is a living environment and so it won't necessarily be ready for you, just because the sun has come out. Early spring is particularly difficult as golfers are eager to begin playing, but the grass may not be growing and the ground will still be soft, so any damage caused will take a long time to recover.

Antony: It's basic etiquette for me and golfers taking responsibility for their own actions. I have been in the industry 28 years and playing golf for 35 and the etiquette of the game has declined. That could be down to increasing the volume of golfers, or introducing other golfers to play, but we've lost the way the game was meant to be played. A golf course is owned by the members and in many ways it is their responsibility to help maintain it. If you don't rake a bunker, then a member of staff will have to do that, taking them away from other vital duties around the course that could elevate it to the next level and give you somewhere really special to play.



WHY CAN BUNKERS BE SO INCONSISTENT ACROSS THE COURSE?

Antony: Bunkers can have been constructed individually over a period of decades and so there may be many different types of construction used on them. They may have built bunkers without an adequate budget or technology will have developed over the years. Older bunkers may not have lining and so stones and soil from below will contaminate the sand.

There's also the question of raking. If there isn't a standard procedure, different greenkeepers will have different methods, while members themselves won't rake the bunkers in a consistent way.

Depending on the shape and its location, you may find that sand disappears from one bunker but not the next because it's sheltered. I think many golfers would be surprised by the amount of time, money and resources that it takes to maintain something that golfers should be trying to avoid!

Thomas: Bunkers should be rebuilt every five to seven

years. Due to budget and time management, that can be very difficult to achieve. That will inevitably lead to a drop in consistency.

Iain: Members have to remember that bunkers are a hazard, so they shouldn't be easy to play from. I often get asked why the bunkers aren't very good in the afternoon and that can be down to the weather or animals going in them, but usually it's golfers who haven't raked efficiently when they've been in them. To keep bunkers consistent you'd need a greenkeeper sitting beside them all day, tidying them up, and they don't even have that at The Open!

Gordon: We find that members, when raking, will often pull the sand towards them. That means sand ends up at the front, while the back of the bunker is bare.

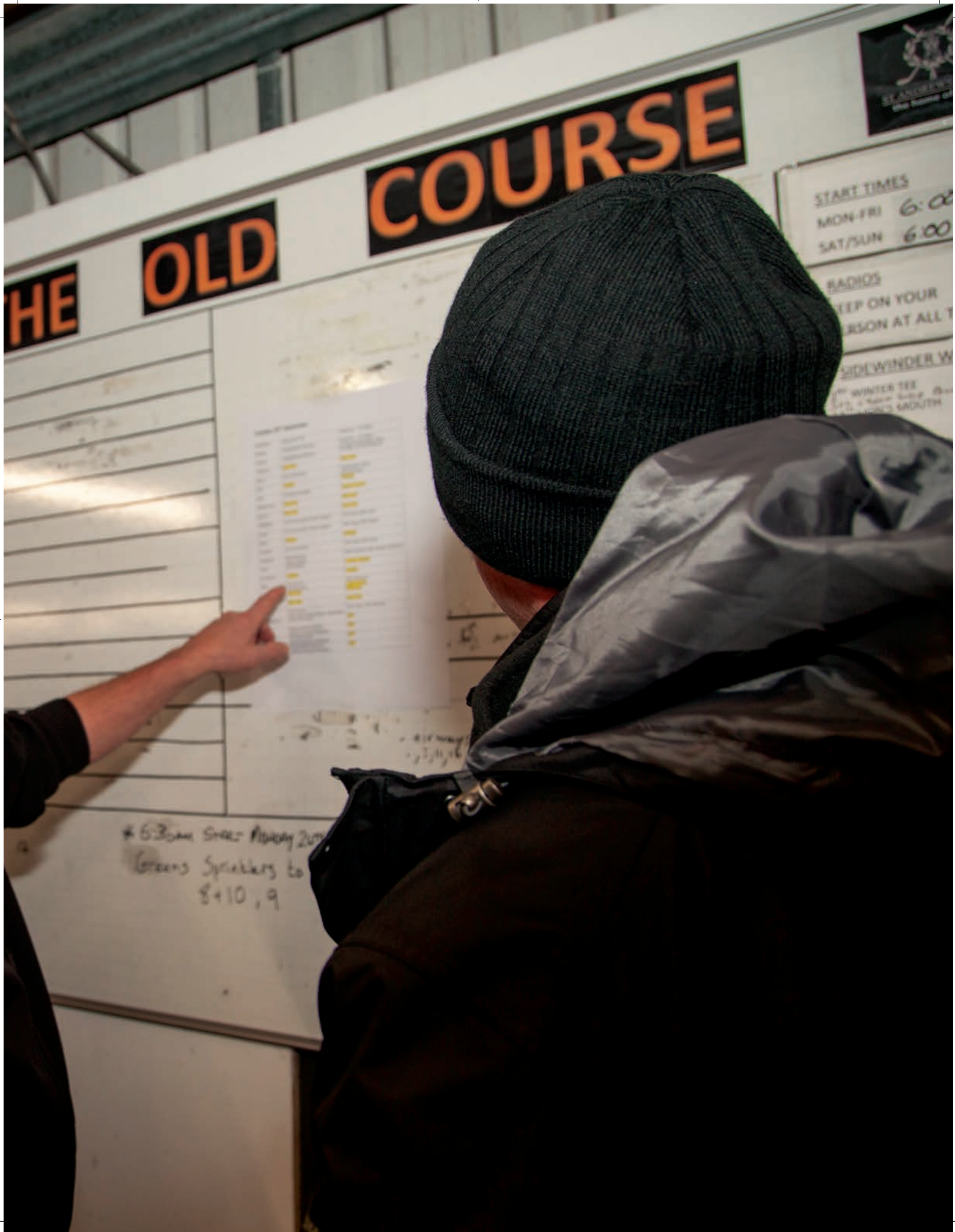
WOULD IT BE A GOOD IDEA TO POST YOUR ROTA IN THE CLUBHOUSE AND WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD SURPRISE YOUR MEMBERS MOST IF THEY SAW YOUR STAFF ROTA?

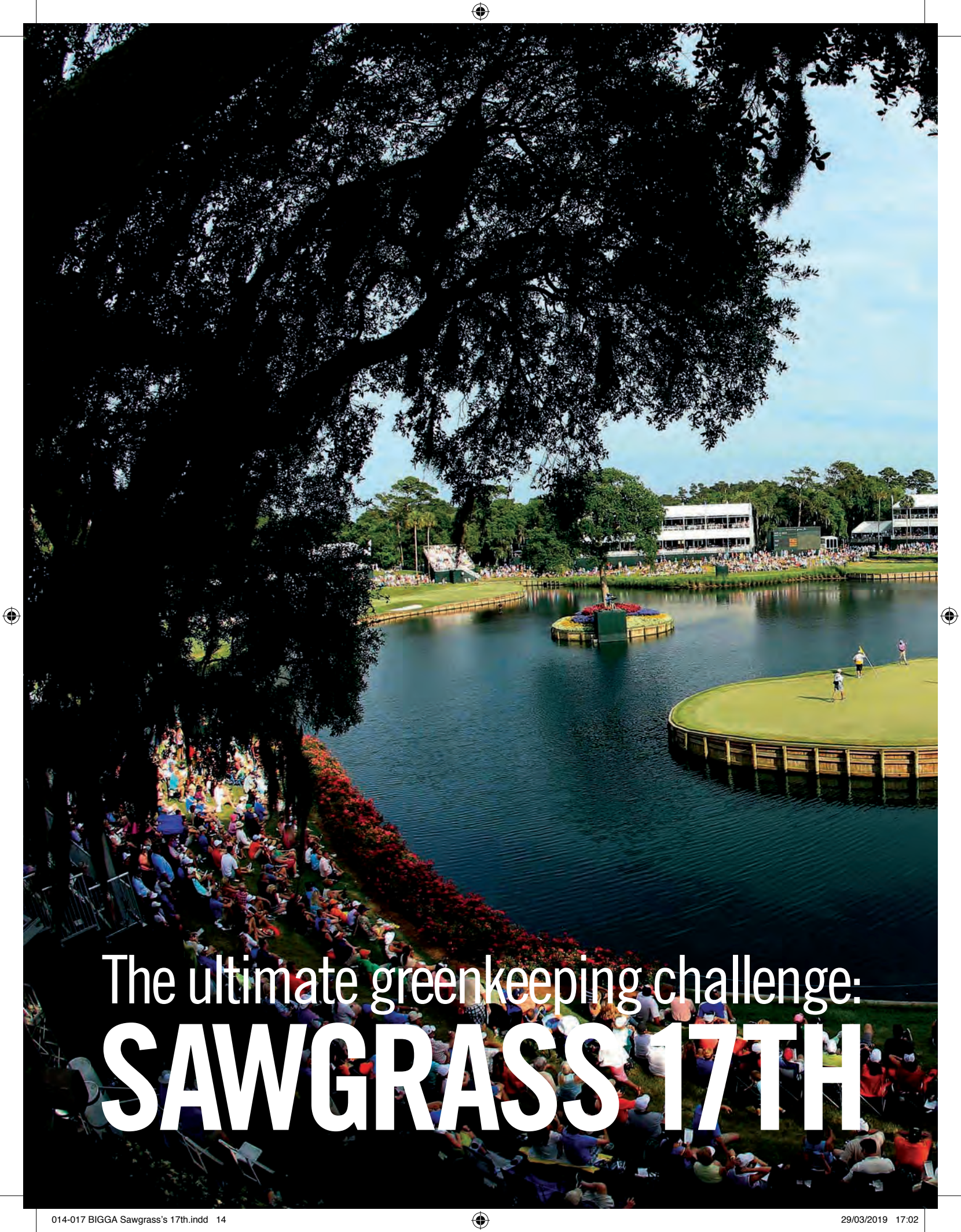
Iain: I have written a golf course policy document, which sets out the jobs we do on a typical day and that's up on the wall in the clubhouse. I do have a list of jobs and how long it would take one or two people to complete and it might not be a bad idea to publicise that more. We try and make members more aware of what's going on around them and the time it takes to do certain jobs.

Gordon: I produce a greens report every month that acts as a newsletter for the members and that tells them the things we have done, things we are doing and things we have planned. That seems to answer a lot of questions, especially as we don't just detail what we're doing, but also explain the reasons behind it. It tends to head off a lot of questions and I try to include not just what we are doing, but why we are doing it and what it entails. Communication is the key. It's even doing things like team photographs and introductions so members know they are real people, with names and lives and interests.

Antony: I believe golfers would be surprised at how long it takes us to cut the fairways. If you've only got a single fairway mower than it may take a day and a half to complete the job. With regards the greens, it takes on average two to three hours to do them all each day. ❁







The ultimate greenkeeping challenge:
SAWGRASS 17TH



The world's most famous par 3 poses a real challenge for the team at TPC Sawgrass, as Steve Carroll discovers

“S

SOMETIMES we think we have to put a life-vest on guys that get up there to mow that.”

Jeff Plotts is only half-joking. The 17th at TPC Sawgrass is one of golf's must-play holes and it claims as many as 120,000 balls every year as players reload in unison until they can say they've hit the 'island green'.

But that 137 yards of mostly water, surrounding a 78-foot long putt surface, gives the greenkeeping team tending to the Stadium Course at Ponte Vedra Beach a headache.

How can you keep the tee and green in championship condition all-year-round if every golfer is hitting half a dozen shots during their once-in-a-lifetime trip?

“When you get a hole that receives a lot of extra traffic, it becomes a difficult hole to manage,” explained Plotts, the director of golf course operations at TPC Sawgrass and the man in charge of more than 100 greenkeepers at the 36-hole complex.

“That green is very small, so it takes a lot of shots. Most golfers that come here are going to keep hitting until they hit the green – or maybe even hit it twice.

“So it has a lot of ball marks. It's a challenging green to manage but our team does a really good job.

It's called the 'island green' but it's technically a peninsula – with a single entrance and exit.

For several months before the month-long build up to The Players in March, Plotts and his team employed a small wooden walkway around the back of the green to balance the constant footfall.

Plotts explained: “That kind of stumps people when they see that for the first time.

“The walkway was put in to allow us to manage the entry and exit points on that green throughout the winter months, when we're not growing as aggressively as we are during the season.

“We do a lot of roping and staking to try to help to keep people from having a tendency to walk in one direction every time. We have to manage the hole. You just can't let it be.”

Then there's the tee. With most golfers hitting a multitude of shots, and many of them hardly described as the perfect strike, the turf can get hugely hammered with divots.

“The tee does get a lot of activity, and not just from golfers,” Plotts admitted. “There are a lot of wedding photos that get taken out there. There are a lot of extra photos that just happen on the golf course. So the tee gets a lot of wear.”

What will help from now on is the recent winter programme to reseed the greens, tees, and indeed the entire golf course, so it is more playable, and manageable, leading up to The Players, which returned to a March date following 12 years in May.





Main: The 17th at TPC Sawgrass claims as many as 120,000 balls each year

Below: Jeff Plotts, the director of golf course operations at TPC Sawgrass

Ryegrasses are a cooler season species and so they come out of winter dormancy earlier in the year. This species interchange was extremely costly – beyond the means of most courses - but it was necessary to ensure the course was looking in top condition for the earlier championship date.

Plotts will have to repeat that reseeding process every year, but one of the other major benefits is that ryegrass handles the numbers of people walking across the turf far better than the previous Bermuda grass did on its own.

That puts him in a much better position to handle the constant flood of feet, iron shots, and pitch marks that are a constant when you're working with one of golf's most recognisable holes.

"It's a beautiful golf hole but it holds up to it," he said. "Our team does a phenomenal job of understanding what that hole means, and what it means to this facility, and trying to manage it accordingly.

"That hole is a just a really tough hole to manage, even though it doesn't have a lot of turf." ❀

THE 17TH AT SAWGRASS IN NUMBERS

- It's been estimated that as many as 120,000 balls every year find the water at the 17th at Sawgrass.
- The green is actually the largest on the Stadium Course – measuring 78-feet long (or 24 metres). The water is four feet deep.
- The hole plays at 137 yards from The Players tees.
- At The Players in 2018, the 17th yielded the most birdies of the par 3s (69) but also the most double bogeys and worse (42). 82 per cent of players found the green off the tee.
- There have been eight hole in ones at The Players, the last of which was Sergio Garcia in 2017.
- The hole ranked fourth in difficulty during last year's tournament.



MANN TO

Walton Heath has hosted the British Masters. Carrbridge is a scenic nine-hole BIGGA members named Michael Mann and we thought we'd take a look at



MANN



course in Spey Valley. Both are supervised by
just how different their two worlds are



Walton Heath

M

MICHAEL MANN, meet... Michael Mann.

The course managers of Walton Heath, in Surrey, and Carrbridge, in Inverness-shire, are namesakes. What are the odds?

But while the duo share the same moniker, the way they practice their craft – in terms of their budgets, staff and the machinery they have available –

couldn't be further apart.

We asked the pair to talk about their roles, explain their resources and outline the opportunities and challenges that are presented to them at their very different courses...



Michael Mann, Walton Heath

MICHAEL MANN, COURSE MANAGER, WALTON HEATH

As the 'Mann' in charge of the prestigious Old and New courses – two of the best heathland layouts in the British Isles, Walton Heath's Michael Mann can call on impressive resources to ensure they remain on the must-play lists of all players.

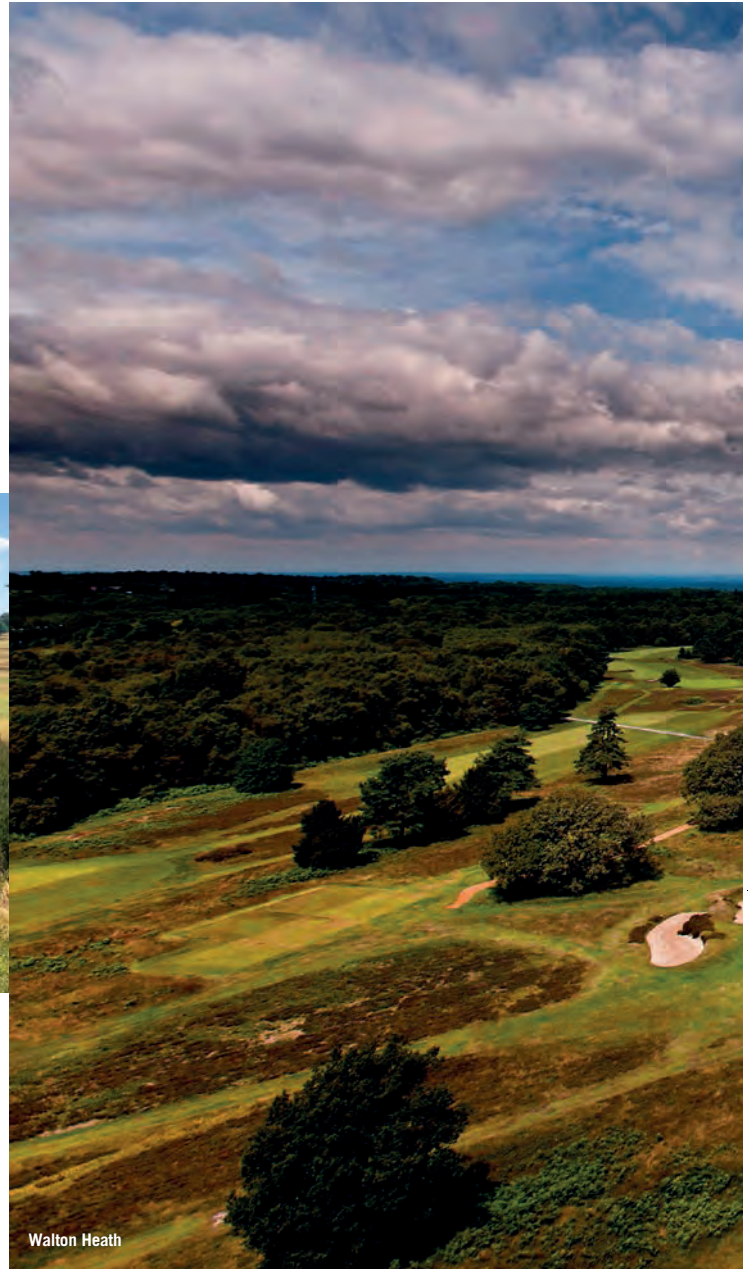
In charge of a team of 21 at the height of summer, his budget is not limitless by any means – it's just that it is significantly larger than the average course.

"Everything is relative," Mann explains. "I don't want to shatter anyone's illusions but everyone has a budget.

"You can't live beyond your means. But if you look at it from the perspective that we've got two courses, obviously the budget is going to be bigger."

With that pair of courses to maintain, Mann utilises a fleet that includes four fairway mowers, along with four tee and approach mowers, as he tries to manage some six hectares of tees, 23 hectares of fairways and three hectares of greens.

"It is interesting that we manage Walton Heath as one big course – because the two layouts intertwine slightly," he added. "We don't separate things, so it is one big team working together on both courses.



Walton Heath

"We keep the standards the same and obviously those are the standards you would expect on a high profile heathland course that sometimes hosts tournaments.

"I compare it to where I grew up, where if the membership was over £300 it was a lot of money. It's a lot more at Walton Heath but it is in an affluent part of the world."

Last year, the club held the European Tour's British Masters, won by Eddie Pepperell, and that brought an acceleration in maintenance work to ensure the course was as good as it could be for the arrival of the top professionals last autumn.

"We found out 12 months prior that it was going to happen. The European Tour didn't ask for too much. I think they asked for two new tees to be constructed and so we did



that.

“There were some tees that we were planning to improve in the future and that was brought forward.

“I think in total it was nine tees that we reconstructed. On the composite course – 16 holes of the Old and two of the New – there were 65 bunkers where there was sand exchanged in each one.

“All of this was stuff that needed to be done but it was accelerated. It was probably two years worth of work done in one winter.

“This year, it has been heather regeneration programmes, revetting bunkers, pathways and things like that. There are always improvement projects going on every year.”

Mann’s also shepherding through a scheme to try and

make the course self-sufficient – looking at water capture projects and harvesting rainwater to fill a reservoir. All of which will require more investment.

“It came to a point last year where the drought really took hold and it was ‘well, we’ve got a reservoir, it’s full to a point but we need to put more water in it’.

“We were drawing from the mains supply but we needed more water. So it was ‘okay, more water will go in. It wasn’t regardless of the cost but it was putting a sum of money into the reservoir, without really flinching.”

Key to the Walton Heath mantra, and the key to the budgets that are available, is the need to do things right. Waste is frowned upon but, as Mann reveals, “the job has to be done well and that’s the same with everything –



Michael Mann, Carrbridge

from top to bottom.”

MICHAEL MANN, COURSE MANAGER, CARRBRIDGE

They say greenkeeping can be a solitary job and, for six months of the year, that couldn't be truer for Carrbridge's Michael Mann.

He tends to his 9-hole course by himself during the winter, before bringing in a seasonal second member of staff during the busy summer.

That presents a challenge because the Highlands course proves very popular with visitors and he is often working around them to try and get his work done.

“We have one fairway mower,” Mann says of the equipment upon which he can draw. “I have two ride on triple X mowers for greens and surrounds.

“I have a rough cutter. It's a Jacobsen AR250 and I have two hand mowers for the tees. And that's it.”

When things go wrong, Mann turns to a company in Inverness that can get a machine to him if necessary.

“But we just to try and mend and make do. They are only an hour away and if they can't get anything down they'll basically come and repair it as soon as possible.”

It's a good job Mann isn't uptight about that, because there's little leeway in the budget if he needed to make an expensive purchase.

Last year, he spent just under £7,500 on course upkeep.

“For machinery, repairs, servicing and fuel costs, we were just over £5,000. So basically the course runs for under £13,000 a year,” he added.

Just think about those numbers for a second.

Mann is keeping a golf course in great condition for around half of the average person's salary in the UK. And the efforts he makes to stretch resources are having a positive effect, if the visitors flocking to the course are any guide.

So how does he do it?

He explains: “I have a good association with quite a few of the manufacturers and suppliers of greenkeeping products. We just try and get as good a deal as we





Carrbridge

possibly can for everything we buy.

“Most of the machinery we buy is usually second hand but, obviously, from a good reliable source so I’ve always got the machinery manufacturers on the lookout for good used machines for us.

“The basic strimmers and flymos are all purchased new but any other machinery we buy is usually three or four years old and as long as it’s in good condition we do it.”

Mann also does all of his course maintenance work in house. You will very rarely see an outside contractor’s diggers on the heathland layout.

Bunker need repairing? Mann carries out the work himself. Work on tees and greens? You guessed it. That would be Mann again. It’s hand to mouth at times, as he admits, and he’ll only take on two or three winter projects – hiring any plant machinery he needs. He’s also got his ear to the ground at all times, as he bids to find new ways to improve the course at little cost.

“I take a lot of advice from my peers on things and I speak to as many greenkeepers as I can about what products they are using – just so I can get the best results from what I purchase.” ❖

WALTON HEATH

The host of last year’s British Masters, Walton Heath is one of the world’s most highly regarded clubs.

Five-time Open champion James Braid was the first professional and His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales was the inaugural captain in 1935, becoming King Edward VIII the following year.

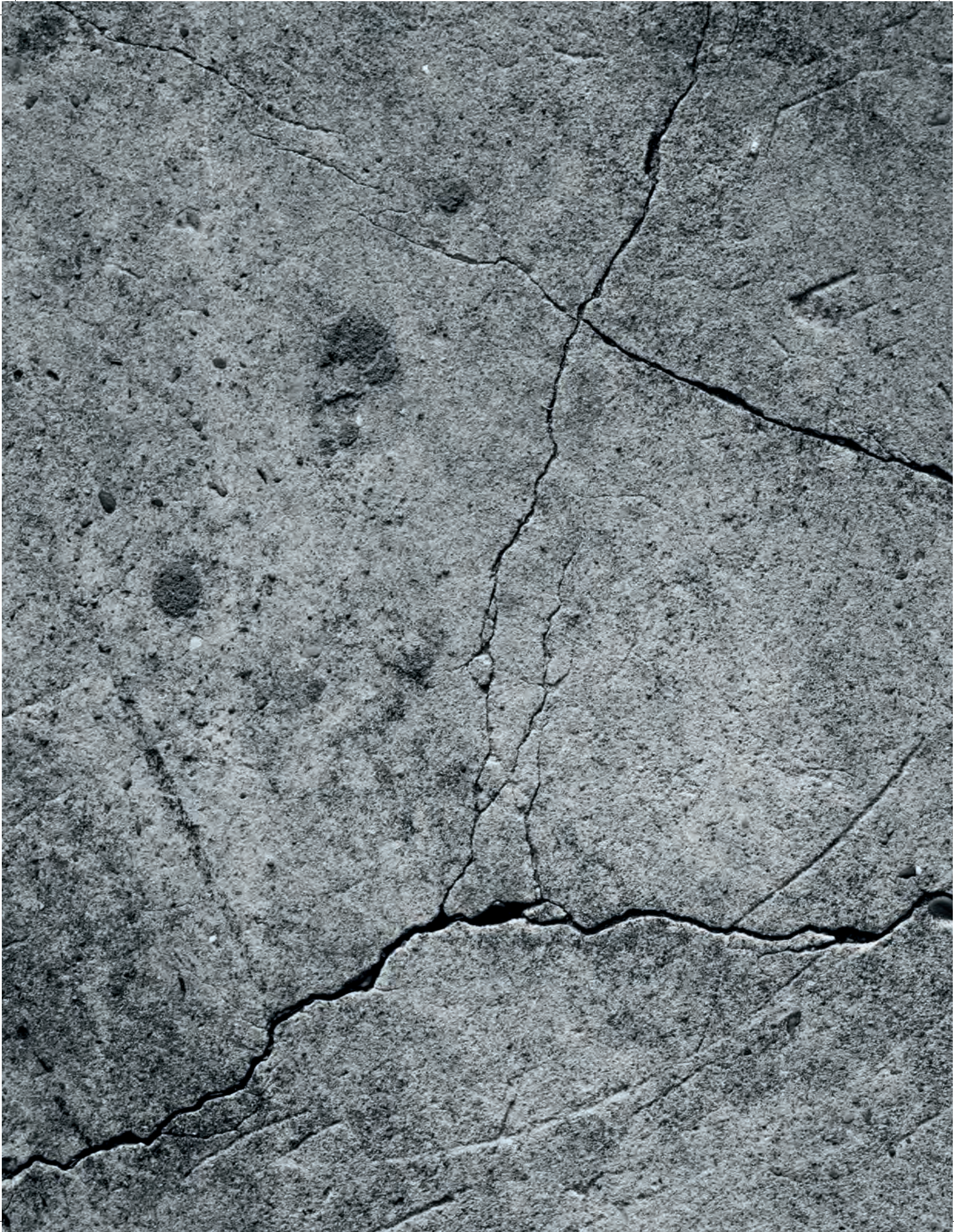
Featuring two classic heathland layouts, the Old and New, which are always ranked highly in annual lists, Walton Heath hosted the Ryder Cup in 1981, Senior Open in 2001, British Ladies Amateur in 2000 and holds US Open qualifying every year.

CARRBRIDGE

Using the natural unspoiled hillside terrain and burns, Carrbridge is set against the backdrop of the Cairngorm mountains in the magnificent Spey Valley region of Scotland.

The club was formed in 1980, although the course has been there significantly longer, and it is regarded as a scenic, but challenging, 9-hole course.

The immaculate greens are hailed as some of the best in the area. Meanwhile, water plays a significant part during a round here because of the presence of several burns dotted around the course.





THE IMPACT OF PITCH MARKS

They are golf's equivalent of potholes, but convincing golfers to repair their pitch marks seems as elusive a task as ever. Steve Carroll discovers why something so simple is also so important

Stuart Green, BIGGA's head of member learning, says to repair a pitch mark correctly you want to push from the top and sides – pushing the turf back into the middle. Do not put the repainer in and then lift up

THEY drive greenkeepers to distraction – something everyone complains about but no one appears able to solve.

Golfer and greenkeepers get equally upset when they see a putting surface covered in pitch marks and yet standards of green etiquette seem to be getting worse rather than better.

Everyone knows they should be repaired, but it's a fair bet if you walk on any green at any course you'll find plenty of craters where the impact of a shot has been left uncorrected.

So what really is the impact of pitch marks? What effect do they have on the way greenkeepers can work and what happens from a turf point of view when golfers leave them alone?

“You can't do much. If you have the manpower, you'd go and repair all the pitch marks the day after but, nine times out 10, golf clubs don't have that luxury”



We've asked a greenkeeper at one of Britain's top courses and a BIGGA expert to give us the low down...

Jamie Wade is head greenkeeper at The Belfry, in Warwickshire. The three courses at the Ryder Cup venue are rarely empty and so his team see more than their fair share of pitch marks...

YOU HAVE THREE COURSES AT THE BELFRY – THE DERBY, PGA NATIONAL AND THE BRABAZON – WHICH ARE GETTING AN AWFUL LOT OF PLAY...

Last year we came very close to doing 110,000 rounds. We very rarely have an empty golf course – pretty much every tee time is sold.

You can imagine the amount of play we get, every



single day and all year round.

We have no temporary greens. We try and deliver a Ryder Cup experience every day. People come to The Belfry and want good greens, so that is what we try and deliver.

SO 110,000 ROUNDS IS AN AWFUL LOT OF GOLFERS AND AN AWFUL LOT OF BALLS LANDING ON GREENS. HOW MANY PITCH MARKS WOULD YOUR TEAM BE DEALING WITH DAILY?

We've got a team of 40 guys and, whatever job we are doing on greens, we have to repair pitch marks every single day. If it's a particular day when they are not repaired very well, we could be doing up to 30 a green. We shouldn't be doing those numbers, really.

It's very time consuming for our guys and it slows

downs our daily maintenance tasks – cutting greens and that kind of work. It's quite a big job but, even if we are walking past a green and see a pitch mark, the team are encouraged to repair them.

HOW LONG WOULD THAT PROCESS TAKE?

It's hard to say because it's not an individual job to do them. The fact that we do them every single day, without fail, means we are always keeping on top of them.

They're not done at set days and set times. With the amount of golfers coming through, there are a lot every day.

DOES IT FEEL LIKE GROUNDHOG DAY?

Definitely. On The Brabazon it takes five hours to mow

greens. It would obviously be a far quicker task if we didn't have to repair pitch marks. You can spend 10 to 15 minutes on each green repairing them.

YOU'RE TRYING TO KEEP GREENS AT CHAMPIONSHIP CONDITION AT ALL TIMES. HOW DO PITCH MARKS HINDER YOU IN THAT TASK?

It's a massive task and it puts a lot of pressure on the team. It doesn't just affect the guys that are cutting greens but those all the way down.

If golfers repair them wrongly, we have to go out and sand and seed and try and encourage some grasses back in there. That's another task that we shouldn't have to do, but we want the turf quality of those greens to be 100 per cent.

CAN PITCH MARKS AFFECT OTHER AREAS OF GREEN MAINTENANCE – SUCH AS WHERE YOU MIGHT CONSIDER PLACING A HOLE?

We don't put freshly cut pins round disease or any old plugs that we've had previously. We are looking for a completely clean area but if a pitch mark is not repaired properly then it is obviously a struggle. Our greens total a hectare in size.

That's not a massive area compared to some and they might have five or six more pin placements than we might have.

IF YOU COULD MAKE A PLEA TO GOLFERS ABOUT PITCH MARKS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

It would obviously be to repair them but I think we still need to educate people better. We encourage our golf operations team to tell golfers before they go out to repair their pitch marks. We've also got signage out on the course as well.



What about the science?

Stuart Green, BIGGA's head of member learning, explains what happens when a pitch mark occurs and why anything but a prompt repair causes so many problems...

WE SEE THE RESULT OF A PITCH MARK WHEN IT LANDS BUT WHAT IS THAT ACTUALLY DOING TO THE GREEN?

When the ball impacts into the turf, it is basically breaking through the canopy and smashing into the soil. As the ball hits, it forces the roots and the shoots of the grass out of the way.

How firm, or wet, the surface is will decide the severity of the damage. Generally, you want a firmer surface so there is more resilience in the turf to resist the ball making a mark.







IT'S NOT JUST A LITTLE BRUISE THEN?

No. When a ball impacts, it generally doesn't do so on a vertical trajectory. It comes in at an angle.

So your pitch mark gets longer and, if that happens, it pushes the turf away.

When it comes to repairing a pitch mark, one of the reasons people do it wrong is they put the repairer in and then lift up. That's not what you should do.

You actually want to put the pitch repairer in and push from the top and sides – pushing the turf back into the middle of the pitch mark.

It's like taking a divot. You want to put the turf back into the hole where it has come from.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PITCH MARK IF IT IS NOT REPAIRED PROMPTLY?

If you repair a pitch mark immediately it will start to recover within 24 hours and the damage will clear a lot quicker. Obviously, it comes down to how firm the surface is at the time.

In a normal growing period, if you don't do it within 24 hours it won't repair itself for over three weeks. Once that ball has gone in and ripped out those roots, you've got to try and get that grass to re-establish in that space.

That will take time and it opens the surface up to weed seeds coming in. Pests will also see an opportunity to get into the soil. It's quite damaging.



THE FIVE STEPS TO CORRECTLY REPAIRING A PITCH MARK

1. Discard the loose piece of turf taken out by the ball
2. Insert the pitch mark repairer tool just outside of the back of the pitch mark
3. Lever the turf towards the centre of the pitch mark
4. Repeat this motion from all sides of the pitch mark
5. Gently tap the repaired area with your putter. This action stretches undamaged turf over the pitch mark, providing instant recovery



THERE'S NOT A LOT GREENKEEPERS CAN DO WHEN THEY COME IN ON A MONDAY MORNING AND A GREEN LOOKS LIKE THE SURFACE OF THE MOON?

You can't do much. If you have the manpower, you'd go and repair all the pitch marks the day after but, nine times out of 10, golf clubs don't have that luxury.

It really doesn't take a lot for a golfer to repair a pitch mark.

When I played golf with my dad, he always said 'as soon as you walk onto a putting green you repair three pitch marks. You repair your own and a couple of others.'

If everyone did that, pitch mark damage would pretty much disappear overnight.

You don't want to be hitting your ball up to the hole and it suddenly deviates because there's a damaged bit of turf because of unrepaired pitch marks.

If damaged pitch marks are not repaired it also makes it very difficult to change holes.

When we come to change a hole on a green, we are looking for at least a metre of good clear turf around that hole so we don't have any damage or scars.

You want a good clear area, so you have a nice surface to putt on.

If we don't repair our pitch marks it limits where you can start to put the holes on putting greens.

It becomes even harder for the greenkeeper and even more difficult for the golfer. ❀

The art of building a Bunker



There's a misconception that maintaining sand traps takes a few short minutes but, as Royal St George's head greenkeeper Paul Larsen says, there is a craft to constructing a bunker



ASK a golfer about their bunkers and you'll hear a range of responses – none of them usually complimentary. The hazards can make the mild-mannered turn puce, whether that's carping over a ball that's stuck in the face, moaning about the raking or complaining about their consistency. The average player reckons keeping a course's bunkers in good condition is an easy task. I mean, how difficult can it be to rake a bunker?

The answer is more complicated. In fact, nothing about the way bunkers are maintained, built or redesigned is simple.

There are 104 at Royal St George's and the eyes of the golfing world will be on all of them in July 2020.

The Open returns to the Kent course after a nine-year absence and head greenkeeper Paul Larsen and his team have been working feverishly to ensure the famed layout is in its best condition for the arrival of the world's greatest golfers.

Key to Larsen's work, and that of his team, is the preparation and maintenance of the bunkers that form such an important part of the challenge of playing a links course.

The most famous of those is the gargantuan Himalaya, a crevice that is 40-feet deep and 25-feet wide and sits on the fourth hole.

But, with a team of 15 staff, keeping all of the Sandwich layout's bunkers at their best is a job that takes precision and hours of work.

"They are maintained and prepped all year round. There is not a time they are not worked on," Larsen said.

"If we rake them every day, it's two guys and three or four hours each to do them. I try to do them with quite a few of us.

"What we'll tend to do is hand cut the greens and rake the bunkers at the same time. In four hours in the morning, we will get the bunkers raked and the greens cut. Separately, another two people will spend six hours raking fairway bunkers."

Only half a dozen of the bunkers at Royal St George's are natural, with the majority revetted. That is where sods of turf are stacked on top of each other to produce a layered effect.

It's a lengthy process and, as Larsen attests, an art form. It's a project that needs to be repeated usually every four years, as the faces wear and need to be replaced.

"We prep the turf we are going to use for revetting the bunkers on our nurseries a year in advance," he explained.

"They are all cut to 12-inch widths and about an inch and a half (tall) with a turf cutter. It's just like building blocks as you stack them on top of each other.

"You have to dig out the old bunker, build the base up, dress on the back wall and it's quite a long process. The

guys will probably take two or three days to build a bunker. "When you are back filling you have got to go slowly and not rush it. It has got to be done properly.

"When they are building – they are actually sculpting – they blend it in with the horizon and the area of land so it fits the natural surroundings. It is more of an art than a build like it used to be."

Clearly, you can't revet 104 bunkers at the same time so Larsen and his team take on around 25 a year.

Everything is hand raked at Royal St George's and the wind – a natural enemy at a seaside location – keeps everyone on their toes. Sand, which is usually taken from their own dunes, needs constant monitoring and redistributing as it is blown about.

Again, that takes time. But the Himalaya bunker, which because of its size and scale would make you assume needs careful handling, is actually one of the easier to deal with after sleepers were taken out a few years ago.



"We only rake the base of it. What we do have to do is, for the grasses on top of the bunker around it, we will spray with a selective herbicide. We want to keep it more natural, so they are the proper grasses and it doesn't get too thick and clumpy or get any rye in there. That's the hardest bit of looking after those bunkers."

You'll not find any grasses on the faces, either. It is burned off and then the grass on top is hand cut every two weeks so it blends in with the fairways.

Wetting agents and a lot of hand watering, particularly during last summer, help to keep it alive. That's a lot of work for one bunker. So imagine replicating that 104 times.

"The building of a bunker now is not a labouring job," Larsen concluded. "It's an artist's job, it's a sculpting job. It takes a good eye.

"They have got to blend in with the surroundings and find the highest point into the middle of the green. It is definitely an art." ❁

Main: Paul Larsen, the head greenkeeper at Royal St George's, estimates that it takes his team two to three days to build a bunker





DON'T YOU JUST CUT GRASS IN THE SUMMER?

This popular golfers' refrain couldn't be further from the truth, as Steve Carroll discovers

BE honest. When the sun is out and the mercury is rising, how many of you even notice the greenkeeping team out on the course?

They've been up since the crack of dawn, preparing it diligently to ensure it's at its best when the first tee times follow on a sunny morning.

But there's often a misguided belief among players that our much loved layouts don't require as much work in the summer months – aside from the rituals of cutting tees, fairways, rough and greens.

The reality couldn't be more different – even mowing is much more intricate than you might think – and the overall picture was never more revealed when teams battled in the face of a drought last year that hadn't been seen in four decades.

So we asked greenkeepers at four very different layouts – links, downland, heathland and parkland – to explain what they do in the summer and how grass cutting is just one of their many tasks.

THE LINKS

MANAGING a links course in the summer often means treading a fine line. Yes, the sort of grasses that thrive on the coast tend to be harder than most. But then they need to be, because the elements that test them mean a layout can require careful management.

That's certainly the case at Formby Ladies, the quirky, classy links that sits in the centre of its championship sibling Formby on the Lancashire coast.

"Summer on a links is generally about balancing moisture inputs and irrigation," said course manager Rob Sandilands. "We're pretty dry, so you've got to try early on in the spring to start your wetting agent

programme to lock a reasonable amount of moisture into the soil and get the numbers in your favour.

"We have a programme of wetting agents on fairways, greens and all those sort of areas. You are using management tools, like moisture meters, to keep those things within the parameters that you know are what keeps your site in the best condition."

What's a wetting agent? You all know that water has two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen molecule. Hence H₂O. The bonds between those are strong. Sandilands uses the example of filling a glass – water will bend over the edge of the receptacle before it spills over. So to get those molecules to cling to soil particles, and spread out in the soil, you need to break the surface tension of the water. You use a wetting agent to make the most of the water that goes in.

Most of the time, that liquid will be rain. Irrigation is a



very different beast on a links course compared to others. Sandilands continued: “It is just a fall back, or an insurance policy, in a lot of cases. You are just maintaining enough moisture to keep fine grasses happy. “You are not especially concerned over firmness – the firmer the better really for a site like ours in the summer. “Without irrigation on fairways you are at the mercy of the elements. You’ve got to try and do what you can to retain a certain amount of moisture. By and large, a links site like ours will do okay on a limited amount of moisture. “The plants that are there want to be there and have grown to be there over hundreds of years. You are doing what favours those plants naturally. The finer grasses, and those slightly acidic grasslands, are pretty drought tolerant and have pretty deep rooting. There’s a lot of aeration and overseeding of the finer species to try and supplement that.”

Then last summer happened. “It was brown for a while and it was white after a point”, remembered Sandilands. “It was the heat that really did it. A lot of species that we thought would be very drought tolerant just met their limit and all of a sudden we were losing coverage on fairways. We’ve got a bit of work to do to catch things up. “The point of dormancy was what we could have kept on our side if we had some fairway irrigation. We didn’t, and we did everything in our power, but dormancy did go to death in quite a few areas – which we have had to reseed in the autumn and will do again in spring.” But the drought may, in the future, prove to bring some infrastructure benefits at Formby Ladies. A new irrigation sub committee was formed, the weaknesses in the current system identified and a long-term plan was drawn up.

WHAT is it you see when you watch a greenkeeping team at work on mowers? Look closer, next time, and you might witness something that surprises you.

It turns out there's more to cutting in the summer months than simply running a blade over the grass. At

Royal Winchester, course manager Andy Barber knows that keeping the sward upright is vitally important for the health of the turf at the chalk downland course.

"When we block cut, you can get into the habit of the grass laying down too much and we are always trying to make sure we alternate the cut," he explained.

"We go back against the grain with a brush, especially when cutting the fairways. You can imagine that when the grass lies down, it can actually get quite long if you cut it in the same way all the time so brushing is really important.

"We want to get the air and light around the blade but if you get all the grass upright you will get a better cut.

"People forget about the fairways. It's a big area and the main thing that everything sees on a course presentation-wise."

If you think a links can get dry, then a downland course will rarely be holding any significant source of moisture under the soil either.

With his course found at the highest point of Winchester, without fairway irrigation and with a busy tee sheet at all times, keeping things ship shape in the summer months is not an easy task.

"Last summer, we weren't only dry but we are a really busy course so there was stress from play all the time.

"The main problem is managing the traffic and keeping the course pristine and being strong for the winter.

"We start early. We don't do any different practices to anywhere else. There will be a lot of aeration.

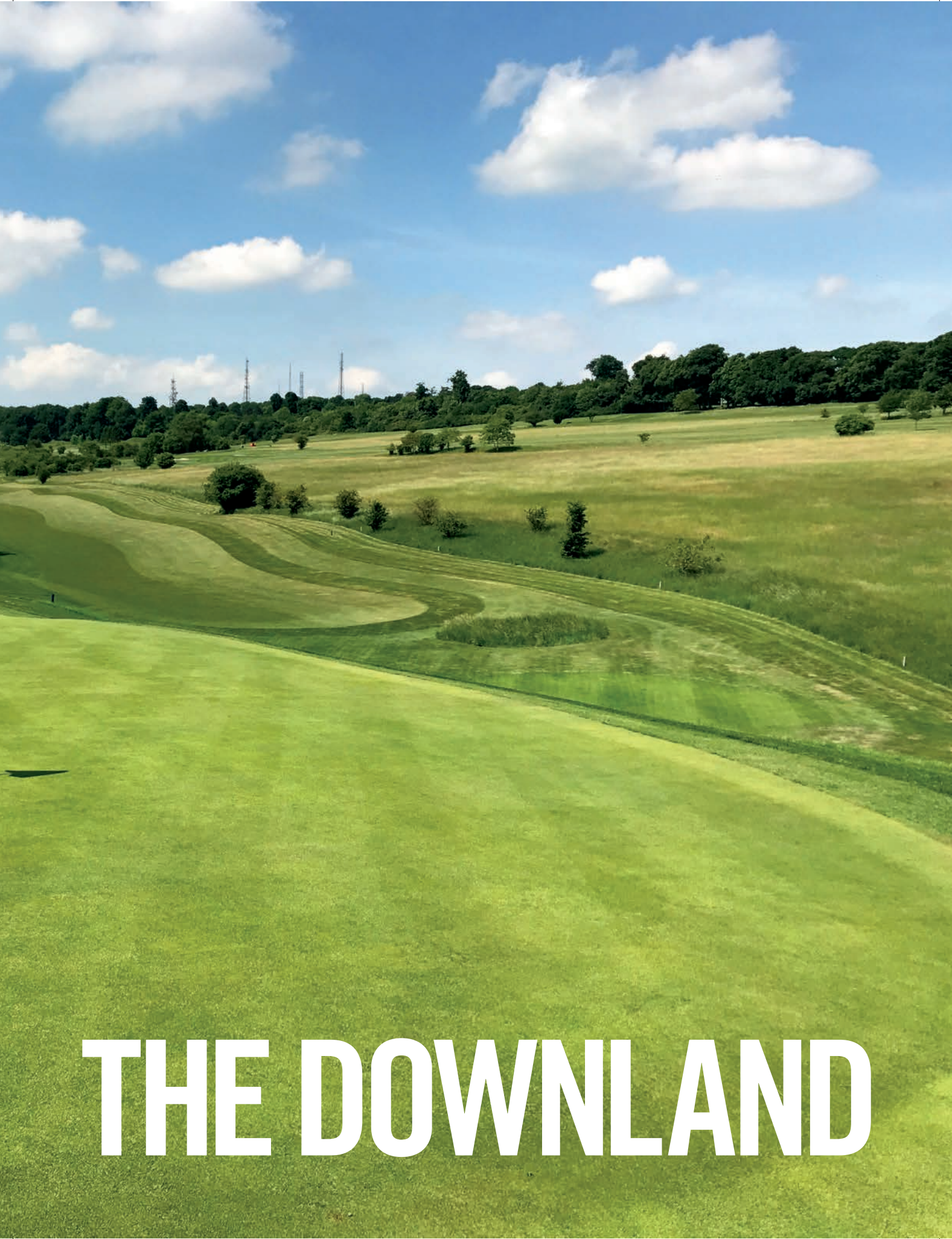
"It's just keeping the turf healthy all the time, planning ahead, using wetting agents and seaweed – that kind of nutrition and keeping things strong."

Barber will use soluble fertilisers and wetting agents, alongside a fairway feeding programme that employs a little and often approach.

Following the rigours of last summer, where the course wasn't hit as hard as some, his team kept things simple to ensure the dormant grass recovered as quickly as possible.

"It's a lot of stress on the plant but, on the other hand, it does show how hardy grass is. It comes back really well. We are constantly working and trying to do the best we can. It's about simple greenkeeping techniques and not trying to over complicate anything."





THE DOWNLAND

HEATHLAND courses can be a golfer's paradise. With heather in full bloom and firm, bouncy fairways, it's many people's idea of a perfect course.

But giving members and visitors that kind of experience doesn't just happen naturally as the weather warms. It takes lots of work.

Matthew Brighton, deputy head greenkeeper at Alwoodley, accepts the team at the Leeds layout are fortunate to have the land they've got.

"We don't end up having to worry about being wet and boggy," he said. "We are predominantly fescue in the semi-rough and fairways so, when we get into the summer, and especially last year, we're really not cutting all that much.

"But it deflects your time into other areas. Fescue is a very hardy grass but, at the same time, it does need splashes of water.

"So there is quite a lot of hand watering going on – especially for us being on USGA specification greens.

"We have got a top of the range irrigation system

and it's all well and good using it on an evening but it is not just as easy as putting the sprinklers on.

"What you tend to find, especially when you are starting to dry out, is the water doesn't necessarily penetrate the surface on the high spots.

"It ends up running off and into the low spots. You can get an inconsistent coverage on greens.

"Things can start to look very patchy. While your low spots will look very lush and green, the high spots will go very brown.

"We use moisture meters a lot. There are different categories depending on your style of course. We aim to be 15 to 25 per cent on the moisture scale, which is a little bit of a crossover into the top five per cent of a links course and the early five per cent of a parkland course."

With top tournaments held regularly at Alwoodley, including Open qualifying, the greenkeeping team have to maintain a careful balance in summer to ensure the course is kept at its best possible condition, but doesn't boil over under the pressure of being maintained to such a high level.

To do that, the club has invested in additional



machinery as well as staff. But Brighton said the key to getting it right during the height of the season was ensuring communication was spot on with the members.

“It’s one of the key things,” he explained. “Sometimes the greens can be absolutely immaculate, but we need to get some holes in and some air to help them breathe.

“At points through the summer, we can be cutting and ironing three times a week and it’s trying to find that balance where you have quieter days and explaining it to members – so they have an understanding as well – that we can’t cut the greens every day.

“It’s all well and good getting the course into absolutely fabulous condition for the first couple

of weeks in May but you’ve got to keep the balance there – otherwise the course will start to tail off in June.

“It’s explaining to members so they understand we are keeping it in the best condition each day we possibly can but we always have that extra little bit in reserve to go a little bit further for things like Captain’s Day.

“That’s one of the most important days at the club. We have to keep in mind it is a members’ golf club and those are the most important days for them.”



THE HEATHILAND



THE PARKLAND

PARKLANDS are very green and lush, and popular with golfers all over the United Kingdom. But, in summer, lots of trees can bring lots of problems.

Trees are hardy, and their roots can spread out over a wide area. Those roots stretch out under fairways and, even worse, under greens. They suck out the available moisture and can hinder keeping playing surfaces in pristine conditions.

Sitwell Park is a heathland hiding in a parkland's clothing – that's how course manager Martin Hayward sees the Rotherham course, designed by the great Dr Alister MacKenzie.

“Sitwell Park was originally more of a heathland course,” said Hayward, who is in his second year in the role. “There is a lot of gorse, heather and bracken around the golf course, which are natural to the site but

have been overtaken by unwanted species of trees.”

So his team spent Hayward's first summer in the job undertaking tasks far removed from the simple regime of cutting. An intensive woodland programme was carried out to open up areas of the course.

He said: “Certain greens have started to recover quickly because we have removed big trees around them and you can see where the roots are going under the greens. They are taking all the moisture away from the turf, which puts the health of the grass at risk. Once they get too big, and too dense, they start to damage your surfaces and once they do that you have to start cleaning them out. You have to have your playing surfaces right.”

That thinning out of copses is being followed by a regeneration of gorse and the reintroduction of grassland areas. When the average member turns up at Sitwell Park, Hayward and his team have already been there for hours and the course is prepped and ready to



go. They cut three times a week, which leaves two days clear to carry out everything else – strimming, edging and so on. Hayward’s crew rake bunkers every day and that task probably takes a lot longer to complete than you might imagine.

“There are only five of us so it is quite intense labour for the lads,” he said. “We’ve only got 40 bunkers but we do them by hand – so we can feel the depths of the sand levels and make sure we have got enough sand in.

“You prepare the course to look nice through the summer but, ultimately, you are doing your work to prepare it so it is as good as it can be for the winter, and in the winter for the spring, and so on.”

For Hayward, that means lots of aeration.

“I believe in letting the turf breathe. Grass needs air pockets to grow into so we undertake lots of aeration and sanding. We introduced about 160 tonnes across the greens and tees last year and we will hopefully increase that gradually as the budget allows.” ❀

FORMBY LADIES

This links course may be found right in the centre of its more prestigious big brother Formby. Underestimate it, though, at your peril. Placed amid the pine trees and sand dunes right on the Lancashire coast, it measures just 5,374 yards. But with its tight fairways and small, well guarded, greens, it demands a great deal of thought and a precision iron game. With heather lying just off the fairways, and making the rough a stiff challenge, elevated tees show off much of the course and the Irish Sea.

ROYAL WINCHESTER

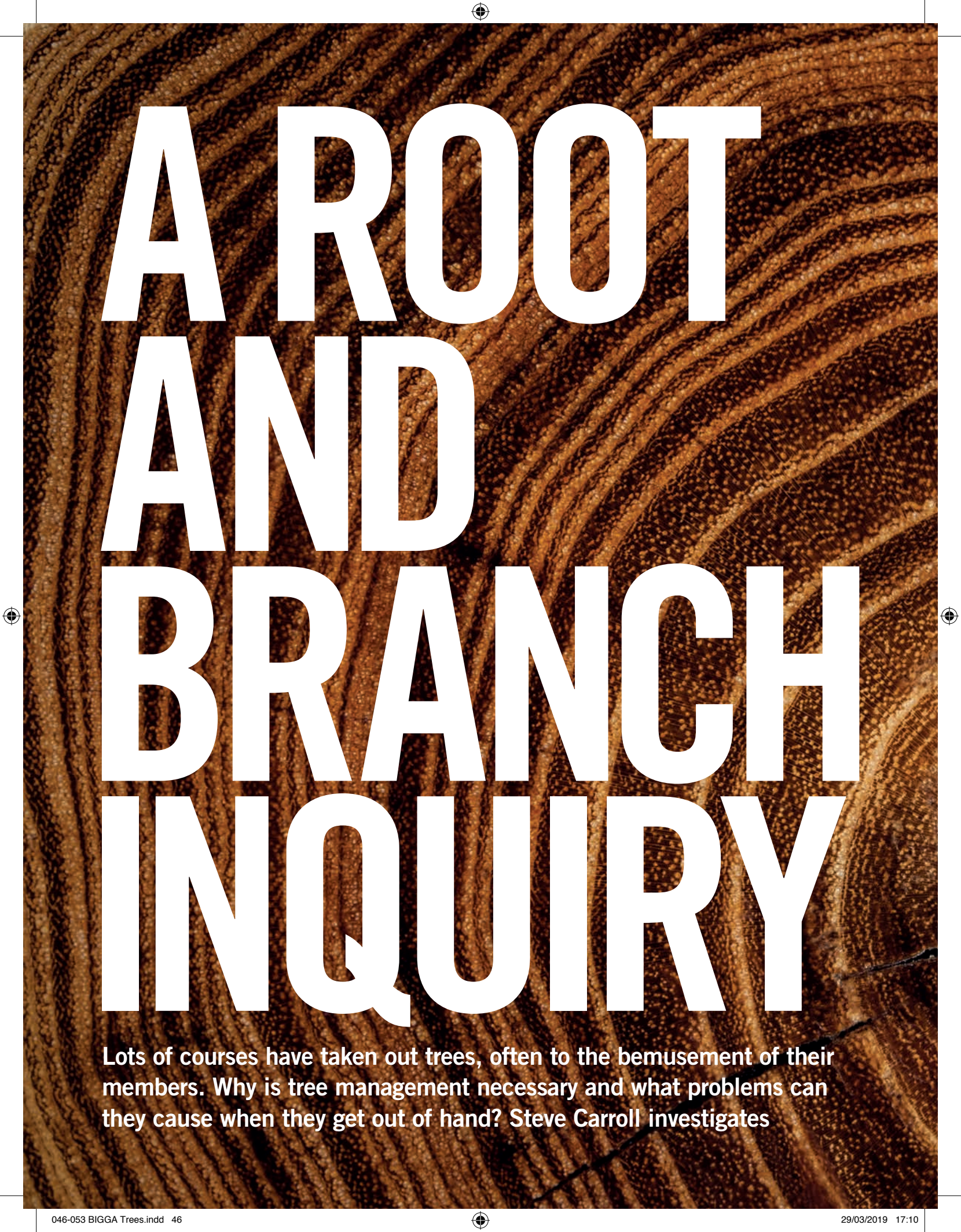
More than 130 years old, this is the only club to have Royal patronage in Hampshire. Designed by JH Taylor, the course was laid out in typical regional downland. It drains extremely well and is a magnet for those looking for year round golf in great conditions. A shade under 6,400 yards from the tips, highlights include the short 7th with its raised green, and the doglegged 13th. Back-to-back par 5s at the turn are unusual and a renovation programme two years ago saw work completed on the bunkers.

ALWOODLEY

Dr Alister MacKenzie’s architectural journey started in Leeds and his first course was the wonderful Alwoodley. Regarded as one of Britain’s finest inland courses, it is set on Wigton Moor and its springy fairways sweep through heather and gorse towards large and undulating greens. A regular host of Open qualifying, Alwoodley will host the Brabazon Trophy – one of amateur golf’s most prestigious trophies – at the end of May and start of June.

SITWELL PARK

This Rotherham course is renowned for having one of the most highly respected finishes in the area. The classic MacKenzie greens also set it apart, with their fast and tricky reads, and the course retains much of the original design as the layout slopes around a hillside. But this picturesque parkland has also recently modernised – having gone through a five-year redevelopment programme in time for the club’s centenary back in 2013.



A ROOT AND BRANCH INQUIRY

Lots of courses have taken out trees, often to the bemusement of their members. Why is tree management necessary and what problems can they cause when they get out of hand? Steve Carroll investigates



THE picture below cannot be questioned. It reveals to the members of Broadstone how the heathland course once looked, before widespread tree planting took place.

There's a desire at Broadstone to restore those heathland features that made the area so important – heathland is, after all, a rare habitat in need of preserving. And when golfers question this move, asking why trees are being removed from the site, all head greenkeeper Paul Staples needs do is dig this picture out of the archives.

Golf is a game that is steeped in tradition. Members play at their course for decades, comforted by the knowledge that generations of golfers played before them and aware of their responsibilities to preserve the course for generations to come. Perhaps long-lived trees are the physical embodiment of that?

But if they are not managed correctly, trees are not the benevolent force you'd think they might be on a course. They can cause huge problems.

Broadstone is one of England's heathland treasures. Except it was under threat. The swathes of oak and birch planted during the last century were transforming this Harry Colt classic beyond all recognition.

The heather was dying, and Broadstone was becoming parkland. So the club, like so many others up and down the country, engaged in a programme to clear and thin out their woodlands.

For many golfers, wherever the chainsaw has been produced, that has been a difficult process as they have sometimes argued passionately for their retention.

It's in this environment that Staples reaches for the old grainy images. They show a course with nary a branch in sight. It's a portrait that can convert even the hardest held opinion. "It has been massive," he admitted. "We've got these pictures from 100 years ago and there was hardly a tree on the course.

"We've recently undertaken work on the 11th, which had a backdrop of trees. I photoshopped all the trees that were there and put them next to the old picture. It's a tough one for golfers to say they don't want it to look like that – because that's what the course looked like.

"I get a lot of the old pictures to say 'this is what we are trying to bring the golf course back to'."

"The presence of trees is a delicate balancing act, said BIGGA's ecology and sustainability expert James Hutchinson, who has seen the work taking place at Broadstone first hand. "I would say that trees, from an ecological perspective, are very important and without them golf courses would suffer considerably. I have visited around 280 courses over the past four years and I would have to say that it is the ones with well-established



The 14th at Broadstone as it looked a century ago





How trees came to dominate Broadstone's 14th



St Mellion, Cornwall

trees of the correct species that have wildlife diversity in good numbers. That doesn't mean every tree is good on a golf course and some species are not suitable, or even safe. It's important that greenkeepers and golfers have an understanding of what is a good tree on a course and what isn't."

If trees are planted in strategic locations, they need only be effectively managed. So why can they also be such an issue? The problem is that effective management is not what's happened at some of our clubs. It hasn't happened for generations, leading to trees that have crept too close to playing surfaces and are giving greenkeepers big headaches.

"Golfers like trees because they believe they absorb water," Staples added. "The problem with birch, oak, and those that lose their leaves during the autumn, is that they land in our heather and they raise the PH level of the soil. The heather dies and the leaves smother it."

It's a similar story at Leeds-based Headingley, where the trees that had been planted, and simply left, were producing major concerns for head greenkeeper Andy Stanger.

He explained: "Invasive roots will get into your playing surfaces and cause you problems, and particularly when they get into your greens. They will destroy your drainage systems. Particular types of tree love the pipes that have



got water in them all the time. They will just run right the way down them and block them up.

“Our 10th green in the autumn would be our first job in the morning. Before we could achieve anything, we’d go there and blow the leaves off. We couldn’t mow it. We couldn’t even wipe the dew brush over it because it was covered in leaves and twigs. That green in the summer, when you are out hand watering and trying to keep everything alive, was going to be on the intensive care list before any other. The trees were five yards from it and the roots were right under the back of the green.”

While trees can certainly be beneficial to a parkland through the biological diversity they promote, Hutchinson

revealed they are much more problematic when found in anything more than small, manageable numbers around the course.

“Dense woodland actually has a detrimental effect upon biodiversity as the shade they produce prevents other plants, such as wildflowers, from growing.

“If there are large amounts of trees then greenkeepers will spend their limited resources managing trees, rather than the playing surfaces.”

Trees cast a long shadow, quite literally, but greens need direct sunlight in order to properly grow. Cropped shorter than any other area on the course, the turf on the greens is already under great stress. Shade caused

by overhanging trees removes the ability of the grass to perform well, opening up the possibility of serious disease damage. That same situation occurs when greens are covered in leaves for extended periods.

“We’re trying to sow bentgrass into our greens,” added Staples. “We had five oak trees right of our first green this year and we couldn’t get any bent to grow on it. We took the trees down and now it is light all day and every day.”

At Headingley, the club decided to thin out trees as required. The results surprised and thrilled everyone.

Stanger said: “We have 18 greens but they are like 18 different kids – they will all behave differently. The first green was just choked completely but now we have released that. That was a green that would not be in play during the winter because the right-hand side would be saturated and unstable. Now we have removed the trees, that’s no longer a problem.

“Disease pressure is one of our great challenges as turf managers. You will get to August and, in theory, you shouldn’t have a lot of outbreaks in the summer because it’s hot and dry and the fungus that cause turf diseases prefer damp and moist conditions.

“If there are no trees then you get a breeze flowing across the greens, which clears away the early morning dew. But if there are trees surrounding a green then it is sheltered and the moisture doesn’t disperse. Then at night, when the temperature drops, the moisture carpets the greens, making the ideal environment for diseases to multiply and take hold.”

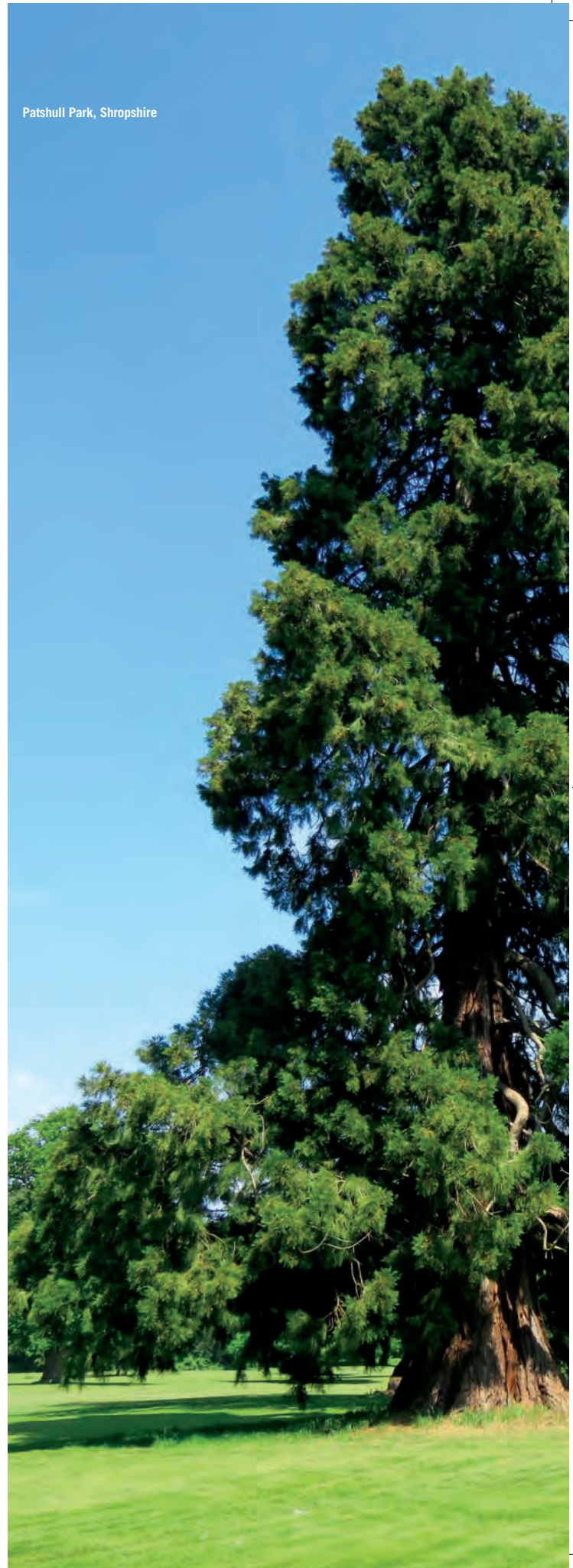
There is also a safety aspect to tree thinning as falling branches can be dangerous and, sadly, even fatal to golfers and greenkeepers alike. Less trees make the area around each of them easier to manage and golfers are also able to play from around them, rather than being stuck in thick vegetation.

The important thing is to strike a balance between playability and preservation, as Hutchinson explained: “There have been times when I have advised a club to move a green or tee out of the shade of an important veteran tree, rather than cutting it down. That veteran tree may have stood there for 300 years already and, in the case of some species, may have another 700 years to go. Can we honestly say the green or tee will still be there over that time?”

Staples added: “Over the 400 acres of our site we’ve got probably 50 to 60 beautiful oak trees that we will not cut down. My focus is to keep on top of the smaller trees so the heath doesn’t become parkland.

“The views are unbelievable across the course now but there is heath in between. Members are realising our fairways are starting to come back and we’ve got more grass coverage on them. They are starting to see the bentgrass coming through and understand why we are doing it.” ❀

Patshull Park, Shropshire





WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TREES?

Shade, leaf drop, invasive roots, air movement block, risk of failure and expensive arboriculture fees are all problems that can be caused by trees on a golf course that are not properly maintained.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THINNING OUT TREES?

“In terms of golf it is quite straight forward,” said James Hutchinson, BIGGA's ecology and sustainability expert.

“It includes ball retrieval, mowing underneath and between the trunks but, most importantly, being able to actually swing a club beneath the limbs.

“If we look at it from an environmental angle then the benefits are more air movement through the course, less shade and sentinel trees become more dominant resulting in more wildlife. Of course, aesthetics are important: large oaks, beeches and Scots Pine are impressive features on a golf course.

“In a natural woodland habitat, you would simply leave it to nature to decide – she's pretty good at natural selection.”



Northampton, Northants



The Belfry, Midlands



The science behind

It's a vital practice but a controversial topic for golfers. We've gathered a



and TOPDRESSING

quartet of greenkeepers to reveal how and why they topdress their greens

THE sight of sand falling onto a green makes the golfer's heart sink. We all know it's necessary but we also know that, usually in the height of the season, it's going to make putting a lottery for a brief period while it settles into the surface.

But it feels like there are a number of different approaches. Why do some clubs seem to do it all the time, and others only a couple of times a year?

We asked four greenkeepers to reveal their topdressing tactics...

PAUL OLIVER, MID SUSSEX GOLF CLUB, EAST SUSSEX

We use a fairly traditional approach to topdressing our greens. Our annual aim is to work 100 tonnes (of sand) into the profile between April and October.

We have two maintenance windows to make the most of – the first of which is at the end of April. That allows us to get a large proportion of the 100 tonnes into the profile at each end of the season – by means of hollow coring or solid tining.

We have our second window at the end of August, and the beginning of September, which allows for quick recovery due to soil temperatures still being high.

Our maintenance programme during the playing season includes verti-cutting once a month, then dressing straight after to help fill any imperfections created by the blades. We also pencil tine monthly. This creates minimal disturbance when the course is at its busiest, while allowing us to work seven or eight tonnes into the putting surface and keep it firm and true.

We use a medium sand dressing with 65 per cent medium sand content, 30 per cent coarse sand content and five per cent fine sand, which has the same particle distribution as our USGA greens.

COLIN HOPPER, ELSHAM GOLF CLUB, BRIGG

My tactics with regards to topdressing has to be the little and often approach.

Although there are arguments for both, we can integrate a substantial amount of sand into the upper profile without disrupting play or the quality of the putting surface.

The main reason why we can use that approach is we are fortunate to have the right equipment to achieve our aims. The two vital pieces of equipment we use are a ProGator and Top Dresser attachment, along with a sweep and fill brush.

This allows us to apply six to 10 tonnes of sand on a two to four week basis – dependent on weather conditions and amount of play.



With these pieces of equipment, this process can be carried out in under three hours before golfers arrive at the course. In 2016, we managed to apply 120 tonnes of sand onto the greens with around 80 tonnes of this in the playing season. Using this approach we are managing to keep our organic matter levels in the top 20mm in the four to six per cent range.

We are also fortunate enough to own our own grinding equipment. With regular sand inputs, mower blades are likely to become blunt so, within a couple of hours, the cutting units are sharpened to produce a quality cut again.

NIGEL THOMPSON, LILLEY BROOK GOLF CLUB, CHELTENHAM

We are trying to apply around 100 to 120 tonnes of sand onto our greens. When I joined Lilley Brook, I inherited greens that had a very high thatch content.

As a club, we decided to tackle the situation with a new greens programme and we have also installed drainage in our greens. Since we started the renovation works, I basically put two weeks in the diary for greens maintenance.

Ideally, I like to try and get my first week in around the end of March, or early April, and my second spot in the second week in August.

During the first renovation, I hollow core around three inches down and scarify to around 15/20mm deep and then apply a heavy dressing of sand – around 40 tonnes.

In August, we hire in a Graden Sand Injection (machine) along with 40 tonnes of kiln dried sand at a depth of 25mm. Since we have carried out the major works on our greens I also try to apply small dusting of sand after a verti-cut, and scarify and also solid tine.

With the additional work of topdressing, these greens have been transformed, which is very pleasing. The members are seeing great results and we have the majority of them on side when it comes to renovation work.

BOB MACKAY, MURCAR LINKS, ABERDEEN

We have religiously topdressed with pure sand for the past six years and intend to do so for many years to come.

The removal of organic material was a priority and the decision taken was to heavily sand, initially, to fill up the resulting holes with a much more free draining material.

As time went by, and our surfaces began to firm up, we started to reduce the quantity per application but increased our frequency.

Depending on weather conditions, we will normally start with light fortnightly dressings as early as the end of January and increase to weekly by the end of February.

We then continue this procedure until early June, by





which time we have produced a firm, true and consistent surface for the season ahead.

Only after autumn renovations to our greens, whether that is hollow-tining or verti-draining, do we now apply a heavier dressing. The little and often process undoubtedly suits our requirements best. We have extended our sandings to our tees, approaches and fairways and, in an ideal world and if the resources were available, we would extend the frequencies to these areas also. ❖



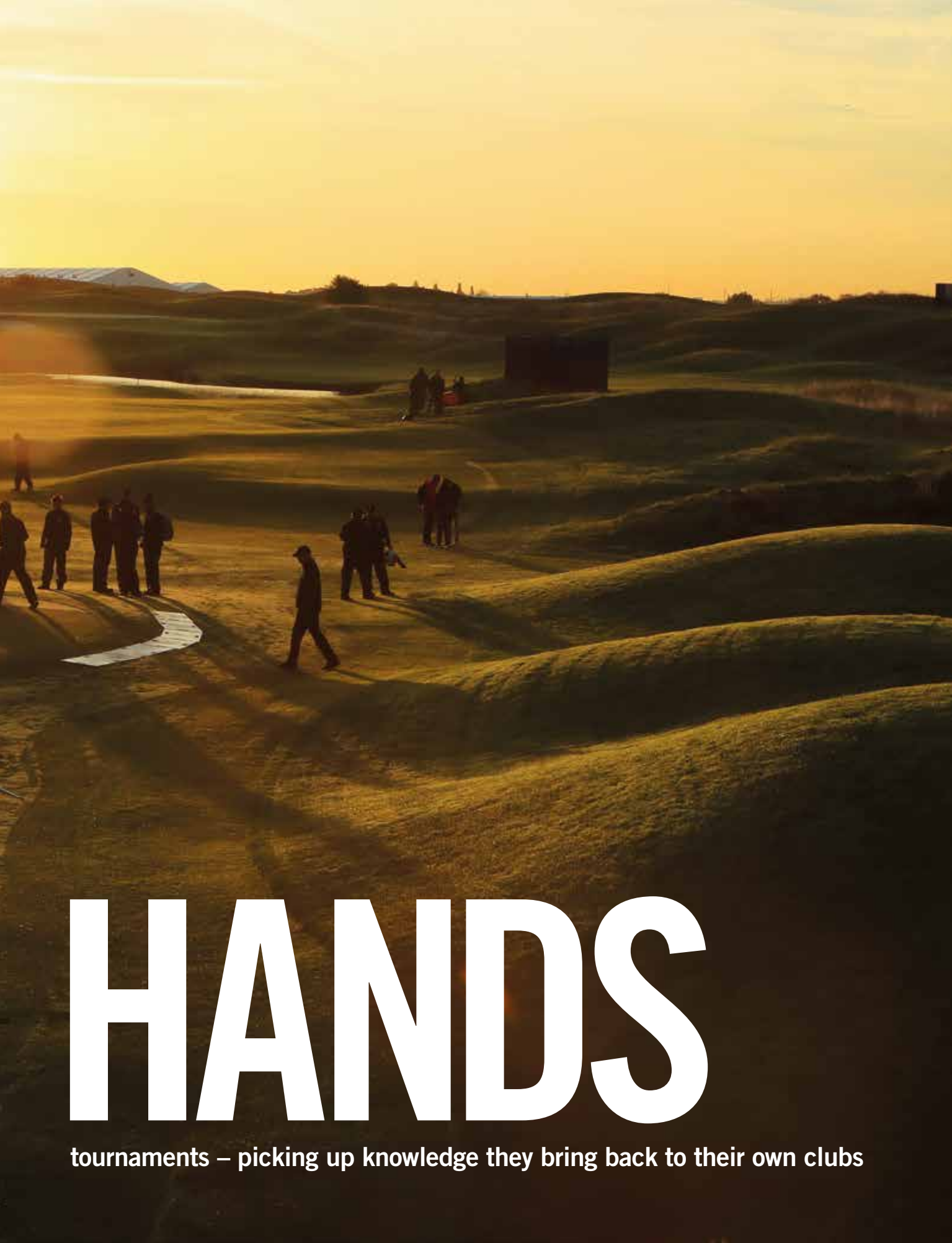
WHAT IS TOPDRESSING?

Topdressing sees a layer of sand, or a mixture of sand and other materials, spread across the turf. There are many different ways of applying it and, depending on the course, greens teams could use it little and often or heavy and only once or twice a year. The aim is to dilute the layer of organic material, known as thatch, that sits between the surface and the soil, improve the quality of the soil and drainage and maintain a smooth and true putting surface. All of this promotes a better grass plant and means a better putting surface. We talk about topdressing alongside aeration – which is punching holes into the turf to replace soil air with atmospheric air – because they can take place at the same time. If the greens have been hollow tined then whatever is in the topdress mix can be integrated into the soil, through the holes in the surface.



HELPING

BIGGA gives greenkeepers the opportunity to volunteer at major



HANDS

tournaments – picking up knowledge they bring back to their own clubs





W HETHER it's part of the annual Open Championship Support Team, or the lucky few selected to work at the flagship BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth, one of the key aspects of being a BIGGA member is the chance to volunteer at some of golf's biggest

tournaments.

Those who get the opportunity to work at events, both home and abroad, not only enjoy the experience of a lifetime, but they also learn valuable techniques they can employ when they return to their own clubs.

They see how the most prestigious courses set up a course for competition play, and they pick up hints and tips from their fellow volunteers, while also cementing friendships that can last a lifetime.

We caught up with two greenkeepers – one who volunteered at arguably the biggest event in the sport, and another whose responsibility was to manage a team of volunteers, to find out what they gained from the experience...



JOHN REID, DEPUTY HEAD GREENKEEPER AT THE DUKES, IN ST ANDREWS, WAS SELECTED TO VOLUNTEER AT LAST YEAR'S RYDER CUP AT LE GOLF NATIONAL...

How did the opportunity arise to volunteer at a Ryder Cup?

I was selected for the Future Turf Managers Initiative in 2018, which is a training programme that BIGGA runs alongside Jacobsen. While there, we were told that one of the group of 20 would be selected to volunteer at the Ryder Cup, which was an incredible opportunity.

I put my name down for it and, the week after the course, got a phone call saying I had been selected. I'm lucky that, at The Duke's, my course manager wants us to go to tournaments. We hold a few tournaments ourselves so it is great experience to go and you can take things from the tournaments you have been at.

I've done the Italian Open, the BMW International in Germany, and the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits. We also held the European Amateur Championship at The Duke's.

What were your duties at the Ryder Cup?

The Ryder Cup was on a different level. There were about 200 greenkeepers for that week and I've never seen anything on that level, not even at the Open when it comes to St Andrews.

We were given a briefing when we first arrived from course superintendent Alejandro Reyes.

We were put into teams and every team had a team leader from Le Golf National. We stuck in those teams all week and were given allocated jobs.

There were about 25 in my team. The majority of the days we were given the same jobs so that everyone knew what they were doing. I was on the stimpmeter team. We were doing the 1st hole, 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th.

We had good holes and we were talking to the European Tour agronomists who were there and getting an insight into what they were relaying back.

We were hearing conversations between the course manager and themselves.

They were taking data from us on the stimping so it was a good job to have.

It was a dry week and the greens were getting faster and faster and so they had a couple of days where they didn't mow to slow them. The growth of the grass during the day was enough to slow the greens down just enough to suit what they needed. The hardest task at any tournament is keeping the consistency of the greens, but we did a great job.

It was great to be involved in the whole tournament. The whole world was watching and I don't think there's ever been as big a crowd at a Ryder Cup.

It was an amazing atmosphere and there was a great buzz within the greenkeeping department.

What did you learn that you could take back to St Andrews?

The most impressive thing to me was seeing how Alejandro and his team leaders organised all of the staff and kept them informed and motivated.

Everyone knew what their job was, and got on with it, and the team leader was there to look over everyone and make sure everything was getting done properly.

It just showed that good organisation and planning ended up with a successful tournament.

You can go a long way through volunteering...

I came into greenkeeping six years ago. If someone had said 'in six years' time you will be volunteering at the Ryder Cup at Le Golf National in 2018' I wouldn't have believed them.

I love the industry and it's the first job I have had that doesn't feel like work.

I have just tried to take every opportunity that comes my way.

It's improving my personal development and, hopefully, helping me at my own club.

At every tournament I have taken away something positive.

You see some negatives but, on the whole, it can be simple little things in doing a task that you take and it works at home.





WHY DO GREENKEEPERS VOLUNTEER?

How many greenkeepers do you think your golf course has? The number may vary from the average of around 5-6 all the way down to just one or two. Working in isolation makes it difficult to acquire new skills and gain contacts that can enable you to take the next step in your career.

Volunteering for events – and these can be major tournaments such as the Open or local championships at another course nearby – allows you to build relationships and gain a large amount of knowledge that can then be brought back to your home course.

Volunteering also gives you a front row seat to some of the greatest moments in golfing history, and you can't put a price on that.



AMANDA DORANS, DEPUTY HEAD GREENKEEPER AT DUNDONALD, WAS PART OF THE TEAM LOOKING AFTER THE VOLUNTEERS WHO ARRIVED IN AYRSHIRE TO ASSIST AT THE 2017 MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SCOTTISH OPENS

What was your role during those busy two weeks?

A lot of things go on in the background when it comes to volunteering and every club is different.

I was looking after accommodation for the greenkeepers. There are a lot of considerations when you have people on site.

We're slightly removed from the local town so, when people are off duty, you have to look at recreation for them.

We realised that for the duration of the tournament it would be best if we hired local greenkeepers. But we also wanted to give an opportunity to those greenkeepers who hadn't had many chances to volunteer or who hadn't really been part of a tournament before.

What was really cool for a team like us, who have done so many tournaments, was that we gave the younger guys some of the more 'prestigious' jobs.

They were cutting greens and they changed holes.

While they were local, we also wanted to keep them for the least amount of time we could so they could go back to work, or have a bit of fun and watch golf.

So we kept them for three hours in the morning and the club did the rest of the work. We stayed all day and did the divoting at night.



What did the volunteers learn from that experience?

I think all of the volunteers who took part learned a huge amount about what it takes to prepare a course for a major tournament.

We had one guy, Angus Roberts, who won the Toro Young Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award in 2017. He was based slightly further away but was so keen to do it we felt we just had to do something for him.

He stayed with us all day and when his role was finished I took him out with me.

I also look after sustainability on our site, so I took him to all my meetings to give him background.

We walked the whole golf course, looking at the traffic routes and ensuring we weren't disturbing the ecology.

He helped out with waste management. There are lots of stakeholders when it comes to running tournaments and he loved it.

So you can benefit from what the volunteers bring to your club as well?

They pick things up and we can pick things up from them. It is good for your own staff as well. If you are teaching somebody to do something, or showing the way our club would do it, it is a refresher for yourself. You sometimes do things without thinking about it and then you've suddenly got to buddy up with someone.

It gives people a sense of ownership and responsibility. The youngest lad in our crew was partnered up with quite a well-respected greenkeeper.

Because the volunteers didn't know the site, we buddied everyone up with someone who did.

I could see his confidence growing, because he was helping somebody, and it was really nice.

He remembers that responsibility and, when people now come on site, he doesn't just sit back waiting for one of the older people to come and welcome them.

He's got that confidence to go up and welcome somebody into the shed.

It's building good communication skills. ❖



INTRODUCING THE 2019 OPEN SUPPORT TEAM

BIGGA have announced the team that will head to Northern Ireland as The Open takes place at Royal Portrush.

They will be given unprecedented access to golf's greatest championship and will assist with maintaining bunker presentation throughout the duration of the tournament, which takes place from July 18 to 21.

The 62 bunkers that will be in play is the lowest of any current Open venue, but team members will be hoping the players stay out of the famous Big Nellie trap, which measures 25-feet high and has been recreated on the 7th hole.

Jim Croxton, BIGGA chief executive, said: "Royal Portrush is going to be a stern challenge for the world's best golfers and I'm delighted that BIGGA members have played such a vital role in preparing the course.

"The Open is a long week and everyone works extremely hard, but the rewards are incredible. Everyone at BIGGA is looking forward to giving our all to make sure the 148th Open is a tremendous success."

The BIGGA team consists of: Adam Baldwin, Lilley Brook; Craig Berry, St Andrews Links Trust; Sam Bethell, Chipstead; Alex

Brougham, Trentham Park; Sophie Bulpitt, The Berkshire; David Byron, Thorndon Park; Gary Corlett, Mount Murray; Joe Curtis, Gloucester; James Dawson, Oulton Hall; James Devoy, Donaghadee; Allan Donlevy, Abbeydale; Anthony Duffield, Ham Manor; Josh Dunn, Bramcote Waters; Nicholas Edwards, Remedy Oak; David Feeney, Prestwick; David Fellows, Cocks Moors Woods; David Forbes, Faughan Valley; Phil Hellier, Axe Cliff; Graham Ives, Louth; Richard Jenkinson, Golf House Club (Elie); Rodney McKay, Galgorm Castle; Ronan McKeown, Golf Club Montgomerie Links; Scott McTaggart, Ralston; Glen Mlotek, Shiskine; Ryan Neale, Bromsgrove; Ian Nichols, Orsett; Daniel Patten, The Mere; Oliver Pennington, Les Ormes; Richard Ponsford, Clevedon; Chris Powell, St Clements; Leigh Powell, Windlesham; Kevin Ravier, Golf de Lavaux; Peter Roberts, Belvoir Park; Graeme Roberts, Swinley Forest; Peter Robinson, Slieve Russell; Andrew Ross, Maxstoke Park; Aaron Small, Belvoir Park; Phillip Snellin, Donaghadee; Ollie Tanton, Royal North Devon; Mark Thompson, Galgorm Castle; Sean Tully, Meadow Club; Daniel Tyrrell, Gathurst; Andy Unwin, Birley Wood; Darryl Walker, Portstewart; Paul Walton, Hexham; Richard Whyman, Burnham & Berrow; Adam Young, The Players Club.



THE GREENKEEPER'S GLOSSARY

Know your fescue from your bent? Here are five grasses you can expect on your course...

1. BROWNTOP BENTGRASS

For many, particularly free-draining British courses, this is a very desirable turfgrass. A dull green in colour, it produces a fine, dense and even sward. Sown together with a Chewings Fescue, it produces fine turf swards.

2. CHEWINGS FESCUE

This is often sown to produce a 50-50 sward with browntop bent for greens and other fine turf areas. It's also widespread over other areas of the course, and is prevalent in seaside links, heathland and moorland layouts. Fescue grasses provide high quality surfaces but are not tolerant of very close mowing (less than 4.5mm). It is comparatively resistant to fusarium (Microdochium Patch) and take-all patch diseases.

3. ANNUAL MEADOW-GRASS

This is Britain's most common grass species, also known as *Poa annua*, and is found almost universally in

nearly all turf areas – both fine and coarse. It requires more mechanical and nutrient inputs than bents and fescues but can produce good surfaces when well managed. It is generally more susceptible to common turf diseases.

4. SMOOTH-STALKED MEADOW-GRASS

This grass is predominantly found on fairways and roughs. Not tolerant of close mowing, it requires careful management.

5. PERENNIAL RYEGRASS

Traditionally ryegrass has been used in sportsturf for very high wear areas e.g. football and rugby pitches. It is also very popular on golf course pathways and highly used areas. Modern developments in dwarf ryegrasses have produced species which are becoming increasingly popular for more fine turf areas including high wear parts of putting surfaces. ❖



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Supporting the health and growth of the game and industry of golf

Providing leadership and direction in greenkeeping to the golf industry

For more information about BIGGA Membership and how we can support you please contact us.

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