

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

October/November 2020

Issue 93 | £5.95

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Dollar Academy is one of Scotland's finest private schools, catering for over 1300 pupils, many of them from the surrounding area



THE MAN WITH A PLAN

The current 'situation' may have put many hopes and dreams on hold but, at Towcestrians Sports Club, it's just another minor challenge in the progress of an ambitious development designed to bring several of this Northamptonshire town's sports together and raise standards, whilst enhancing an established community facility. Jane Carley meets the club's Head Groundsman, Tom Waldock, to find out more

Leaving his Mark!

For twenty-two and a half years, Mark Broughton has resided as Course Manager of Suffolk's Aldeburgh Golf Club. It takes something special, and perhaps someone special, to stay at a club for over two decades, and on the drive towards the Suffolk coastline, it is plain to see the attraction

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WELCOME TO

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Living with it

The current situation certainly feels as though we have moved from a 'defeat Covid-19' status to one where we must 'live with it for the foreseeable future'!

With so much uncertainty surrounding the industry shows, it makes us question when the turfcare fraternity might be able to get together again. There was a recent survey asking whether we would be more comfortable with an outdoor show, and the findings suggested this is the case, but it remains uncertain whether large gatherings at all will be permitted over the next year - not only across our industry, but for concerts, weddings, funerals and such like.

Chatting to interviewees over the past couple of months, it's good to hear that most venues have unfurloughed staff and are now busy preparing sport across all sectors. However, the pandemic will no doubt continue to have an impact in terms of renovations, budgets, purchasing new machinery etc. and there are still interesting times ahead to see how our industry adapts.

One thing that hasn't changed is the 'blame' culture and criticism groundstaff receive from the media. Not least recently when Liverpool legend Graeme Souness bizarrely blamed the Reds' poor performance on the state of the pitch, claiming that Villa groundstaff had left the grass longer in order to slow the visitors' speed of passing. Villa groundsman Eddie Mills defended the comments as uneducated and insulting to all the massively hardworking groundsmen up and down the country, who put their hearts and souls into their proud work! Well said Eddie.

From one legend to another, it is with great sadness that we report the retirement of our Operations Director John Richards on page five. Many of you will be aware that John turned from

legendary Wolves player (who still retains the title of second-highest goal tally of all time, with 194 goals), to co-owner of Pitchcare with Dave Saltman. I've personally worked alongside John for over seven years and he has offered support, understanding and many laughs along the way. So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for encouraging my career development and wish him well. He doesn't escape entirely though, as we have convinced him to continue his expertise within the editorial department on a freelance basis.

Also, in this issue, we have an interesting article on Scotland's Rural College and their practical teaching experience utilising Elmwood Golf Course. At one end of the spectrum, it's great to hear facilities such as this are actually visiting schools and educating youngsters on what our industry can offer. However, at the other end, it's hard to grasp how many industry jobs have been, and will continue to be, lost in the coming months. Stay safe and positive.

Kerry Haywood
Editor



SAY THAT AGAIN!

"You can't get away from it. And that's part of the joy of it, that it's all consuming, but it can be exhausting, and you can get to the stage where you think your health might suffer if you keep going"

Mark Broughton, Aldeburgh Golf Club

"Those who are running the budgets may be thinking about where to make cuts. My experience tells me the grounds department will be one of the first places they look, unfortunately!"

Melvin Jones, Warrington Wolves

"You come into the job with a good idea of what it is going to be like, but I found out quickly that, no matter how much planning you do, it can go straight out the window ... especially when something like coronavirus happens"

Michael Hood, Leicester Grammar School

"We want to make this the best local sports facility in the county. It's a great project and my goal is to continue to deliver good playing conditions. And, in spite of Covid, my five year plan is not far off track!"

Tom Waldock, Towcestrians Sports Club

"It has been hard to plan for the coming year as nobody is sure what is around the corner. I hope that things will get back to some sort of normality soon"

Richard Hare, Bromsgrove School

"When students initially come onsite, some of them have never been on a golf course, let alone worked on one!"

Greg Kilgour, SRUC Elmwood

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Issue 93 October/November 2020

Tom Waldock, Towcestrians Sports Club

COVER STORY: The man with a plan

The current 'situation' may have put many hopes and dreams on hold but, at Towcestrians Sports Club, it's just another minor challenge in the progress of an ambitious development designed to bring several of this Northamptonshire town's sports together and raise standards, whilst enhancing an established community facility. Jane Carley meets the club's Head Groundsman, Tom Waldock, to find out more **P66**

GOLF

Hand in glove facilities

Elmwood Golf is one of the premier golf and greenkeeping training facilities in the UK. Here, Lee Williams met with Programme Manager Michael Clark, Lecturer Andy O'Hara and the club's Course Manager Greg Kilgour to discuss what the college offers and how they manage the course around teaching the students. **P12**

Through the ranks

Set in 180 acres on the border between Devon and Cornwall, China Fleet Country Club in Saltash is one of the south west's leading clubs. On the first call of what has now become Lee Williams' annual summer tour of the south coast, he met up with Nathan O'Sullivan - the club's forty-four-year-old Course Manager - who has worked his way through the ranks over the last twenty-one years. **P24**

Leaving his Mark!

For twenty-two and a half years, Mark Broughton has resided as Course Manager of Suffolk's Aldeburgh Golf Club. It takes something special, and perhaps someone special, to stay at a club for over two decades, and on the drive towards the Suffolk coastline, it is plain to see the attraction. **P34**

Cooking up a sand dune

Perranporth Golf Club is situated on the beautiful North Coast of Cornwall, overlooking the glorious Perran Sands beach. It sits on top of a disused tin mine, among the dunes of blown sand and old mine workings and the views from every hole are dramatic and a delight. Lee Williams met with Course Manager Rob Cook, who is tasked with the general upkeep and maintenance of this unique links course. **P42**

Thirty years man and boy

Situated a stone's throw from Cornwall's beautiful south coast, St Austell Golf Club is a private undulating parkland/heathland course designed by James Braid. The area is best known for the Eden Project, The Lost Gardens of Heligan and the surreal landscape of the china clay mines. Lee Williams met with Vince Vosper, the club's forty-eight-year-old Head Greenkeeper, who has been at the club for thirty years. **P50**

WINTER SPORTS

Down to the Wire!

To get an idea of what the new normal is like working for a top Super League rugby club and the challenges a groundsman now faces getting a pitch ready for a Covid-19 secure game, Lee Williams met up with the Warrington Wolves dedicated and long-serving head groundsman Melvin Jones who celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday in October. **P58**

SUMMER SPORTS

The Wee County

Clackmannanshire is the smallest county in the UK and is often referred to as 'The Wee County'. Clackmannan County Cricket Club was established in 1868, making it one of the oldest cricket clubs in Scotland. During their long history, the club has played at a variety of venues, but the side now call The Arns, on the outskirts of the county town Alloa, home. **P72**

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SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Scotland's finest

On the A91, which concludes at St Andrews, and just a few miles east of Stirling, sits Dollar Academy, one of Scotland's finest private schools. Catering for over 1300 pupils, many of them from the surrounding area, the seventy acre site nestles at the foot of the Ochil Hills. It was here that Lee Williams met Robert Meldrum, the school's long-serving Head Groundsman. **P78**

He can't be Hoodwinked

Leicester Grammar School is a family of three independent co-educational day schools based in Great Glen. Before its development in 2007, the school had no playing fields of its own and transported pupils to various sporting facilities by bus! It now boasts seventy-five acres of sports facilities and Head Groundsman, Michael Hood, is the man entrusted with the challenge of looking after them. **P86**

Hare to stay

There is no Harry Potter bell tower, no sweeping driveway through undulating fields and the entrances are, frankly, unprepossessing. Despite the millions of pounds invested in recent years, Bromsgrove School keeps one hundred acres of secrets from a casual visitor, hidden like a vast walled garden. Kerry Haywood met Head Groundsman, Richard Hare, to find out more about this 'gentle giant' of a school. **P94**



Mark Broughton, Aldeburgh Golf Club's Course Manager who is retiring at the end of the year

PUBLIC PLACES

Palace of the Peak

Chatsworth, said by many to be the Palace of the Peak, is set on the banks of the River Derwent in the heart of the Derbyshire Peak District. Since 1549, it has been home to the Cavendish family and currently is to the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. David Mears was given a rare opportunity to visit, tour and talk to a number of the gardeners' team recently. **P102**

TECHNICAL

'Most weather' pitches

It's that time of year when various named storms sweep across the Atlantic to batter the UK, whilst various other weather patterns bring freezing temperatures and occasional heavy snow. It is a time when 'all weather' pitches struggle to live up to their epithet. Synthetic Pitch Maintenance expert Nick Harris provides a few pointers about what you should, and should not, do when adverse weather strikes your synthetic pitches. **P112**

Reassurance from maintenance

David Jackman, operations manager at Reesink Turfcare, takes a look at how to control spending and avoid spending surprises, allocating maintenance budget when the economy is uncertain, managing this cost component over time and warranties. **P116**



Vince Vosper, St Austell Golf Club



Melvyn Jones, Warrington Wolves



Michael Hood, Leicester Grammar School



Greg Kilgour, SRUC Elmwood

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Zooming in

BIGGA teams up with new online conference hosted by Carolinas golf course superintendents' association



This autumn, BIGGA will be partnering with the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association in an online conference to satisfy members' ongoing education needs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Known as Conference Comes to You, the programme will deliver 30 distinct seminars scheduled - one a day - over 30 weekdays starting 2 November 2020. There will be a one-week break for Thanksgiving in the US from 23 to 27 November.

Using a tailored Zoom platform, the two-hour seminars will be presented live each day at 1pm EST by some of the leading researchers, scientists and experts in their field. All seminars will carry GCSAA education points and BIGGA CPD credits.

As official partners with the Carolinas GCSA in this effort, BIGGA members will receive designated member pricing for every seminar using the promotional code UK2020. This will give a discount from \$70 US to \$40 US.

In addition to first-class education, members will also be able to share in \$30,000 US worth of cash giveaways. A total of 82 prizes, ranging from £100 US to \$2,500 US, will be drawn live on the Carolinas GCSA Facebook page at 1pm EST on 21 December. Each seminar taken qualifies you for one entry, so the more seminars taken, the more chances to win. Entries must be validated by watching a series of brief messages from industry partners.

The association benefits from your participation. A portion of each registration fee paid for by a BIGGA member will come back to BIGGA. So the more seminars you take, the more the association 'wins'.

Registration and complete conference information will be available beginning on Friday 25 September via www.ConferenceComestoYou.org

To date, more than three dozen chapters across the United States have become official Conference Comes to You partners.

Carolinas GCSA president, Brian Stiehler, CGCS, MG from Highlands Country Club in North Carolina said: "This platform benefits everyone involved and the more people who participate, the more benefit there will be for everyone. We see many visitors from across the country and overseas at our traditional conference and show each year. So, in these extraordinary times, when we can't be face to face, it made sense for our conference to go 'see' them."

For more on BIGGA, you can visit bigga.org.uk

GT under new ownership

Industry trio completes Grounds Training acquisition

Grounds Training, the specialist training business dedicated to the sports turf and grounds maintenance sectors, is under new ownership having been acquired by three familiar industry names.

Having previously functioned under the Pitchcare/Maxwell Amenity and Agrovista brands, it became part of Sampson Training Limited in the summer, with partners Martin Sampson, Chrissie Johnson and Ellie Parry teaming up to take it forward.

The trio will be no strangers to our readership. Former Grounds Manager Martin is an experienced instructor and assessor for Lantra, City & Guilds (NPTC) and UK Rural Skills, who has delivered training courses for Grounds Training since its inception. For the past six years he has run a land-based training consultancy from offices in Dorset and South Wales. He's experienced increased demand for his services over the past few years and a growing need for high-quality training in the industry.

Chrissie joined Pitchcare in 2006 and founded Grounds Training later that year. Under her stewardship it went from strength to strength, developing a range of customised courses which became accredited by Lantra. She remained at the helm for 12 years until retiring in 2018. Ellie was part of the original team that launched Pitchcare and is one of the turf industry's most prominent marketing communications professionals, working with a wide range of companies and organisations around the world through her agency, Forte.

As an Approved Training Provider with both

Lantra and UK Rural Skills, Sampson Training provides professional, on-site grounds maintenance and turf care training to groups of operatives. Its focus is on the delivery of training on-site at clients' premises. Customers include sports clubs and associations, commercial organisations, schools, universities, local authorities, contractors and private estates. It also runs regular Safe Use and Safe Application of Pesticides courses (PA1/6) and a limited number of niche courses regionally, including lawn care, line marking and basic tree inspection.

Martin said: "As a training partner we offer clients a complete service, from initial enquiry to delivery and beyond, helping Grounds, Course and Estate Managers, HR staff in local authorities and companies of all sizes plan training and competence programmes for their staff teams. We work with a fantastic group of instructors and assessors with an incredibly diverse skillset, enabling us to deliver a broad range of training courses and qualifications."

"Training others is incredibly rewarding. For the past few years I've been a tutor at a land-based college working with the next generation of turf professionals. It's vital we address the skills shortage in our industry in order to ensure that the nation's sports and leisure facilities, parks and green spaces have skilled people to maintain them, and that those personnel are able to work confidently, competently and safely."

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Martin Sampson



Chrissie Johnson



Ellie Parry

Premier League helps more than 1,000 clubs prepare their stadiums for football's return

Football clubs across 65 leagues in England and Wales have received funding from the Premier League to prepare for the resumption of football, as well as the safe return of supporters to stadiums where permitted.

A total of 1,090 clubs from the National League System, Women's Football Pyramid and Welsh Premier League have benefitted from grants through the Matchday Support Fund, which has distributed more than £5.5 million.

The money allows clubs to put measures in

place to make grounds safer for the 2020/21 season, given the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The grants were managed by the Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF), which is financed by the Premier League, and provides support for non-league and women's clubs with the cost of improvements to their grounds.

Matchday Support Fund impact at a glance:

- 1,090 grants worth £5,545,500
- 913 grants awarded to National League System clubs
- 165 grants awarded to clubs in the Women's Football Pyramid
- 12 grants awarded to Welsh Premier League clubs

And it's goodnight from him

Pitchcare business partner to depart at the end of October

Following the recent departure of Pitchcare founder, Dave Saltman, it has been announced that his former business partner, John Richards, will also be retiring from his current consultancy role with Agrovista UK at the end of October.

The Maxwell Amenity/Pitchcare business was acquired in December last year and, since then, John has been part of a management team overseeing the integration of the Sherriff Amenity and Maxwell Amenity operations.

John commented, "Since the acquisition, a lot of work has taken place to create the new Agrovista Amenity from what were two different, but very dynamic and highly regarded teams. The work is now complete, the foundations are in place, so the time is right for me to step aside."

"The circumstances surrounding the integration have not been ideal; the Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating and very disruptive, but I've been impressed with the professional way this has been handled by Agrovista UK, in terms of staff and customer relations. It has certainly not been easy for anyone, but the manner in which it has been done augurs well for the future."

Commenting on his nineteen years with Pitchcare, John said, "It has been a great adventure, with more than a few bumps and

challenges along the way. I can vividly recall all those years ago, Dave coming round and talking about this idea of a website for groundsmen. I hadn't a clue what he was going on about. He'd already invested a lot, in terms of money and time, plus he had the knowledge and the contacts and, unquestionably, his passion and enthusiasm for the industry was infectious. So, we agreed to give it a go."

"I then entered this weird and strangely exciting world - probably not unlike Alice's introduction to Wonderland - with an unusual and different language, with words like bents, fescues, poa annua, and people who could spot a weed at twenty yards. Many were like Dave - passionate, obsessive and determined to progress and improve what was then a very staid industry. And that's exactly what we did, notwithstanding those bumps!"

"I have no regrets; it has been fantastic and also a privilege to work with some exceptionally talented people, seeing them and the business grow in stature and reputation. I'm sure the new team will be even more successful, and I wish them all well."

"I can honestly say my time with Pitchcare/Maxwell Amenity has given me the most satisfying work experience of my life. And now I'm ready for the next adventure..."

Duncan Brown, Agrovista UK's Finance



Director said, "Following a discussion with John, we have agreed that this would be a mutually convenient time to end our consultancy arrangement; however, he has agreed to continue working with the Pitchcare Editorial team on a freelance basis."

"On behalf of Chris Clayton and the rest of the management team, we would like to thank John for his involvement and support during the merger of the two businesses, and we wish him well with whatever he is planning to do in the future."

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Deere pull out of shows

John Deere will not attend international trade shows in 2021

In order to ensure the safety of customers and employees, John Deere has announced that it will not attend any international agricultural and turf trade shows in Europe and the CIS during the company's 2021 fiscal year (1 November 2020 to 31 October 2021), as this would require extensive international travel. Instead, the company will use a new marketing mix of traditional and digital tools to deliver information to customers.

Events of the last few months have profoundly changed everyone's working and social lives. The protection of people's health and safety is now more critical than ever, whilst maintaining close contact with customers is still important to provide reliable services in these uncertain times.

"Farmers have done an excellent job in the emergency phase of COVID-19 to ensure food supplies. For that, we wish to express our appreciation to all our customers," said Denny Docherty, John Deere Vice President Sales & Marketing, Region 2. "The pandemic has changed the world and our industry is undergoing a period of great change too. This also applies to our marketing activities."

The need for a new approach to



John Deere's Mannheim European headquarters

communications with customers has therefore prompted John Deere to reduce its participation in trade fairs for the time being, and the company has decided not to exhibit at any international agricultural or turf show during the company's next fiscal year, which ends on 31 October 2021.

John Deere's key focus in 2021 will be the change in its operating model, to become a 'smart industrial company'. As previously announced, Deere is moving towards being a production system-based organisation, in order to build a more customer driven and streamlined business. This is one of the biggest organisational restructurings in the company's 183-year history, which requires a change of

marketing approach and an extended focus on Precision Ag technologies.

"We are also expecting a major change in the exhibition landscape, driven by COVID-19 and digitalisation," said Andreas Jess, John Deere Director Marketing, Region 2. "In the medium term, our company would welcome a new timetable to be implemented by the international trade fair organisations, to free up the show cycle across Europe. However, we will continue to support our John Deere dealers if they decide to participate in their local agricultural and turf shows, always based on the fact that the health and safety of both customers and dealers can be ensured."



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First 'virtual' ICL Scholars

BIGGA members looking forward to online education event from the comfort of their own homes

BIGGA and partner ICL have revealed the five recipients of the fifth ICL Scholarship, with a greenkeeper from the Scottish island of Jura able take advantage of a new online format.

Restrictions relating to COVID-19 and concerns for the health of potential attendees have led to BIGGA's annual education conference being hosted as an entirely online event, meaning this year's scholars will enjoy a new learning experience from the comfort of their own homes.

The new platform will allow Laura Sayer-Hall from Ardfin Golf Club to access BIGGA's renowned education programme online, saving her a 700-mile, 18-hour round trip from her home in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland.

The successful BIGGA members chosen for the scholarship are:

- Laura Sayer-Hall, assistant greenkeeper, Ardfin (Scotland)
- Neil Gilham, course manager, Reigate Hill (Surrey)



ICL's Andy Owen speaking at Continue to Learn 2020

- Jamie Wright, greenkeeper, Sunningdale (Surrey)
- James Matthewman, deputy head greenkeeper, Maesteg (Wales)
- Chris Low, deputy course manager, Olton (Warwickshire)

The ICL Continue to Learn 2021 Scholars will receive a package including:

- An all-access pass to Continue to Learn Virtual education conference in January 2021
- Six online workshops, which is the equivalent of two one-day workshops

- An invite to BTME 2022 including two nights' accommodation
- A ticket to BIGGA's National Regional Conference, taking place online on 10 November 2020

Sami Strutt, BIGGA's Head of Learning and Development, said: "The ICL Continue to Learn Scholarship enables five BIGGA members to continue their quest for professional development and we feel this is even more vital in these unprecedented times. Education is the cornerstone of BIGGA and the ICL Scholarship provides a fabulous opportunity to gain new knowledge and learn new skills."

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PELLENC

Textron relocate Jacobsen production to UK facility

Autumn move for Jacobsen professional turf equipment as manufacturing relocates to Ipswich



Textron Specialized Vehicles Inc. will relocate all manufacturing of Jacobsen professional turf equipment to its facility in Ipswich. The move will begin this autumn and be completed in stages over the next several months.

This move will enable the company to focus its investments, skill, and improvements in mower production on a single facility, and leverage existing resources and expertise at its Ipswich facility. The plant, which currently builds Jacobsen and Ransomes mowers, is the oldest manufacturer of motorised lawn mowers in the world, in operation for more than 187 years.

The UK facility will produce mowers for all regions, including North America. Jacobsen will maintain its sales and customer-care teams in North America, and its network of North American distributors, to serve its customers in the United States and Canada.

“We are excited to establish our Ipswich, UK facility as the worldwide manufacturing centre of excellence for Jacobsen equipment,” said Simon Rainger, Vice President, Turf for Textron Specialized Vehicles. “This move will enable us to operate more efficiently, and expand on the legacy of innovation and quality that our Ipswich plant has built over its long history.”

Jacobsen continues to develop new products to serve its customers around the globe. The brand will launch a robust slate of new mowers this year, including the quiet, highly efficient Eclipse 360 ELiTE electric greens mower powered by Samsung SDI lithium-battery technology, and the new AR530 and AR730 contour rotary mowers, designed to be safer, easier and more cost-effective to maintain and operate.



The Government's Kickstart Scheme for 16 to 24 year olds.

The Kickstart Scheme provides funding to employers to create new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

This is part of the government's Plan for Jobs and aims to create hundreds and thousands of new, fully funded jobs across England, Scotland and Wales. The first placements are likely to be available from November.

Funding will cover for each job placement:

- 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week
- the associated employer National Insurance contributions
- employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions

There will also be extra funding to support young people to build their experience and help them move into sustained employment after they have completed their Kickstart Scheme funded job.

Young people can find out more about the Kickstart Scheme at the jobhelp site.

This collection includes:

- guidance for employers and representatives of employers on how to apply for the grant
- contact details for the Kickstart Scheme
- promotional materials that supporters of the scheme can use in their communications

Employers can use the Kickstart Scheme to create new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

The job placements should support the participants to develop the skills and experience they need to find work after completing the scheme.

Any organisation, regardless of size, can apply for funding.

Further details at www.gov.uk

BASIS Points for magazine subscribers

BASIS awards two CPD points for 'paid-for' subscribers to the hard copy version of Pitchcare magazine, due to the "diverse range of content that relates to the control, management and use of pesticides".

Subscribers can now obtain a further two valuable CPD points for their Professional

register, simply by paying for a subscription to the 'hard copy' version of the Pitchcare magazine.

Anyone wishing to claim their points should email their full name, BASIS membership number, date of birth and postcode to editor@pitchcare.com.



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GIS becomes virtual show

Golf Industry Show 2021 moves to virtual format for 2021



The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has announced that the 2021 Golf Industry Show will transition to a virtual format from the previously planned in-person event in Las Vegas in February.

GCSAA and presenting partners, the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA) and the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), will offer a virtual experience that will continue the GIS's long tradition of connecting attendees, exhibitors and industry experts through a progressive week of unparalleled education opportunities and access to golf facility solutions for golf industry professionals. In addition to the education, trade show and special events, attendees will also have the option to view or review all the content for an extended period after the show concludes.

The theme of the 2021 GIS - "Your space. Your pace. All in one place." - not only reflects the ability of participants to attend the show from the safety of their homes or offices and consume the content on their own schedules, but also speaks to the convergence of industry experts that will be a part of the high-calibre education lineup.

Why virtual? GCSAA President John R. Fulling Jr., CGCS, explains the decision. "As we monitored the national landscape and sought input from our members and exhibitors, it was clear that a virtual event would offer the safest and best way to provide a quality GIS experience. We are confident our attendees will embrace this interactive, cutting-edge virtual platform. In addition, we believe the virtual event will offer opportunities for those who may have not been able to attend in-person shows due to travel costs or time away from work. It is a unique situation where we have the ability to connect more industry professionals from all corners of the world than ever before."

The 2021 GIS will be presented on a dynamic virtual platform, which is highly interactive, visually engaging and easy to use. The lineup will include concurrent education sessions, networking, special events and a virtual trade show.

A preview of the virtual platform and more information about the show is available at <https://player.vimeo.com/video/447145809>.

Registration for the 2021 Golf Industry Show opened on 13th October.

Bernhard Company postpone BIGGA delegation



Seen as one of the best educational opportunities for greenkeepers, Bernhard Company is disappointed to announce that the recruitment for the BIGGA delegation has been postponed.

Following the announcement from BIGGA and GCSAA that BTME and GIS will not be taking place due to the current health concern, it comes as no surprise that they will be unable to go ahead with the BIGGA delegation.

The team at Bernhard is still very keen to promote education and to encourage greenkeepers to think about ways to enhance their careers.

Steven Nixon, Director for Bernhard Company said: "On what will be the 20th anniversary of the delegation, we were really looking forward to celebrating present and past delegates. We are looking at different ways to support BIGGA and its members in these challenging times."

Stephen Bernhard, Chairman, added: "Keeping safe is more important than ever and, although it is a challenging time, we are determined to carry on working with BIGGA to bring more opportunities to British greenkeepers."

www.Bernhard.co.uk

STRI launch golf survey for R&A Golf Course 2030

STRI Group is delighted to announce the launch of a new golf course industry focused survey to support The R&A Golf Course 2030 (GC2030) industry initiative established in 2018.

STRI was awarded a number of GC2030 projects to help meet the projected challenges that the golf industry will face over the next ten years, including, golf green quality standard, grass selection, aggregate availability, Integrated Turf Management (ITM), and water management.

The new golf industry survey will focus on Integrated Turf Management of Poa/Bent Parkland Greens and the results will allow STRI to review current practices and use of Synthetic Plant Protection Products (SPPP), as well as water management issues such as drought or flooding.

Steve Isaac, Director of sustainability, The R&A, said: "This Golf Course 2030 project is designed to help you and your course overcome the challenges we face in coming years, such as, more frequent flooding and drought events, more disease and pest incidence and the consequences of regulation, particularly with regards to the availability of pesticides."

"Your input, through this brief questionnaire, will be vital if this project is to deliver the support and guidance you need to future-proof the condition and playability of your course."

Paul Woodham, General manager of agronomy, STRI, said: "This project is well underway and is designed to act as a learning resource and support tool for all in the industry. The questionnaire offers an opportunity to get involved as we build the research information which deals with all aspects of managing

parkland greens."

"There will be continued challenges with further restrictions and limited resources over the next decade. The predicted challenges for the golf industry due to climate change and resource pressures are being realised, and we encourage all applicable courses to offer their support by completing this important R&A Golf Course 2030 survey to help to shape the future of the game."

STRI will produce an interactive best practice handbook, for the management of Poa/Bent golf greens in a parkland setting based on the survey results and wider research around this subject.

For further details, and to complete the Golf Course 2030 survey, visit www.strigroup.com or follow the following link: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GC2030.



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SRUC Elmwood Campus and Elmwood Golf

Hand in glove facilities

Elmwood Golf is one of the premier golf and greenkeeping training facilities in the UK, owned and managed by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) Elmwood Campus based in Fife, Scotland. It has been developed to support the golf teaching areas of the college and provide excellent practical teaching experience for students studying greenkeeping, golf studies, golf course management, professional golf and golf facility management. Many former students are employed on prestigious golf courses across the globe!

Lee Williams met with Programme Manager **Michael Clark**, Lecturer **Andy O'Hara** and the club's Course Manager **Greg Kilgour** to discuss what the college offers and how they manage the course around teaching the students

first spoke with Michael Clark, who has been at the college for over twenty-six years and, before that, course manager at Aberdour Golf Club in Fife. He talks me through the background of the college and what they provide for their students. "Back in 1961, we were predominantly Elmwood College - which was an agricultural facility. The golf course is only two miles away and we naturally started to get into golf greenkeeping. This eventually became really successful and we became the primary source for greenkeeping education, not only in Scotland, but all over Europe ... along with Myerscough College in Preston." "In 1997, we opened up the first 9 holes (whilst construction carried on with the remaining 9 holes) and it was officially



Left to right: Michael Clark,
Greg Kilgour and Andy O'Hara

opened by Michael F. Bonallack O.B.E, Secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, in May 1998. It was built so that we had somewhere for our own trainees to practice but, for this to work, we needed greens staff to look after the course, and greenkeeping tutors to instruct our students."

"Myself, Andy and other members of the team undertake the theory and course manager Greg, along his team, teach the practical. That is where the two marry together and that's why we have a golf course and an educational establishment ... the two fit hand in glove."

In addition to golf education, the club offers local golfers a season ticket membership and they currently have five hundred season ticket holders. There is



What about the children in schools who have no golfing background and have no idea what a greenkeeper is? So, with the help of our marketing department, we have three to four open evenings per year and we visit local schools





When students initially come onsite, some of them have never been on a golf course, let alone worked on one!

a driving range, which includes an indoor video analysis room, six covered bays, twelve outdoor bays, and a grass teeing area that can accommodate up to sixteen golfers at a time. There are three greens for chipping and pitching, and two large putting greens alongside.

Michael continues: "We also offer HNC and HND distance learning; so the students can study remotely - we have 188 on our books at the moment. Normally, we will have around one hundred Scottish Educational Qualification students (the equivalent to an NVQ down south), who are fully employed; they will attend for two years, three weeks at

a time on block release. This year, because of Covid-19, that hasn't happened and we have had to move everything online, but we adapted to that quite seamlessly."

"On Friday, I was dealing with the Course Manager at Silver Lakes Golf Club in Pretoria, South Africa. We get around twelve students from there every year. They have their own trainers out there and we supply the materials, registration and verification for them. We are very well connected with the industry; we are lucky to be surrounded by prestigious courses such as St Andrews, Muirfield and Carnoustie (to name a few), but we also have some courses that have fewer resources. One thing all these places have in common is they want great greenkeepers and trainees."

The big issue I hear all the time on my travels is how do we get more young people interested in starting a career in our industry. Whilst speaking with Michael, I could tell that they were very proactive as a team, and I think many other colleges and governing bodies should be following their lead - if



Student cutting the rough



Newt survey



It can be challenging as we want to give the students the best possible experience, but we have to factor in the health and safety aspect

they aren't already.

"Historically, our students have come from a golfing background; their parents have played golf, they play golf and they see greenkeepers doing their jobs, so they know a little bit about the maintenance of a golf course. It dawned on me a long time ago: 'what about the children in schools who have no golfing background and have no idea what a greenkeeper is'."

"So, with the help of our marketing

department, we have three to four open evenings per year and we visit local schools. I know Royal Dornoch and Carnoustie greenkeepers have also been into their local schools to advise pupils on what a greenkeeper does. The open evenings have become very popular and cover everything from what a greenkeeper does, to what do professional golfers eat. We explain what a career in greenkeeping can entail and encourage them to visit their local golf club,

where they can speak to the greenkeepers and, perhaps, get a wee taste of what the job is like with a bit of seasonal work."

"Another initiative, which Andy O'Hara manages, is to bring local schools in for an afternoon each week. They work alongside Greg undertaking some basic work and also get to hit a few balls. It quickly establishes who is really keen and, from last year's group of fourteen pupils, we have had four sign up for the course. Parents whose

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As you can imagine, there is a lot of handholding, as many of them do not have any prior experience at all. It can be a challenge; there are no two ways about it

children have joined us see the benefits of a career in greenkeeping, working outdoors, promoting health and wellbeing, meeting people and all the new skills they learn.”

A big part of being a greenkeeper is the hours of work, getting up early in the morning and working most weekends. I was interested to know how Michael approaches that subject with potential students. “That is an excellent question ... During open evenings or interviews, I will ask the youngster if they ever had a paper round and the parents will usually question why I asked that. I advise that greenkeepers generally get up early in a morning and, if the child had a paper round, they are less likely to have an issue. Where it goes wrong is if you do not tell them this and they come to us at college. It can become a problem if you’re not open about the hours when they

have to undertake work experience, with 5:30am starts.”

I now turn my attention to Course Manager Greg, who fell into the industry by chance in 2001 (at the age of twenty years old), after deciding he needed a change of career from working in a call centre. He applied for various educational courses at local colleges and Elmwood was the first to offer him a place on their National Certificate Course in Greenkeeping. “Whilst on the course, it opened my eyes to the realisation that greenkeeping is more than just cutting grass sat on a lawnmower. I did my first season’s work here and then went back and did my HNC. In my second season, we started to remodel the course; this gave me my first taste of construction work at that point. After completing my HNC there were no full-time posts available, so I

‘Turned’ out nice

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Bunker construction



started my HND and, halfway through that, a full-time post came up as a greenkeeper instructor which I got. I have been here ever since, working my way up to deputy before becoming course manager in 2016. I haven't had quite the varied career some of the guys sat in this room have, but I have been lucky to get the experience of remodelling the course between 2004-2008 and also saw the construction of the driving

range. I'm lucky to have fallen into this job ... I also applied to be a bricklayer, so things could have turned out a lot different!"

Greg's position is different from other course managers around the country. He has the unique position of managing the trainees as well as his own full-time staff. "It can be challenging as we want to give the students the best possible experience, but we have to factor in the health and safety

aspect and balance that with the delivery of what it takes to maintain a golf course. We must also strike a fine balance between teaching the students what they need to know (as part of the curriculum) and keeping the golf course presented in the way in which members are accustomed to. The students normally start with us in September, but this year it is delayed until further notice due to coronavirus. Back when I first started,

again augers to maximise work rates



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Getting Personal

Greg Kilgour - he wants to bag all the Munros (I had to Google)!

Who are you? Greg Kilgour, Course Manager at Elmwood Golf.

Family status. Single.

Who's your hero and why? My Granddad; when I was young it seemed there was never a problem he could not fix.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Gaining GEO accreditation three times and the team I have built up around me that helped achieve it.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? Thought you would be balder.

Which famous people wind you up? The Conservative party.

What job would you love, other than your own? Benign dictator.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? The first time I got drunk.

What is your favourite film? Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

What scares you? Climate change.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Full Forest – Tom Hanks.

What is your favourite sport? Cycling.

What would you cast into Room 101? Plastic.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Italy during the Renaissance.

What's your favourite smell? The smell after rainfall.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To bag all the Munros.

What talent would you like to have? Rhythm - so I could play a musical instrument or dance.



What's the best advice you have ever been given? Don't dwell on mistakes ... learn from them and move on.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Ian Curtis, Hunter S Thompson and Leo Tolstoy.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? There are more atoms in a teaspoon of water than there are teaspoons of water in the Atlantic ocean.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? OK Computer - Radiohead, Exile on Cold Harbour Lane - Alabama 3, I Had the Blues, But I Shook Them Loose - Bombay Bicycle Club.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? The 18th fairway is growing the wrong way, why don't you fix it?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Our 1994 SISIS slitter; it's cheap to run and has made a huge difference in helping combat thatch build up.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Calm, stressed and confused.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundskeeper/greenkeeper? Ask as many questions as you can and grab any opportunities available to build your experience.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Legislation that will protect workers rights, environmental standards and animal welfare post Brexit.



This year, because of Covid-19, that hasn't happened and we have had to move everything online, but we adapted to that quite seamlessly

each season was much more prominent and, by September, the golfing season would start to wind down and you would start to see slower growth, but now it keeps growing right up until November."

Greg's greenkeeping team also have the responsibility for training students and maintaining the course on a daily basis. "I have my Deputy Ryan Stenhouse and two senior greenkeepers, Mark Hood and Daniel Lang. These three guys are the ones who deliver the majority of the practical training and are LANTRA accredited instructors. I also have one assistant greenkeeper, John Law, who completed his work

experience with us; he enjoyed it and was a great wee worker, so I put him forward for the NC training and he has been with us ever since."

I asked Greg how he manages to juggle both sides of the job; how it affects maintenance planning with having to train the students and get the job done, all at the same time. "A lot of people think when you have a class of fifteen students, the course will be amazing with so many hands-on deck. In reality, until they are near to finishing their course, that is not the case. As you can imagine, there is a lot of handholding, as many of them do not have any prior experience at all. It is a case of





Students learning their way around the Air2G2



John, our wee workhorse, will undertake as much work as possible ahead of the golfers. Then, we try to factor in student practical's into what is going on at the time. It can be a challenge; there are no two ways about it. We just have to find a good balance."

"When students initially come onsite, some of them have never been on a golf course, let alone worked on one! So, we start with tasks we can do in groups, such as divoting tees and raking bunkers which helps them to gel as a class and also understand the layout of the course. Once they understand the basics of getting from A to B safely, we start to introduce some of the machine work. At each stage, we are continually thinking about the student's experience; there is no point having fifteen

students, one instructor and one machine because they are only going to get a couple of minutes using the machine and the rest of their time watching. So, we will split them into groups of five (and one instructor), with one of the students gaining experience on the machine while the rest will be nearby repairing pitch marks, weeding bunkers doing some of the less risky practical tasks."

The students start their day with registration at 9:00am, where they go over risk assessments for the days tasks, then they will be out on the course by 9:30am - which is another problem Greg has to get his head around. "I would love to use them for course set up; it would be brilliant to send ten students out in front of golf. But, because they are coming from all over



I am confident we have a far more beneficial impact than a negative one when it comes to the environment and biodiversity around the course



Students at work



Student hedge planting



Entrance road wildflowers

Scotland, not many of them have their own cars and depend on public transport, so it's impossible for them to start any earlier. Students further afield will be staying in the halls of residence, so we could ask them to start at 7:00am, but we would not get any consistency amongst the class. They work till 3:30pm, so we do not get a full day's work out of them, but they are not here to do a full shift, they are here to learn. We have students volunteer to come in and work on days they have not got classes and they are the ones you know have got the drive and the passion to succeed, so we want to accommodate them. They will get a bigger range of experience because they will fit in with the tasks we are doing on that day, rather than just the tasks we are doing to fit in with the curriculum."

The college also provides courses for professional golf students and, as part of their curriculum, they will take part in competitions at Elmwood Golf Club. "This gives the greenkeeping students an excellent opportunity to show off the skills they have learnt, and it is the NC students who set the course up for that day, which is

a great experience for them. We sit down the day before, so they all know what they are going to do, then leave them to it on the day, with guidance, of course, if they need it."

Greg gives a brief breakdown of the yearly maintenance programme. "In season, we mow greens at 4.5mm daily and roll behind when we have competitions or parties playing. Aeration consists of weekly slitting or sorel rolling, pencil tining two or three times annually, hollow coring once a year on new greens and we Dyna-Core the old greens, as thatch does not warrant a hollow core. Throughout the year, we carry out minimal verti-cutting and topdressing and a brush is used to reduce lateral growth. We only apply sand during renovation week. A compost tea is applied fortnightly when possible. Fertilisers are all selected for low salt content to help support the soil biology. Wetting agents are used routinely to keep surfaces dry and moist. We tend to hand pick weeds, but we have also used a selective in the past on areas of long rough, to reduce creeping thistle invasion and we use a knapsack for



When I first started, each season was much more prominent and, by September, the golfing season would start to wind down, but now it keeps growing right up until November



Long rough maintenance



We explain what a career in greenkeeping can entail and encourage them to visit their local golf club, where they can speak to the greenkeepers

targeted weed control. This season, due to reduced staff, we have had to spray bunker bases and limit bunker maintenance, but this is the first application on a playing surface in four years. Our aim was to be pesticide free by 2020, which we did achieve until Covid restrictions came in. Fungal diseases are treated with citric acid, increased aeration and compost teas which have worked well for us; since working with the natural soil biology (rather than against it), we've seen a

reduction in thatch build up."

The club is very proud of the environmental strategy put in place before construction of the course began. This involved the minimal movement of soil during construction and the planting of over 9,000 indigenous trees on the site. As a result, ongoing maintenance of the turf involves minimal (if any) use of pesticides. There has been a considerable increase in wildlife and wildflowers, and conservation

areas within the rough, and other areas mostly out of play, are part of this strategy.

Greg continued: "Ecology is vitally important to me and the club and we are always trying to improve on our environmental impact. The biggest area which has the potential to create new habitat is in the long rough. So, we want to turn these areas into meadows to help encourage more wildlife and improve the biodiversity further. We have taken steps to

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prevent any negative impact by undertaking work on the ponds by the fourth hole - which we had to create due to this part of the course being on heavy clay. It is the one area of the course that does not drain into a soakaway; it leads into a storm drain once it reaches a certain capacity. To ensure water is cleaner going out of the site (than what it was when it came in), we have introduced willow bridges and reed beds that filter the water out. I am confident we have a far more beneficial impact than a negative one when it comes to the environment and biodiversity around the course."

With measures the club has put in place and the dedication to the ecology around them, they are now starting to see a much more comprehensive range of wildlife living and being spotted around the course and in the ponds. "Recently, we spotted a Short-Eared Owl, Woodpeckers have been coming to the bird feeders outside the clubhouse and we also have Sparrow Hawks now nesting on site. In the ponds on the fourth, we have seen newts, frogs and moorhens so, all in all, I feel we are heading in the right direction."

On a course walk, I noticed there were

hay bales in the ponds near the fourth hole, which I found unusual. I also spotted some beehives out there. "The bales were put in the water as a trial to see if they help control the chickweed. We've used barley bales before to control algae and that worked a treat, but the chickweed is a bit of an experiment currently being carried out by SAC Consulting, part of SRUC."

"The beehives belong to a local beekeeper who was looking for a place to have his hives. We looked around the course and the area near the sand martin nest site was their preferred place, as it was out of the way with plenty of pollen close by for the bees. Once the hives start producing, we are hoping for some honey that can either be sold in the clubhouse or used in some of the menu recipes."

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Background photo credit: Mark Hollingsworth, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Whitley Bay Golf Course.

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TM

China Fleet Country Club

Through the ranks

Set in 180 acres of exquisite countryside, on the cusp of Devon and Cornwall, **China Fleet Country Club** in Saltash is one of the south west's leading clubs. On the first call of what has now become Lee Williams' annual summer tour of the south coast, he met up with Nathan O'Sullivan - the club's forty-four-year-old Course Manager - who has worked his way through the ranks over the last twenty-one years

Whilst at school, Nathan played junior golf and would have loved to have made it as a pro golfer. The next best thing, to continue his passion for golf, led him to explore the idea of becoming a greenkeeper. "When I left school at eighteen, I went straight to Yelverton Golf Club Ltd in Devon and started an apprenticeship where I undertook NVQ Level 2 in Amenity Sports. In 1999, after four and half years, I moved here as an assistant greenkeeper at the age of twenty-two years

old. Over the years I worked my way up to deputy head then, when my predecessor moved on six years ago, I became course manager. I love my job here and the satisfaction of being a greenkeeper working outside is second to none."

Since Nathan has taken over as course manager, the club has really supported his ambition to improve the overall quality around the course by investing heavily in staff, machinery and increasing communication with members. "There is a lot more understanding now. It has been a





//

Over the years I worked my way up to deputy head then, when my predecessor moved on six years ago, I became course manager. I love my job here and the satisfaction of being a greenkeeper working outside is second to none



17th fairway



View from the 1st green

long road of writing report after report and producing spreadsheets, to offer a wider understanding of the costs and everything involved to get to where we are today. I will sit down with Ben Waters, our Golf & Estates Manager to prepare our budgets. Ben moved here from St. Mellion Golf Club and has been in the job for eighteen months now since Linda Goddard retired after twenty years in the position. We have built a great working relationship and he is very professional. We will go on course walks to discuss various issues and it's great that he sees things from the same perspective and has a similar vision to me. Once we have put our budgets together, they will go to the Managing Director and then the Board of Trustees. So, there are a few stepping stones, but we are a charitable trust meaning all profits go back into the club."

Helping Nathan maintain the course are: Martin Coe, Deputy Golf Course Manager - NVQ level 2 and 3, PA1, PA2, PA6 spraying certificates, chainsaw certificates, twelve years' experience. Terry Ruse, Assistant Greenkeeper - NVQ level 2, powered pole pruner certificate, twenty-nine years

experience. Matthew Frost, Assistant Greenkeeper - NVQ level 2 and 3, PA1, PA2, PA6, chainsaw certificates, six years' experience and Charlie Blatchford, Assistant Greenkeeper - NVQ level 2 and 3, PA1, PA2, PA6, chainsaw certificates with seven years' experience.

The parkland course is clay based with USGA spec greens, originally designed in 1991 by Martin Hawtree. When Nathan took over, the profile of the greens were in a pretty bad state with a lot of black layer, thatch and compaction. "We have a lot of mature trees surrounding the course which also results in shade and airflow issues. A combination of all these conditions was causing a lot of disease and led us to bring in Laurence Pithie from Turf Master One Ltd, who offered his advice, expertise and implemented a programme to help reduce thatch. I finally feel like we have almost turned the corner."

"In the past, the greens were overseeded with bents, but we didn't have the right conditions. We have now reached a stage where we consider the profile to be at the right stage to do this again. This means that



Originally, the designers planted tens of thousands of trees and they expected 60-70% to take, but we had a 100% success rate



From left to right: Terry Ruse, Matt Frost, Nathan O'Sullivan, Martin Coe and Charlie Blatchford



Shade on the 9th green back in 2018



The 9th green after thinning the trees

we don't have to stress the greens out, we have lowered the height of cut to achieve decent pace, so they are a lot less prone to disease and produce fewer seed heads. We have managed to reduce our fungicide applications significantly; going from five or six a year to once in sixteen months, which I am absolutely delighted with. We are in a good position and Laurence has now gone from two visits per year, to once every two years."

In January 2015 (Nathan's second year in charge), the club had a new irrigation system installed. "It is a Toro system using the Lynx software package complete with a weather station, which we have never had before. We have the valve-in head sprinklers on the greens, and pop up sprinklers on tees and one approach. The water is supplied through a reservoir at the entrance to the course, which is gravity fed to a pump house. From there, one set of pumps sends it up to the

clubhouse and the other to the golf course. At the moment, I'm happy with the water levels in the reservoir for this time of year, normally by the end of the summer it will be almost empty."

A lot of the drains on the course run into the reservoir helping to keep it topped up throughout the year. "When the course was first designed, tees, greens, bunkers and fairways all had drains installed, which means it's all now around thirty years old and,

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Getting Personal

Nathan O'Sullivan - he's proud of his achievements

Who are you? Nathan O'Sullivan
- Course Manager at China Fleet Country Club.

Family status. Married.

Who's your hero and why?

My wife; for putting up with me and being a great mother to our children.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far?

Just bringing the golf course to the standard it is now; seeing the transition from very thatchy, disease prone greens, that had around six fungicide applications per year, to a decent, free draining surface, with only one fungicide application in sixteen months. The continued feedback and backing from the members, who now understand why we have to cause some disruption at times in order to improve. Also, being involved in the support team for the PGA at Wentworth a few times.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? I would be proud of myself and my family.

Which famous people wind you up? Reality tv 'stars'.

What job would you love, other than your own? Professional footballer/golfer.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Pronouncing my wife's name wrong at our wedding!

What is your favourite film? Ferris Buellers Day Off.

What scares you? Heights.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? 'No idea' ... Tom Hanks.

What is your favourite sport? Golf.

What would you cast into Room 101? Bottled water, lazy people and having so many passwords to remember!

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Ancient Rome.



Do you have a lifetime ambition? To visit Augusta National.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? John Lennon, Billy Connolly and Karl Pilkington!

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Listen and think positively.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.

What's your favourite smell? Bacon cooking.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Ocean Colour Scene - Mosely Shoals, Kings of Leon - Because of the times and The Beatles Anthology.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Is the course floodlit?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro ProCore.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Passionate, hardworking and stressed!

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundskeeper/greenkeeper? Put yourself out there, speak to other greenkeepers, listen and play other courses.

What talent would you like to have? To be able to play the guitar.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Some sort of ban, or further limitations on single-use plastic.



subsequently, we are starting to see drains collapsing and just not functioning properly. We are in the process of renewing some drains on the fairways, but we have not really had to update drainage on the greens yet."

Nathan tells me he is seeing a significant change in the weather patterns in the last few years. "We are getting extremely high levels of rainfall; it is becoming the norm now. We are starting to get more warmer mild winters with bouts of hefty rain. Gone are the days in November, when you could just park up the machines, strip them down and paint them up ready for the start of the growing season. That is just not the case anymore; it

is a matter of getting out and cutting when you can. Then, we move into summer and, over night, you seem to go into a drought; especially in 2018/2019. It goes from one extreme to another with not much gap in between, which has led us to rethink the way we manage the course throughout the year."

I asked Nathan is there a possibility in the future to extend the irrigation system? "I can't see it on the fairways, but possibly the approaches. However, we would need another three lakes the same size as the current one," he laughs. "There is talk of a borehole, but then we have to be careful as we are so close to the estuary; we would have to make sure the





Club Championship



At the moment, I'm happy with the water levels in the reservoir for this time of year, normally by the end of the summer it will be almost empty

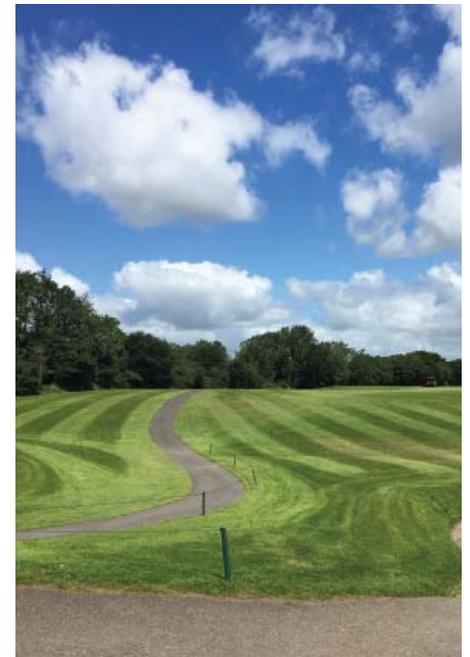
water wasn't too salty. When I visited BTME this year, I spoke to a few companies about wetting agent programmes for fairways. The idea is to not let the fairways get to a stage where they get severely damaged in the drought, leaving us with nothing. Then, in November, it rains for four months without being able to establish grass. With the footfall, it just turns to mud and then you get the weeds and moss coming in, so it is a constant battle. We are just about there with the greens and tees, it's now fairways that have moved up the priority list."

When the 18-hole parkland course was built, it had seventy-two bunkers which were Hawtree-designed, big American style bunkers with steep faces. They have become unsustainable to manage, so Nathan and his team have started to remove and reduce the size of them. "Over the years, we have managed to reduce the number down to sixty-two; ten less. On top of that, the remaining ones have been reduced by half, or a third in places. The main aim for

this project was to fill in the bunkers that were not in play, remove the steep faces that cause the general issues of washout/contamination and not being able to keep the sand on the faces, therefore reducing labour costs."

Nathan feels the course has an excessive amount of original trees and is working towards reducing the numbers. "We have put an ongoing management plan together, so everybody is on the same page and understands why we are doing it. We have significant Ash dieback damage, as many of them were planted before we first opened. This has been good in a way, as it as gives us the perfect excuse to thin out these plantations."

"Originally, the designers planted tens of thousands of trees and they expected 60-70% to take, but we had a 100% success rate and, obviously, now they are too close together. Since I started, the priority was to remove the trees which were shading areas around the greens, tees and parts of



What's in the shed

Toro Greensmaster 3250-D greens mower x 2
 Toro's Greensmaster TriFlex 3400 greens mower
 Cushman Turf Truckster
 Toro ProCore 648
 Toro Workman
 Yamaha buggy
 Toro Reelmaster 3100D triplex mower
 Toro Reelmaster 3100D Sidewinder
 Jacobsen Fairway 305 mower x 2
 Toro Groundsmaster 4500-D semi-rough mower
 Bobcat zero-turn mower
 Iseki TK538 with Lewis front loader
 Kubota L2501
 John Deere 6x4 Gator x 2
 SISIS Variseeder/Sorrel roller
 Turfco Widespin topdresser
 SISIS Rotorake TM1000 deep scarifier
 Core Harvester
 True-Surface vibrating green roller
 Accu-Pro fertiliser spreader
 Redexim Speed-Brush
 Gambetti 600 litre sprayer
 Wiedenmann Terra Spike GX18
 Wessex leaf collector
 Magnum BR600 leaf blower x 2
 Mountfield rotary mower
 Flymo
 Marston Trailer
 5-gang ball collector
 Ryan Turf Cutter
 Stihl M5 251 chainsaw
 Husqvarna 135 chainsaw
 Chapin Knapsack sprayer x 2
 Elite Pro Edger



the fairways and we are now getting to the stage where we are on top of that. So, we are now focusing on looking at plantation and thinning out the weaker trees to leave the stronger trees you know will be around for years to come. It is giving us a more desirable presentation throughout the course and even opened up some views of the estuary, which we did not have before.”

Nathan talks me through the general annual maintenance of the greens. “For the club championship, we try and get greens up to nine and a half feet on the stimp which, in the past, has proved more difficult due to a high percentage of poa. Now we are developing bent it is a little easier, so we are not having to stress them out. I tend to cut down to 3mm for a couple of big events throughout the year, but I would say we average about 3.5mm throughout the growing season. I will aim to roll once a week but, when the course is this busy, we can be cutting seven days a week. My view is that, if a visitor plays tomorrow, they do not know that is the day I have rested the greens because they have been stressed out for weeks. I will try and pick a day when I know

it is mostly members out on the course, but even on the rest day, they will get a roll with the vibrating rollers. We have midweek roll ups Wednesday and Saturday so, if I can spare the staff, we will cut and roll to put that little more on the stimpmeter.”

“In winter, we will average around 5-6mm. This year, with weather being a bit warmer, we managed to keep them at 5mm (until lockdown), then obviously raised them up.”

“For verti cutting, we have historically worked with a thirty-year-old set of blades, but recently purchased some GreenTek Thatch-Away units - which perform so much better. We will go over the greens once a month at a few millimetres depth to just get into the thatch layer. If we have time, I will do two passes but, since lockdown, we have not had the chance to get on there. Once a month, we will religiously go over with the Toro ProCore 648 with the needle tines ranging between 2-4 inches and alternating depths, to reduce risk of forming a pan. Then we will add between eight and ten tonnes of topdressing and our yearly aim is to apply one hundred and fifty tonnes on the greens. When we started this process, we managed





The Toro ProCore 648 is used once per month



There is talk of a borehole, but then we have to be careful as we are so close to the estuary; we would have to make sure the water wasn't too salty

to get two hundred tonnes on in the first year, which I was absolutely delighted with. We now have the backing of the golfers as they have seen what we have achieved. So, instead of their hands up in the air saying 'jeez, they are topdressing again', they are seeing the benefits of it and have become much more understanding. We also keep them informed of the STRI results we obtain throughout the year."

Renovations on the greens are usually

carried out three times a year but, with the current climate, Nathan and his team will struggle to achieve that. "We have missed out on the last few months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Normally, in March and Autumn, we will hollow core and also use 12mm solid tines at a depth of eight inches. Although August is right in the middle of the playing season, it is oddly our quietest month, believe it or not, which means it is the most productive for overseeding.

This year, temperatures will hopefully allow us to take advantage of a bent application and the process will be to: 12mm solid tines at a depth of eight inches, then we will look at either deep scarifying or sarel rolling to create a bed for the Barenbrug All Bent seed mix. Next, we add forty tonnes of topdressing and brush in."

Throughout the year, Nathan tends to favour a liquid programme on the greens with one application of a conventional 8:0:12



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History

1901-1903

The mudflats of Victoria Harbour, in Hong Kong, were bought for \$2.50 per square foot by a local businessman who began charging for tipping rubble from the growing colony. The land began selling for \$25.00 per square foot. Short of buyers for the land, the businessman joined with the personnel of the Royal Navy's China Fleet to raise funds for a Royal Naval Canteen.

1929-1933

The canteen proved to be extremely successful and was soon demolished to make way for a new building. Using the club funds and with a generous loan from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Admiral Kelly (Commander in Chief China Station) laid the foundation stone for the seven-story China Fleet Club building. For the men who served on the China station ('The Old Blue' as it was known), it provided a place for refurbishment and decent accommodation away from the crowded ships.

1941-1973

During the battle for Hong Kong, the Japanese occupied the club using it as the naval HQ. The club was extensively refurbished and returned to its former use after the Royal Marines and Royal Navy liberated the colony. During the Korean war, the club became a major rest and recreation centre for UK and allied sailors. During the Vietnam War, allied and American sailors used the club extensively between tours of duty boosting club profits.

1980-1985

Land values escalated, and the trustees sold the air space over the club. A developer paid for temporary facilities while building a new luxury club on the first nine floors, with 14 more floors of office space above. Fleet house opened and because of the agreement to hand back Hong Kong to the Chinese in 1997, the search began for a suitable successor to the China Fleet Club in the UK.

1986-1992

A proposal to build the China Fleet Country Club in Saltash, Cornwall was put to the Hong Kong sailors committee and Trustees. The feasibility study was approved by the Hong Kong sailors committee, the land was purchased, and design of the complex began. Building work started on the 180-acre Saltash site. The new China Fleet Country Club was officially opened on June 1st, 1991 along with its prestigious golf course, designed by Dr Martin Grant Hawtree. On 30th November 1992, the Hong Kong China Fleet Club closed its doors for the last time ready for the Chinese to take over Hong Kong.

1992-Present day

The China Fleet Country Club goes from strength to strength, opening its doors to civilians in 1994, to constantly extending and refurbishing year on year. Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2016 by receiving a visit by HRH Princess Anne the club was rededicated to commemorate this event. The story continues...



granular feed at the start of maintenance week in March, then will go with a straight N liquid 25:0:0. "A couple of years ago, I started to work with David Bevan from Agrovista Amenity and, with his solid advice, I have gone down the route of using BioMass Sugar, HumiMax, SeaAction Liquid Seaweed and turf hardeners. Historically, we just used to use these products in the winter months, but now we are applying them once a month. One thing I think I do differently to most people, is that I will go half-rate once every two weeks. I found when we first started the programme, it was a stretch trying to go a month at full rate with all the products. So, I experimented with going three weeks still at full rate and found that; in the last week they just looked a bit hungry and tired. I now have a result which works best for us, which is a half rate of everything but every two weeks, so it is like a drip-feed; they never get to that stage where they are looking tired. ICL Primo Maxx is also in there at 400ml every two weeks, but we have just started to ease back on this as we have got to a stage where the greens are too dense, and we weren't getting enough air in the profile. After the latest STRI report, we have just started to tweak down the amount of nitrogen we

are applying throughout the year to help the bent."

As you walk into the driving range (near the club shop), there is the greenkeepers corner board with monthly updates, a picture of the greenkeeping team and information on planned and ongoing projects. I was interested to know if the golfers take the time to read it and if Nathan has had much feedback. "It went up a year ago when Ben joined us. As well as the usual information, we will post any legislation changes on insecticides and fungicides that have been removed from the market, which pre-warns them of what to expect as a result. They are taking notice and we have some good feedback. We also communicate through our Facebook and Twitter accounts and provide similar information, plus weather updates."

Most of the machinery at the club is on lease through various companies, and some smaller items (around £10-15,000) are purchased through CapEx. "We do a lot of business with Devon Garden Machinery. We are mainly Toro, but our fairway mowers are Jacobsen and we have a few John Deere utility vehicles. I tend to purchase whatever machine best suits the area we are maintaining, rather than looking at price or manufacturer."



We have managed to reduce our fungicide applications significantly; going from five or six a year to once in six months, which I am absolutely delighted with

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Aldeburgh Golf Club

Leaving his Mark!

For twenty-two and a half years, **Mark Broughton** has resided as Course Manager of Suffolk's Aldeburgh Golf Club. It takes something special, and perhaps someone special, to stay at a club for over two decades, and on the drive towards the Suffolk coastline, it is plain to see the attraction. Blair Ferguson reports



On arrival at Aldeburgh Golf Club in mid-September, the early morning mist is still hiding much of the gorse lined course, with only the Edwardian clubhouse in full view. During a walk of the eighteen holes with Mark - a well spoken, funny and passionate greenkeeper - the mist soon lifts and everything England's second oldest heathland course has to offer comes into sight. The view of the Alde Estuary and the course characteristics, such as the snaking sleeper faced bunkers come to life on this warm, cloudless morning. With two coffees on the clubhouse terrace overlooking the course, it's time to find out precisely what has kept Mark here for so long and why now is the right time for him to retire.

"I think what has kept me here is that there has always been another challenge," Mark begins. "The club has always had the

attitude of wanting to develop and move on, so in twenty-two years we've never sat back and gone that's it, job done, this will do us. There has never been a thought of that, it's always been what can we do next."

"There have been various course reviews over time, with construction work, lengthening the course and tightening it up in places. So you get the challenges with that and then you have a big event on the horizon and you have a couple of years building up to it. So there's always something to look forward to."

"This year, in the absence of Covid-19, would have been a fairly quiet year, at least that was the plan," Marks says, laughing. "I gave a year's notice so I could have a year where there wasn't much on, and I could quietly drift off towards retirement. But we got one of the biggest challenges that I've ever faced, which is dealing with the Covid-19 situation. Especially going through





I gave a year's notice so I could have a year where there wasn't much on, and I could quietly drift off towards retirement. But we got one of the biggest challenges that I've ever faced, which is dealing with the Covid-19 situation!

lockdown trying to keep the course in good order with a very limited number of people.”

“The other thing is that I fell in love with the place. Opportunities have come to move on, but I've always wanted to stay and carry on with what's going on. It's a lovely place to live, it's a beautiful site, the members are lovely which is comparatively rare when I speak to greenkeepers at Harrogate and other golf clubs. Many people are living in a world of constant hassle and unreasonable demands. At Aldeburgh, I'm very lucky to be working for a very nice bunch of people who know how to do it right. Discerning golfers who know what they want and are very clear about it which makes the job of being course manager comparatively simple because, in all of the time that I've been here, the philosophy of the club in terms of the conditions and presentation of the course has remained the same. Obviously, the goalposts are moving in that the standards we are trying to achieve are going up, but the basic philosophy of it being firm, fast and true all year round golf hasn't



wavered in all of that time.”

“Then you get to the stage where you think I'll happily stay here until I retire and, in two weeks, that will be it. I suppose as much as anything, the time seemed right. This is a demanding job, and I find myself more and more being utterly exhausted at the end of the golfing season. It's a combination of all sorts of things. I've got lots of things that I want to do during my retirement, so it's not like I fell out of love with greenkeeping or anything like that. I still like getting up in the morning, and I love being out here doing it. But we won the Golf Environment Award in 2019, and we had the Jacques Leglise trophy with the R&A, and it just seemed like a good time to bow out.”

“Although, whilst going through this handover process over the last four weeks with Nick Nottingham who is taking over as Course Manager, I've questioned why I'm leaving. Especially now that there are some course developments with golf course architects Mackenzie and Ebert in the pipeline and possible changes to the golf

course and exciting times ahead. But then Nick is twenty-odd years younger than me, and the difference in energy levels is plain to see.”

“So there's no doubt that you can sort of get to a stage...” Mark stops to consider his words before continuing. “At one point I considered working part time, maybe three days a week or something like that, but I don't think I could because I'd end up just doing five. It is a job that you think about all the time. I wake up in the morning, and I'm thinking about the golf course... and very often waking up in the night thinking about the golf course. You can't get away from it. And that's part of the joy of it, that it's all consuming, but it can be exhausting, and you can get to the stage where you think your health might suffer if you keep going.”

Sitting overlooking the course, there is a lot for Mark to be proud of. During his interview for the role, the club outlined their ambitions to host top level amateur tournaments, and that ambition has been achieved. To do that, certain aspects of the



At one point I considered working part time, maybe three days a week or something like that, but I don't think I could because I'd end up just doing five



New Course Manager Nick Nottingham



You can't get away from it. And that's part of the joy of it, that it's all consuming, but it can be exhausting, and you can get to the stage where you think your health might suffer if you keep going

course needed to be improved, but the club were keen for Mark to follow the low input methods they had been using.

Fortunately, Mark's previous experience meant he was just the man for the job. After completing his OND at Myerscough College, he worked at Royal Lytham before joining Henbury Golf Club as First Assistant in Bristol where his family are from. At the age of twenty-five, he took on his first Course

Manager's role at Filton Golf Club where a small budget helped him hone his low input methods. Ten years as Course Manager at Morecambe Golf Club followed before he swapped one of the wettest areas of England for one of the driest.

"For me, and for the golf courses that I've worked on and certainly the ones that I've managed, low input has either been forced on me through budgetary constraints, or it

was a choice because it was what worked for that particular golf club, and it certainly works here. If there's ever a golf course where you could apply Jim Arthur's principles, Aldeburgh is it."

"We work with relatively low inputs of everything. On average in recent years we've had between thirty and forty kilos of nitrogen per year on the greens, and possibly a similar amount on tees, and

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virtually nothing on fairways and other areas. However, we've started boxing off in recent years on the greens surround areas, so they get a little bit of fertiliser to compensate for that. So, low fertiliser, very few pesticides, and bit of selective weedkiller because, on courses like this, you tend to get quite a lot of clover in the fairways if you're not careful. Again, maybe one application a year of selective on areas that need it. Fungicide use, just no. I've been here twenty-two years, and we've never applied fungicide for fusarium, although we've applied it for things like fairy rings on little areas to try and deal with that."

"Irrigation-wise, we tend to keep things very dry. And, again, the sort of figures we'd be looking at before we start irrigating would be well down into the single figures percentage-wise. So, we'd get down to five or seven percent moisture before we started thinking about irrigation. Generally speaking, we are trying to run with the moisture between about ten and fifteen percent if we can, and that works very nicely. A lot of golf courses' greens would be a disaster area at that sort of level but with deep rooting fine

grasses, lots of fescue, it works for us."

"It's very niche and something I'm very well aware will not work at the vast majority of golf courses in the country. Starting here, I needed to develop a feel for the place. When I first arrived, I was lucky in that there were members of staff here who had been here a long, long time and were able to steer me in the right direction. It is so out on a limb that you're not going to get the experience of doing these sorts of things apart from on a tiny number of golf courses around the country that have got similar sorts of conditions and can get away with the same things. So I'd see the greens getting a little bit brown and think do we need a bit of irrigation now and I'd be told by the experienced staff that we could keep going a few more days."

"And some of that is understanding the needs of the agronomic side of things, but it's also understanding the requirements of your particular set of golfers because what the Aldeburgh member sees as great conditions, firm and fast, at many golf courses they wouldn't accept it. The greens would be too hard and too firm, and in lots

of places they want them to be receptive, so the ball stops reasonably easily. It's a double whammy really, you're looking at the members' requirements that are a little bit different from the average golf course and what actually works here. It takes a little while, but once you're into it, you get to a stage where you know that you can go a few more days without irrigation and everything will be fine."

"The other low input side of things is the frequency of cut and heights of cut because it all relates. If you are cutting really low on your greens, it is probably going to compromise your rooting depth and you're probably going to need a bit more water and fertiliser, and you're almost certainly going to need some more fungicide. So, we tend not to do lots of aggressive verti-cutting on greens or any of those sort of practices that are stressful on the turf. It's sensible heights of cut, minimal brushing, minimal verti-cutting and grooming."

"We don't use a roller much. In fact, we haven't used one at all this year which is slightly odd because, in recent years, we've tended to use it a bit more for tournament



I always took part in the Golf Environment Awards because I thought it was good for the industry. It's a showcase for the good environmental work that is done and that is the important part about it. It's not whether you win or not





prep. But then, even for that, we've looked at other ways of getting the greens into tournament condition, but they're never really far away from it anyway, and that's part of the key. You don't have to do too much work to get them in tournament condition. You generally only need to up the frequency of cut and do a bit more hand mowing."

For Mark, bringing the course on the way he has is all about everything gelling together. Everything from the type of fertiliser to how wide the greenkeepers turn when cutting makes a difference, and it isn't just the golf specific areas such as fairways and greens that he concentrates on. The club was named the Environmental Golf Club of the Year in 2019, and maintaining the wider ecology of the land is important to the members, the club and Mark.

The course is situated between two nature reserves, Hazelwood Marsh and North Warren RSPB and hosts annual course walks for members that are always oversubscribed. Despite the link between wildlife and golf performance not being initially obvious, Mark believes that every aspect has its part to play when it comes to

the success of the course.

"We do invest a lot of time and effort into it, so it is nice to have it recognised, but I certainly don't do it for that. I always took part in the Golf Environment Awards because I thought it was good for the industry. It's a showcase for the good environmental work that is done and that is the important part about it. It's not whether you win or not, it's about the fact you are demonstrating to people outside of the industry that golf can be really, really good for the environment."

"And we have a great working relationship here with the Wildlife Trust and others. Suffolk Wildlife Trust come along and give us some advice, and we are a county wildlife site, so they are very interested about what goes on here."

"To me personally, it's very important and, to the club, I think it is important too because it's a heathland golf course and it's part of the character of it. There are a lot of members here and lots of them are very interested in the wildlife and there's always quite a bit of chat about what's around, especially when the nightingales are singing

along the woodland edge in May. Everybody loves it."

"Even those golfers who would profess not to be interested in the wildlife and things like that, you can be sure that at some level they are enjoying the bird song in the spring and the fact that there are some wildflowers in the rough and semi-rough. So, again, it's a different focus. Our semi-rough in the spring will be full of sheep's sorrel, which a lot of golf courses might say is a weed, but for us it's part of the spring look of the course, that red tinge to it, and it plays well."

"You get good lies in it, it's not like its big cabbages you're dealing with. It's part and parcel of running a place like this, it's about everything adding up, it's not just greens, fairways and bunkers, we are maintaining the whole site to create an experience for the members and visitors. It's another example of how things are interrelated in that if we don't manage the gorse, then rabbit numbers increase dramatically and then we'd get a lot of rabbit damage on the fairways and scraping in bunkers and all the work that is involved in that."

"I don't really separate out the



Even those golfers who would profess not to be interested in the wildlife, you can be sure that at some level they are enjoying the bird song in the spring and the fact that there are some wildflowers in the rough and semi-rough



environmental side and the golf course maintenance. You are maintaining a heathland golf course and, if you're doing it right then you're doing the environmental side of it as well; it's just part of it. And almost all of it has some agronomic benefit or a golfing benefit. So the work we do to cut and collect in the roughs gives us the wispy rough that enables a golfer to find the ball, but for it also to be a bit of a challenge to make that choice whether they are going to play towards the pin or go out sideways. You want the rough to be wispy enough that you're tempting people to take too much club out of it with a five iron when really they should be taking an eight iron or a wedge."

"It could be defined as environmental work with golfing benefits or as golf course maintenance with environmental benefits. It's the same for gorse thinning and the removal of saplings, but that's looking longer-term where you're looking at golf in ten years' time. By taking a sapling out by the side of the green you're ensuring that shade and lack of air movement isn't a problem in a few years' time. You're often juggling everything, and there's almost too much to do on a site like this, there's no

doubt you could have twenty staff here and still have everybody busy all the time. But most greenkeepers would tell you they could use fifty percent more staff than what they've got!"

As an hour-long conversation on life as a greenkeeper draws to a close, Mark's enthusiasm, dedication and love for the profession have shone through. A lot of what he speaks about regards how the industry and those around him can improve and develop, and so it comes as little surprise when he cites the development of the people he has worked with as something he is particularly proud of.

"When I arrived, the course was in a bit of a state. The greens were already pretty good, but the fairways were shocking, and the bunkers and tees needed a lot of work, so the improvement has been general. There's been new construction work, tees and bunker developments with golf course architect, Ken Moodie, that we've been doing over a number of years that have really transformed the course. But I think it has been that steady improvement which is the way things tend to go on a heathland golf course. You don't get rapid results at a

place like this, the growth is slow, so you're in for the long haul."

"That's what I like, the general development of the course over time and, of course as part of that, the development of the staff over time, and the joy of seeing a deputy course manager going on to get a course manager's job elsewhere, it's just great."

"I'm lucky at the moment because I've probably got the strongest team that I've ever had. We were talking on the walk earlier about how the job has changed and how there's a lot more office-based admin type work now, but one of the things I've always really enjoyed is the training and development side of it. Developing a team and their individual skills and getting everybody working together to lift the whole place. You can have all the best machinery, a decent budget and all that sort of thing, but if you haven't got a really good team, then you won't have a great golf course."



You can have all the best machinery, a decent budget and all that sort of thing, but if you haven't got a really good team, then you won't have a great golf course



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Perranporth Golf Club

Cooking up a sand dune



Perranporth Golf Club is situated on the beautiful North Coast of Cornwall, overlooking the glorious Perran Sands beach. It sits on top of a disused tin mine, among the dunes of blown sand and old mine workings and the views from every hole are dramatic and a delight. Lee Williams met with Course Manager **Rob Cook**, who is tasked with the general upkeep and maintenance of this unique links course

Rob has taken on the enviable task of this James Braid course designed in 1929, after industry legend Bill Mitchell retired in 2018, having served the club for a remarkable fifty-eight years.

Rob first took an interest in golf when he started caddying for his dad, when he was just fourteen. He then started to play himself (at his local golf course of Bowood) and would spend any free time working on his handicap. After completing his A-levels and a BTEC in business and finance, he was still unsure what career path he wanted to take - until his mum stepped in. "She told me I

needed to further my education rather than just playing golf all the time. I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do, but obviously I loved golf and, whilst at school, I had worked with the greenkeepers at Bowood in the summer holidays, so I decided to complete a HND in golf course management at Reaseheath College. Part of the course involved going out on work experience for seven months, and I was lucky enough to be placed at the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire. I loved it and, when I finished the HND, they offered me a full-time position."

"I would regularly go home to Cornwall to

see my parents and friends and, every time I visited, I would chat with the guy who leased Bowood Golf Course, who was spending quite a bit of money on the course. Whilst working at the Forest of Arden, the phone rang one day and Ray Hunt (Course Manager there at the time) informed me there was some chap on the phone for me. In front of Ray, I answered the phone and was then scared to inform him that Bowood had just asked me to be their Head Greenkeeper. Ray was supportive but recommended I only take the job if suitable budgets were in place, however I was twenty-one at the time and a bit naïve, so I accepted the job."

"It turned out to be a nightmare at first; there were older greenkeepers who did not like being told what to do and the guy who was acting head (who had been demoted) was stubborn. Eventually, with there only being a few of us, things calmed down. Then, the owners went bust, someone else came in with a lot of money and we had some excellent years ... until they did a moonlight flit and the farmer (who originally built the course) took it back on!"

Whilst at Bowood, with not having a lot of money to spend on maintaining the USGA specification greens, Rob made the decision to go down the fine grass route and he started to get quite a lot of fescue on the



//

It may not be the easiest of courses to play and you may not love it, but I urge everyone to visit because it is pretty old school and natural



It is very dry and tends to burn off pretty quickly ... if there is anywhere that could do with irrigation, it is here, as it dries out rapidly

greens. He would pick the brains of the greenkeepers at the local links clubs, as this was the turf management style he was most interested in. "I have always had a passion for links golf, so when a job came up at Trevoze Golf Club up the road, I applied, but I just missed out. Then, when the position came up here due to Billy retiring, I felt it was the ideal opportunity. It is such a natural site and it ticked all the boxes for me; fescue dominated greens and low inputs."

When Rob first moved to the club, his first job was to find a trusty and knowledgeable Deputy Head, as the current deputy decided to leave when he was not automatically promoted to Head. "There were some strong contenders already at the club, but they had not been there very long and I felt I needed more knowledge and experience. I managed to appoint Anthony James (Jacko), who is well known in Devon and Cornwall and had been at Killiow Golf Club in Truro as Course

Manager for ten years (three years service now with us). We have a great team in place with Shaun Trudgeon (twelve years' service) - NVQ Level 3 Greenkeeping, Tony Blyth (five years) - NVQ Level 2 Greenkeeping and apprentice Tom Tiffin (nine months)."

Perranporth is a par 72 natural links course and measures a modest 6,252 yards from the back tees. Often described as a links course on steroids it has multiple blind holes and, except for a little lengthening here and there, its layout has remained virtually unchanged, due to lack of funds.

The course was constructed on what was no more than a sand-strewn wasteland of tin mining remains, lashed by wind and rain over the centuries. "It is a headland with sand blown on top and I believe the dunes are amongst some of the highest sand dunes in Europe. What's unusual here is that all the mounding at the side of the fairways is sand, but a lot of the fairways themselves are quite silty with mine waste. So, everybody thinks the course is on pure sand, but when we verti-drain we can only go down to four inches - it is not all that it seems!"

Rob believes if you have been entrusted



Left to right: Shaun Trudgeon, Tony Blyth, Rob Cook, Anthony James (Jacko) and Tom Tiffin





with the maintenance of a links course, one of your duties should be to promote finer grasses such as fescue. "On a site like this, putting on loads of fertiliser and lots of water is sacrilege."

The fescue dominated greens were constructed naturally and the profile is described as sandy soil.

"Since the 1980s, Billy had religiously been topdressing with Rufford 1742 (a 70/30 mix), which has built up and provided a beautiful

free draining profile, able to hold on to nutrients."

The fully automatic irrigation system was installed in 1990, which Rob describes as 'on its knees'. It's something the club have been looking to upgrade for the last few years, but money is the stumbling block. "We make the best of what we have and we do a lot of hosing, as we struggle with pressure.

We only really water the greens to preserve the current system. There are

sprinklers on the tees, but we only water the par threes; the more we use the system, the more it fails. Just over three years ago, the club upgraded the pumphouse and tank which was great, however we have had to reduce the pressure because if we used it to its full capacity, the pipes and joints would burst. When we fire the system back up in early spring, we usually have around five or six leaks, in fact, most of lockdown was spent fixing leaks - it can be soul destroying."



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Getting Personal

Rob Cook - he has a passion for fescue and the seaside



Who are you? Rob Cook, Course Manager at Perranporth Golf Club.

Family status. Live with my partner Ellen.

Who's your hero and why? Billy Mitchell - fifty plus years pursuing Fescue.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Being Course Manager at Perranporth.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? Crikey, you have settled down.

Which famous people wind you up? Politicians.

What job would you love, other than your own? Professional golfer.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Falling off my motorbike outside of school.

What is your favourite film? Shawshank Redemption.

What scares you? Heights.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Lifetime of Golf - Brad Pitt.

What is your favourite sport? Golf.

What would you cast into Room 101? Perranporth's irrigation system.

What's your favourite smell? The seaside.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? The building of Perranporth Golf Club in 1927.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To help make all links courses fine grass dominant.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? James Braid, Bill Nicholson (Spurs) and Tiger Woods.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? It is hard to do nothing.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? 80% of golfers will never play to a handicap of less than 18.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Bee Gees - Saturday Night Fever, Queen - Greatest Hits and Adele - 21.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Toro ProCore 648.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Passionate, hardworking and enthusiastic.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman/greenkeeper? Ask as many questions as you can.

What talent would you like to have? Be able to sing.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? National Service.



The course is extremely free draining, which enables play all year round. "Last June, it rained pretty much all the way through which meant we had a couple of pockets of standing water on the course, but they were not really in play. If anything, the course performs better in winter when it is green and lush. In summer, it is very dry and tends to burn off pretty quickly ... if there is anywhere that could do with irrigation, it is here, as it dries out rapidly."

Rob gives me the breakdown of his maintenance regime for the greens throughout the year. "During summer, we cut no lower than 4mm, then gradually rise that to 5mm before going to 6mm in winter.

We have four Baroness LM56 hand mowers and a Toro GreensMaster TriFlex 3420. With staff being furloughed, it has been difficult this year but, typically, we will try and hand mow two to three times a week

with the groomers and try and do a double pass, then use the Toro over the weekend." I asked Rob why he swaps between the two methods of cutting? "I just love the finish the hand mowers give us and we only have groomers on those mowers. All the guys here are passionate about hand mowing and it saves wear and tear on the surrounds; because it's an old-fashioned course, it can be difficult to turn the triple. Over the years, I have carried out a lot of hand mowing myself and I would adopt this to all tees and greens if I had the resources."

Throughout the season, Rob doesn't undertake scarifying on the greens and has carried out from where Billy left off with the use of graminicides. "When I first started, I applied four applications in spring and autumn (before Rescue was taken off the market), to ensure I had eradicated all the ryegrass and Yorkshire Fog.





I am a confessed Toro fan, but my view is for individual jobs. I will pick whatever machine is best, irrespective of the colour

Controversially, the next step was Laser, which kills everything apart from fescue and poa including the highland bentgrass; this is horrible and leggy (similar to creeping-bent) and you would see platelets of it, which would catch your eye and look awful. Before applying Laser, I had undertaken a lot of overseeding with chewings and creeping fescue then, in August last year, I bit the bullet and went for it. It did exactly what it says on the tin and killed all the bentgrass,

however some of the bare patches filled back in with poa over the winter. So, we sprayed again at the end of spring to pick up anything we had missed or any regrowth and the results have been tremendous; we are pretty much fescue dominated now. The fescue does not respond well to scarification and verti-cutting, so we only groom."

Aeration on the greens tends to be carried out more in winter using the Toro ProCore 648 as well as the Verti-Drain, when

they have a little bit more moisture. "Every couple of months, they will get a solid tine at varying depths, so as not to create a pan using the 648. It's a fantastic piece of kit; probably my favourite machine in the shed."

"Our renovation weeks are relatively simple. We will overseed using the Toro ProCore using blunt tines to pot seed six to seven bags a time of a fescue mix, which works a treat. I apply a granular



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We make the best of what we have and we do a lot of hosing, as we struggle with pressure. We only really water the greens to preserve the current system

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seaweed from Ocean Knowledge and a 70/30 topdressing.”

Every June/July, STRI will visit to take soil samples from the greens. Rob feels this may become unnecessary though since adopting a nutrient programme of only applying seaweed alongside a monthly top-dressing regime since last August. “I apply ten tonnes a month of Rufford 1742 topdressing, giving me a total of 120 tonnes per year. For us, this is like a feed because the fescue loves it. The seaweed adds a nice balance of NPK and trace elements. Over the years, I have tried to determine the best seaweed, but you just can't! Some people say heat treated is best, some say cold-pressed, but then you also have the freeze-thaw action. Add to this the different types of seaweed and it's a minefield. I apply 20 l/ha of seaweed every few weeks, but I will mix five litres of a cold-pressed, five litres of a heat-treated, five litres of the freeze-thaw action and five litres of Kelp pack. I do this because I do not know which is best and I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket; it seems a bit overkill, but it works for us.”

Most of the machinery at the club is on hire purchase and all the maintenance is carried out in-house, with only the regrinding

being farmed out. “My deputy, Jacko, is pretty hands-on and a good mechanic, so he carries out all of the servicing, which greatly helps reduce our costs. We look after our machines and, if I buy a machine like the front-line mowers, I try and hold on to them for ten years. I am a confessed Toro fan, but my view is for individual jobs. I will pick whatever machine is best, irrespective of the colour. The Baroness hand mowers are absolutely brilliant and leave an excellent finish.”

Ecology is fundamental to a club like Perranporth with it being such a natural golf course and this is their main selling point. “I think this course is one, if not the most, natural and raw links in Cornwall and this is something we should market. It may not be the easiest of courses to play and you may not love it, but I urge everyone to visit because it is pretty old school and natural. Keeping scrub down is a big thing here, and we work with the wildlife trust.”

Some of the dune system is part the Penhale Dunes; a complex of sand dunes and a protected area for its wildlife on the north Cornwall coast. It is the most extensive system of sand dunes in Cornwall and is believed to be the landing site of Saint





Piran. Dating from the 6th century, St Piran's Oratory is thought to be one of the oldest Christian sites in Britain. The remains were discovered in the late 18th century and, in 2014, the covering sand was removed to reveal a building more than a thousand years old in a good state of preservation. "We work closely with the dune ranger and, two years ago, we started to undertake quite a bit of burning to thin out the Marram and burn the rye grasses, with great results. The

following year we got a lot of wildflowers coming through which attract bees and other wildlife. This year, we have sprayed quite a lot of the scrub that has crept in such as pampas grass and cotoneaster, which should not be on a links course. We also attract a lot of wildlife including deer, foxes, badgers, kestrels, peregrine falcons and one of the most exciting resurgence we have is the Cornish chuff - which, at one time, was pretty rare."



I have always had a passion for links golf. It is such a natural site and it ticked all the boxes for me; fescue dominated greens and low inputs



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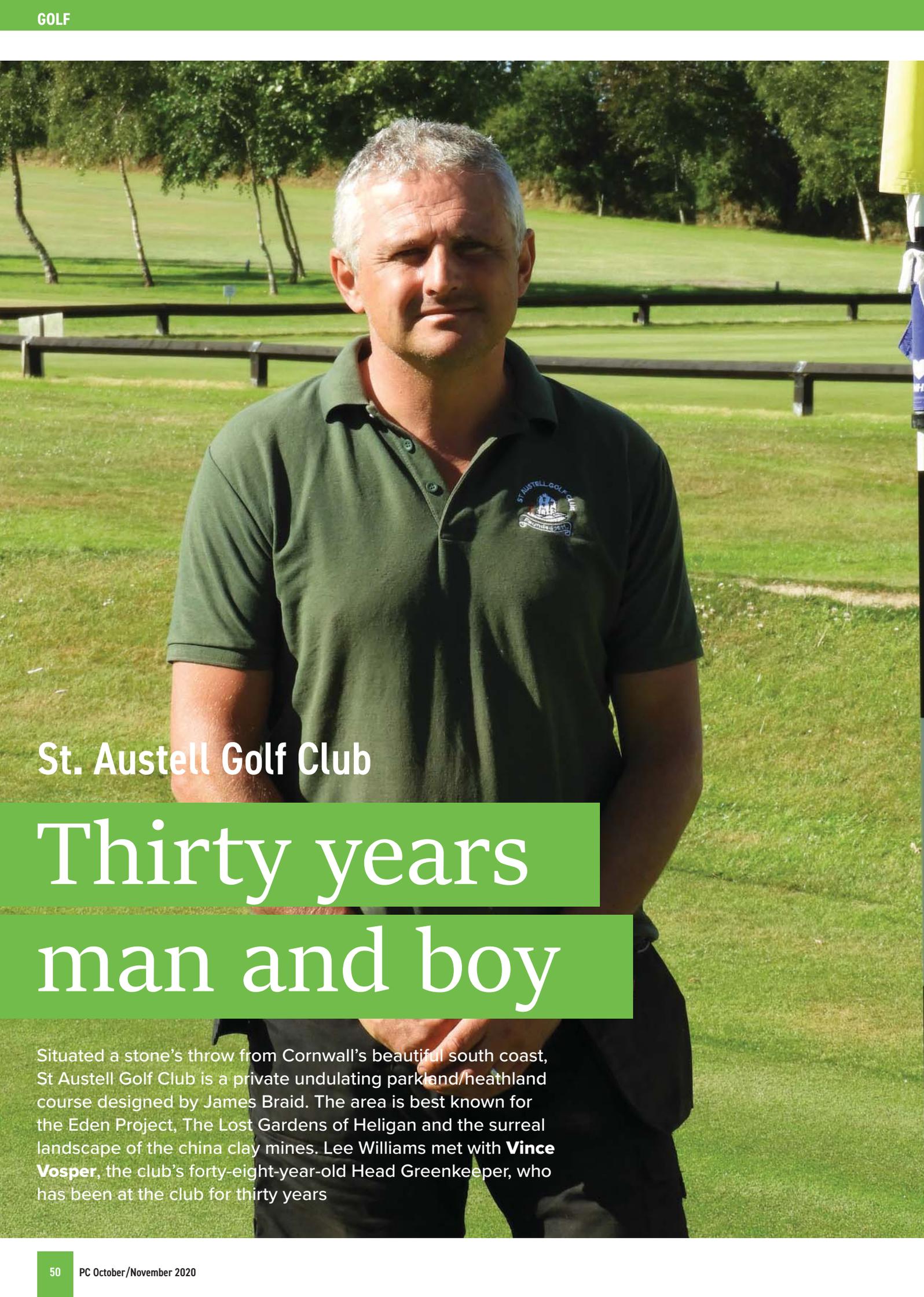
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A man with short, grey hair is standing on a golf course. He is wearing a dark green polo shirt with a small crest on the left chest that reads "ST AUSTELL GOLF CLUB" and "founded 1881". The background shows a green golf course with a wooden fence and trees under a bright sky.

St. Austell Golf Club

Thirty years man and boy

Situated a stone's throw from Cornwall's beautiful south coast, St Austell Golf Club is a private undulating parkland/heathland course designed by James Braid. The area is best known for the Eden Project, The Lost Gardens of Heligan and the surreal landscape of the china clay mines. Lee Williams met with **Vince Vosper**, the club's forty-eight-year-old Head Greenkeeper, who has been at the club for thirty years



We have done what we can to work with the changing weather patterns and to try and keep the course open as much as possible. If the golfers cannot play golf, they do not rejoin, and we do not get paid

After leaving school, Vince Vosper was looking through the local paper when he saw an advert for an apprentice greenkeeper at St Austell Golf Club. He applied and got the position, where he spent twelve months on a YTS scheme. “Sadly, when the year was up, there were no jobs available, so I ended up working in a factory in Bodmin. Twelve months later, a job opened up, and I came back as an apprentice/assistant greenkeeper. Through the years, I have worked my way up to my current position which I have been in for the last eight years.”

Like so many of us who started out in the sports turf industry as an apprentice, he was given many of what would be classed as the menial tasks like raking bunkers, strimming etc. But this never put him off wanting to pursue a career as a greenkeeper. “When I first arrived, they were building the first and second greens,

and the guy who was in charge back then had me screening soil for weeks on end. Then, of course, I did not get a job, but when I returned, I was doing everything, and I have enjoyed every minute of it.”

Vince attended horticultural college in Devon and gained all the relevant qualifications, including NVQ Level 2 and 3 in sports turf management, spraying, chainsaw and tractor certificates.

Always on hand and consulting Vince on all things turf is David Bevan, Technical Sales Area Manager for Agrovista Amenity. “He lives local to the course, so he is always on hand to come in and have a chat. Dave gives us advice on what chemicals and fertilisers to use. He is an ex-greenkeeper from Bodmin Golf Club, so it is handy to pick his brain. You should not be too proud to ask for advice here and there, especially in this job. He is terrific; he’s literally at the end of the phone. He will also take soil samples for us every two years, which I find is good enough.”





The Engine House at the 3rd hole

The eighteen-hole course is built on an old farmer's fields and, up at the top end of the course, is an old tin mine. "The soil profile on what was agricultural land is perfect but, when you get to the top, it becomes clay with shale in places. There's also a lot of undulations due to the old mine shafts."

Over the years, the greenkeeping team has worked hard to improve the soil profile of the greens and the way they play. "We have a mixture of greens. Some of them were just cut out of the ground seventy years ago and are very clayey. The others were built from the ground up with proper foundations thirty years ago. We have carried out a lot of deep aeration, added tonnes of sand and built drains into the ones which were mown out. I feel we have now got to a point where they are all pretty much even."

The Watermation irrigation system is now thirty years old and is starting to cause Vince a lot of headaches. "It is quite delicate; so far this year we have fixed five water leaks! We recently replaced all the old sprinklers with Rainbird heads, which has made the system much more efficient and they are a lot easier

to adjust. We have irrigation on most tees and all greens, but nothing on the fairways."

"We collect our water from the old mine shaft at the top of the course in the engine house. The water is then extracted via a pump into a big tank, which came from one of the clay pits around here. It holds about two hours' worth of water and takes three to four hours to fill up."

As well as adding extra drainage in the greens, Vince has carried out a lot of drainage work throughout the course. "Since I have been here, we have completely drained the tenth as that had no drainage in it and was absolutely shocking. I started stripping the turf off one morning, and I deliberately stripped off more than I could possibly do to force their hand a bit to get me a mini digger and the right stuff. I dug a circle drain around the green and then linked up every six feet. It's absolutely transformed it. We have installed drains down the side of the seventh fairway and dug drains in a lot of localised areas."

Whilst on my trip down in Cornwall, a recurring conversation centred around climate change. Vince was no different,



I mow the greens now and look out at the longer grass waving in the wind, and I think that looks really nice



Baal Pit



We are now looking to improve root development and mass, whilst introducing a better environment for the finer bent grasses to thrive

and he too has noticed the changes in weather patterns. "I think climate change is occurring. When I was younger, summer was in summer! Now, down here, it can be baking hot any time from April onwards. Seasons are coming earlier and they are definitely wetter. We have had some of the wettest winters in memory. The last two winters were absolutely shocking, with the course closing because of rain almost every day. But we have done what we can to work with the

changing weather patterns and to try and keep the course open as much as possible. If the golfers cannot play golf, they do not rejoin, and we do not get paid. We have also experienced a lot higher winds which have taken out a lot of the fir trees. Over the years, they have steadily been blown down one by one to the point that what is left are skeletons; they look awful. I have been saying for a while now we just need to get rid of what is remaining, so this year we took

them out and removed the roots. Hopefully, this will give us a little bit less chainsaw work over the winter."

Vince talks me through the weekly maintenance programme around the course. "Throughout the summer, we cut the greens at 3.5mm. As a greenkeeper, you want to keep a bit of protection on them, but when people start to say they are slow, especially leading up to golf week, we will drop them down to 3mm."



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Getting Personal

Vince Vosper - he loves F1 and is scared of the wife

Who are you? I am Vince Vosper the Head Greenkeeper at St Austell Golf Club.

Family status. Married to Joanna. Dad to Lewis and Harry and stepdad to Sam, Annie and Lara.

Who's your hero and why? My brother George who has overcome so much in his lifetime. He rose through the ranks in the Army to Major, served in various British wars, survived the British Midland plane crash, has been a fantastic cyclist and, this year, survived cancer and life support.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? We are about to hold the County Championships. Since becoming Head Greenkeeper, I have seen the club go from strength to strength and that makes me very proud having worked here for the past thirty one years!

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? Some bleddy boy! He did alright for himself.

Which famous people wind you up? As Ricky Gervais has often said - any 'celebrities' who like to educate every one else, but they never got a GCSE between them!

What job would you love, other than your own? Who wouldn't want to be a Formula 1 driver?

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Getting on an amazing gameshow in Mozambique, thinking I would be awesome ... only to be shown up by my wife.

What is your favourite film? A Bridge Too Far.

What scares you? My wife's mother and my wife does a good job at times too, but she is 100% my soul mate!

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Didn't Turn Out Too shabby - George Clooney, but I expect he will be busy.

What is your favourite sport? F1.

What would you cast into Room 101? Crocs.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Being in mission control when the first moon landing took place.



Do you have a lifetime ambition?

To cycle from Lands End to John 'O' Groats.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

Jeremy Clarkson, Ayrton Senna and Barry Sheen.

What's the best advice you have ever been given?

Happy wife, happy life.

What's your favourite piece of trivia?

What is the worlds largest desert? The answer is Antarctica.

What's your favourite smell?

Castrol R.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island?

Show of Hands - A Show of Hands, Bon Jovi - Best Of and Eminem - Curtain Call.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked?

Why do we have temporaries, it's not raining where we live (they never live near the course either)!

What's your favourite piece of kit?

My BMW motorbike - oh you mean work ... The Toro Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Honest, witty and lucky.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson/greenkeeper?

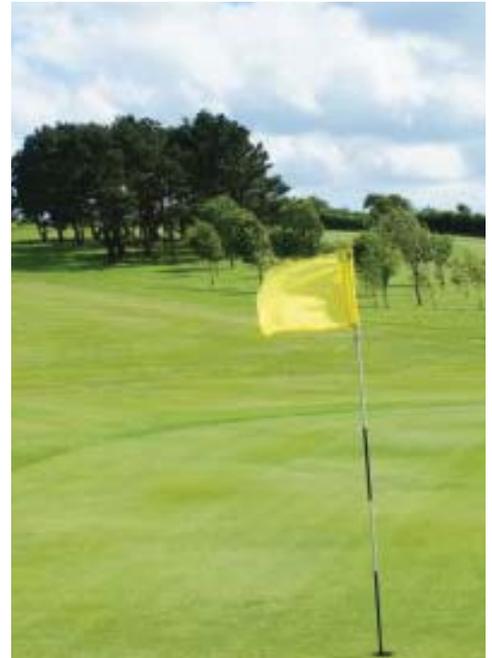
Get yourself a wide range of skills and don't be scared to take things on.

What talent would you like to have?

To be more computer literate.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?

To stop political correctness and start living in the real world again.



"We mainly cut the greens with the Toro Greensmaster Triflex in the main playing season as there are only four of us. Then, from mid-October through to March, we will cut with the hand mowers at a height of 5-6mm. Every two weeks, we will switch between verti-cutting and grooming depending on how they look, how they are responding, weather conditions and how our water system is."

"For aeration, we have our own SISIS roller/tiner that goes out on tees, greens and temporaries every two weeks in summer with needle tines. In winter, we use a thicker tine. At the beginning and the end of the season, we bring in a contractor to verti-drain. I would love to have more options when it comes to aeration, but we are not a big money club. You see all the guys on the forums with their Toro Procore 648 and I would love to have one but, unfortunately, we will only see it on a demo knowing we are very unlikely to get one. So, we just have to do our best with what we have available."

"We aim to apply between fifty and sixty tonnes of topdressing a year. By the end of





July, we had already managed to get twenty-nine tonnes down. I have just had another twenty-nine tonnes delivered which we will aim to get down over the next few months.”

In renovation week and at the end of the season, Vince will overseed the greens with bents and fescues, but he tells me he has tried something new on one or two of the problem greens. “We generally overseed with five bags of Limagrain MM10 grass seed, which is a mixture of Fescues and Browntop Bent, at the beginning of August and again with three bags mid to end of March. Two of our lower greens - four

and six - have really been struggling, so Dave suggested overseeding with a Dwarf Ryegrass mix. I always say I do not want to go near Ryegrass, but I thought I'd give it a go. Those two greens have now completely transformed and we now have fantastic coverage on there, so fair play. The only thing I was concerned about was could I cut down low enough, but we have cut them down to 3.5mm with no effort. It is definitely something we will continue to do.”

Within Vince's programme, Dave Bevan has introduced Biomass sugar, as an alternative way of providing greens



We have done what we can to work with the changing weather patterns and to try and keep the course open as much as possible

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When I was younger, summer was in summer! Now, down here, it can be baking hot any time from April onwards and they are definitely wetter

nutrition through carbon and sugars. He also introduced him to high seaweed feeds, along with a new wetting agent programme and the use of Humic and Fulvic acid.

Dave comments: "Historically, Vince chased colour, but I have changed his mind set of 'green is good' and we are now looking to improve root development and mass, whilst introducing a better environment for the finer bent grasses to thrive. This programme has contributed to less reliance on fungicides and we have reduced his applications by half in the first two years of working with him."

Five years ago, the club more or less



replaced their whole fleet of equipment on a five-year hire purchase deal through Devon Garden Machinery. This included two Toro Greensmaster Triflex mowers - one for the tees and one for greens, a Toro Reelmaster Sidewinder and a zero-turn mower. "It was great to have all the new machines, but five years is a long time in this job. The new Toro machines are excellent, but we have had them for six years and some things are now just breaking on a regular basis."

"Most of the servicing on the machines is undertaken by ourselves. I buy in a service kit and change the oil and filters myself. For any repairs we cannot fix ourselves, and for cylinder regrinds, we use a local guy who is very good."

Like China Fleet Golf Club and Looe Golf Club, which I also visited while in Devon and Cornwall, Vince has suffered with leatherjackets. "We've had a problem with leatherjackets for the last two years. It was a choice between nematode control or Syngenta's Acelepryn. I listened to Dave's advice on that and went with Acelepryn, but it is difficult to say what results we have had from the product at the moment. We still have a leatherjacket problem, but the rates

that they let you apply this type of product are not amazing. I think it will be a case of seeing what happens when we apply again this year to see how well it has worked. The seagulls don't seem to be tearing up the greens as much as they were, so it must be having some effect."

When Vince first started working on the course, everything was manicured from greens to rough, but this has begun to change as he now appreciates the advantages of letting some areas grow up. "The Greens Chairman has a passion for heather and gorse and we've allowed many natural areas of the course to grow, attracting birds and wildlife. I mow the greens now and look out at the longer grass waving in the wind, and I think that looks really nice. I think it is all part of how things have been changing over the years. We have an area between the eighth tee and twelfth which we call the eco-rough, which we just let go, and it now has some wildflowers growing in there."

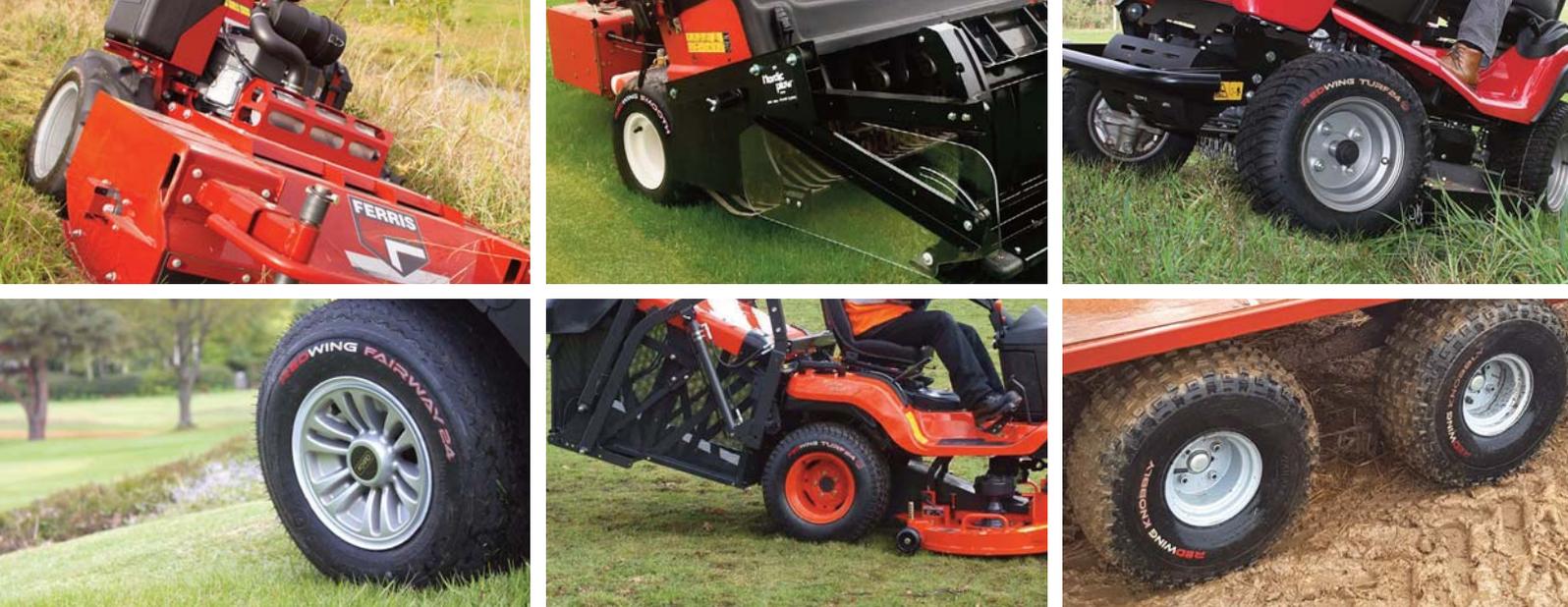
"Last year, we entered a tree planting programme and a large number of trees were donated by members, which were planted at the start of lockdown."

Vince concluded: "I am lucky to work with such a great team who are all dedicated to the course and committed to achieve excellent standards. The Greens Committee have always supported everything we do, which is brilliant for both us and the course."

What's in the shed

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Toro Z mower
Toro sidewinder
Toro fairway mower RM5500
Wessex rotary trail gangmower
Jacobsen hybrid handmowers x 2





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Warrington Wolves

Down to the Wire!

To get an idea of what the new normal is like working for a top Super League rugby club and the challenges a groundsman now faces getting a pitch ready for a COVID secure game, Lee Williams met up with the Warrington Wolves dedicated and long-serving head groundsman **Melvin Jones** who celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday in October

It has been an extraordinary and challenging time for all rugby league clubs and groundsmen around the country this year. The Betfred Super League started with their season opener on the 30th January between Wigan Warriors and Warrington Wolves. This meant that, unlike football which was three quarters of the way through their season, rugby league clubs had only managed to play a handful of games before the coronavirus pandemic halted their season.

The Super League resumed on the 2nd August with the first three rounds of fixtures being played at the Emerald Headingley Stadium - the home of the Leeds Rhinos - behind closed doors. On the 29th and 30th

August the tenth round of fixtures were to be played at the Halliwell Jones Stadium, the home of 'The Wire' (in reference to the wire-drawing industry in the town), which meant Mel had to prepare the pitch to cope with five matches over two days.

Mel talks me through what the situation was like when they were first told that no more rugby league games would be played for the foreseeable future. "Two things happened more or less straightaway. The squad had been playing and training leading up to lockdown. So immediately, this stopped the first-team training on the stadium pitch, which in a way was a positive as they train here a lot. Then the brakes were put on financially, and I had to work my



way around having no fertiliser, seed etc. My assistant was furloughed, so this meant a lot of my plans had to be readjusted and rethought through, because you cannot do what two can do on your own."

Mel was hoping to carry out a full pitch renovation on the pitch this year, but that will now have to be put on the back burner until next season. This, combined with the lack of funding, is causing him some real headaches. "I now have to rely on my instincts and the experiences I have picked up over the many years I have been in the industry. I have been here on my own working on the pitch, and there has been no one else in except for the stadium manager. I am glad of that in a way. The fact that I was

kept on has meant I at least kept myself sane but, on the flip side, we are all very uncertain where we are going with it all."

The furlough scheme is due to end at the end of October, and Mel is worried what it will mean for the many staff and his assistant who work for the club who are still on the scheme. "I am unable to get a straight answer about when I will get my member of staff back. It is a worry for all sports clubs around the country, not just rugby league."

I asked Mel when he first heard that he was to hold round ten of the Super League season and what challenges he faced having to prepare the surface for five consecutive games over Saturday and Sunday? "The RFL was tinkering around with

//

Those who are running the budgets may be thinking about where to make cuts. My experience tells me the grounds department will be one of the first places they look, unfortunately!



It was hard work getting the pitch ready in a short space of time as well as disinfecting all the posts, post pads and flags before and after the games. After the last game at 8:00pm, we had to prep ready for Sunday's games

different formats, and I heard at the beginning of August of the finalised plans for the restart. I had managed to keep the pitch ticking over since March with minimal inputs of fertiliser, using what I could get my hands on and running the pitch lean. I had already started to bring the pitch back at the beginning of August when I was given the funds to get some fertiliser. It was at this point that I heard we would be holding the five games at the end of August."

"Working on my own, I have had to adapt the way I work by putting more hours in; starting earlier and finishing later."

The week leading up to the games seemed strange to Mel going from being on his own each day with not a soul in sight to a hive of activity around the pitch which meant extra work. "An example of this was we had the electronic signage being put in for the televised games. At the last moment, on the Friday night before the first game on Saturday, I had to alter all the pitch lines as the original markings did not give enough room for people to agree there was a three-metre gap between the touchline and the signs. So that meant both sides of the pitch and the dotted lines all had to be moved in and the original lines greened out. I have found that you have to give yourself that little bit of leeway for those incidents that crop up but again, with experience, you know how to work around those things."

Mel explains how the weekend went from starting early on a Saturday morning until the end late on Sunday night. "Until I arrived Saturday morning, I was unaware that I could not go on the pitch for three hours before the game. With the first game set to kick off at 1:00pm, that meant I had to be off the pitch by 9:30am, factoring in the warm-up period."

"It was hard work getting the pitch ready in a such short space of time as well as disinfecting all the posts, post pads and flags with Huwa San from Agrovista Amenity before and after the games. After the last game at 8:00pm, we had to prep ready for Sunday's games. Luckily, I had my assistant Adam Jackson, who came in on a volunteer



basis, and my son Damien helped us out too as he understands you cannot let people go through this on their own. Sometimes, it gets too much with the physical expectations of the job, especially when you are getting older. We worked until 10:00pm that night with divoting, then Damien rolled each side of the lines whilst I followed behind double marking the lines back in.”

“On Sunday morning, we arrived at the club at 6:00am and rolled all of the pitch as that was all it required. With three games

being played, we were not able to do much in the way of maintenance on the pitch. It was a matter of getting the posts, post pads and flags disinfected and, no sooner had the Huwa San dried, they were back on the pitch. Apart from the long days away from home, and whether certain people appreciated the hard work that went in to get the games on, I was pleased with how everything went and how well the pitch played.”

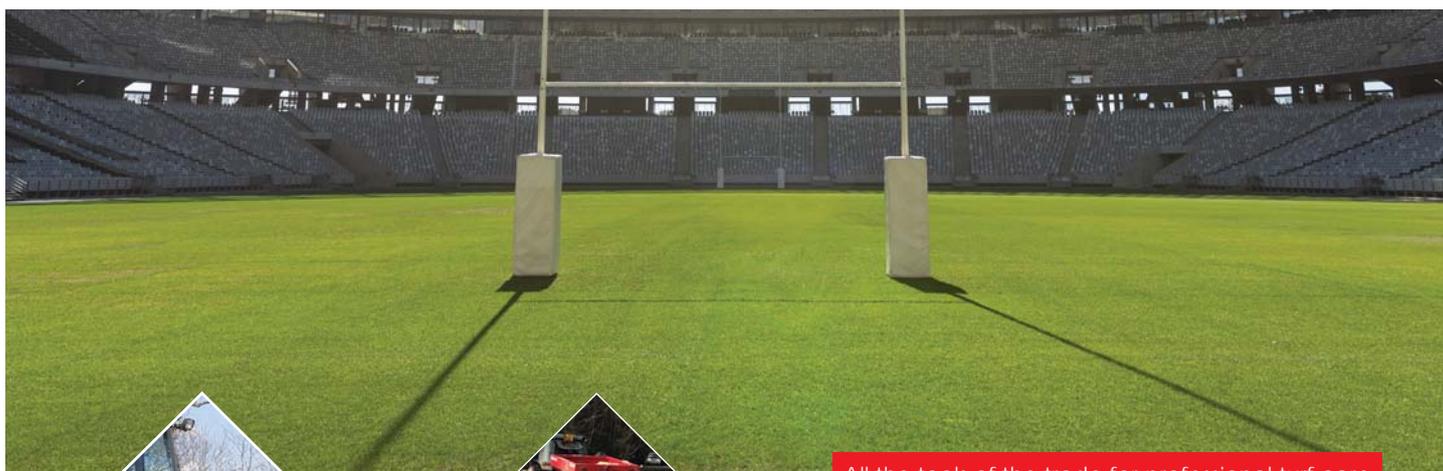
The next fixture at the Halliwell Jones

Stadium was on the Friday 25th September against the Catalans Dragons, but this was supposed to be the second round of five games to be held at the club. Luckily for Mel, this was held at the Totally Wicked Stadium, the home of St Helens RFC. After this set of games were played, the schedule went back to one game a week.

Mel has been in the sportsturf industry for many years and is now at a point where he is considering retirement as the job is taking its toll on him. “I got into the industry in 1976.



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It seems a long time ago; forty-four years now. I came out of a football career with a bad injury and found myself working for Cheshire Education in the Warrington area. We looked after all the school playing fields, and I learned a lot about the job and different aspects of life in my fifteen years there. Then suddenly, the Conservative government of the time put everything out to contract. I found myself unemployed for a short time until I was offered a job with the contracting firm that had taken over. I worked for them for ten years, and that was a real eye-opener. It was all about money and speed, which was not the right thing for me."

"At the end of that ten years, I was seconded to look after Warrington's original stadium pitch at Wilderspool, whether I liked it or not! I was not too pleased as they had no equipment and would use the pitch frequently for training and games. But then I

thought well this would test what I had learned at Reaseheath College when I did my City & Guilds in Sportsturf and a Management Studies course in Crewe all those years ago, which I had never had the chance to put into practice."

"The people that ran the club, and the coaches, were very kind and respected me, so I actually jumped ship in 1999 and worked directly for the club."

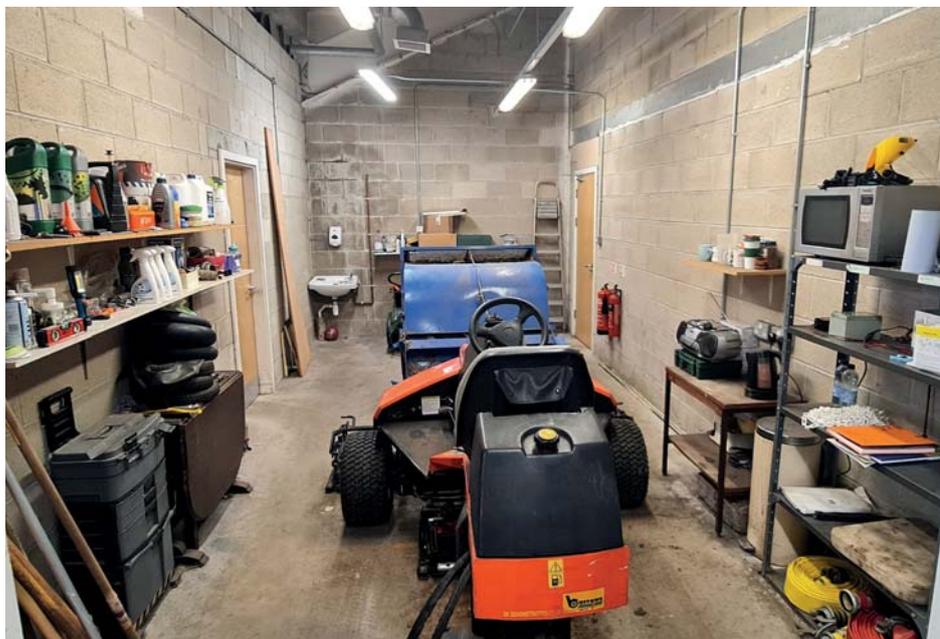
Five years into Mel's career at Warrington, they had a new stadium built which was partly down to pressure from the Rugby League who were not happy with the health and safety aspect at some of the old league grounds. Being from the area, I heard Tesco had something to do with the new ground which is situated right next to the stadium. I asked Mel could he clarify this for me. "Yes, it was all to do with trying to get a Tesco retail park built by BARR Construction who built this stadium as part of the deal but, in

all honesty, I wouldn't let them build me a toilet. The land which was allocated for the stadium build was on the site of the old Walkers of Warrington Brewery."

"One of my jobs in 2003 was to monitor the new stadium build, and it broke my heart watching them construct the pitch. You do not construct a pitch in the way they did and, since opening the ground, we had many issues with it."

Mel has been instrumental in solving the problems faced by the pitch from the start, whilst taking BARR to task alongside the club. "You don't build pitches like this and get away with it, something I have learned being at the forefront of trying to solve these construction problems. With the help of John Mallinson and the STRI, we were able to highlight the problems that existed. We kept records of all their findings, which proved to be very important and enabled me to help the club haul the company over





You don't build pitches like this and get away with it, something I have learned being at the forefront of trying to solve these construction problems

the table before it went to court to say 'this is wrong and here is the evidence'."

"The club then got funding to re-establish the pitch so, in 2007, John Mallinson came in with his team and put in a proper drainage and irrigation system. Since this work has been carried out, we have been on the up. It still needs monitoring and things doing like any other stadium pitch."

"Coming back to Covid-19, this has put a block on what I wanted to do this year and could easily affect what we do next season."

Mel wanted to mention the man that he looked up to when he was first starting his career and took a lot of inspiration from. "I was lucky to know a lovely old chap called Arthur Hindley who was an old craftsman, one of the best, who always pointed me in

the right direction. I have a lot to be indebted to him for. Sadly, he is no longer with us."

With all his years in the industry, and with his experience as Warrington's long-serving head groundsman, I thought it was only right to get his thoughts on the industry. "One thing that always concerns me about this industry, and it all started when I was asked

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Getting Personal

Mel Jones - the answer's Yes ... or Cat Stevens!

Who are you? Mel Jones
Head Groundsman at
Warrington Wolves.

Family status? Married With
two sons (Damian & Dean).

Who's your hero and why?
Denis Law - Man United's
best goal scorer there has
ever been.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far?
The respect rugby league people have given me.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? Why are you still working?

Which famous people wind you up? Politicians.

What job would you love, other than your own? Any job
trying to help the environment.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life?
The first speech to an audience.

What is your favourite film? The Godfather Part 1.

What scares you? Running out of time to relax and enjoy
myself.

**What would your autobiography be called... and who
would play you in the film?** Mr Persistence - my son
would play me.

What is your favourite sport? Rugby League.

What would you cast into Room 101? Disrespectful
people.

**Which historical time and place would you most like to
visit?** 1966 World Cup Final.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To ride a racehorse.

**Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a
dinner party?** Mikahl Gorbachev, my dad and George
Best.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Be
true to yourself.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? De-stress by
staying calm.

What's your favourite smell? Cinnamon.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island?
Any by Cat Stevens, Thin Lizzy and Yes.

**What's the daftest work-related question you have ever
been asked?** I didn't know groundsman could get dressed
up?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Charterhouse Verti-
Drain.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?
Honest. Respectful. Funny.

**What is the single most useful thing you could tell a
16-year-old groundsman?** Be a good listener.

What talent would you like to have? To play the guitar

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced?
Respect anyone you come into contact with.



//

Something is driving the industry that I am not quite comfortable with. We must have a pitch like this, we must use this piece of equipment, we must use this particular fertiliser. Where does it all end?



to look at Desso pitches at a couple of Premier League grounds, is that something is driving the industry that I am not quite comfortable with. We must have a pitch like this, we must use this piece of equipment, we must use this particular fertiliser. Where does it all end? You can have a circumstance where you have a pitch that is top class in construction, with the very best equipment at your disposal... and then your budget gets cut! Then you are left worrying about how you are going to manage people's expectations."

"One example is the amount of money that goes into watering pitches because of the free-draining nature of pitches we have now. If the Wolves did not have access to borehole water this March and April, our pitch would have been dead as we could not afford to run the irrigation system

from the mains. I am concerned we can see good pitches now as sport gets back underway, but we all must start wondering how far this goes."

"Covid-19 is not going away anytime soon. It has given many people a shock, and those who are running the budgets may be thinking about where to make cuts. My experience tells me the grounds department will be one of the first places they look, unfortunately!"



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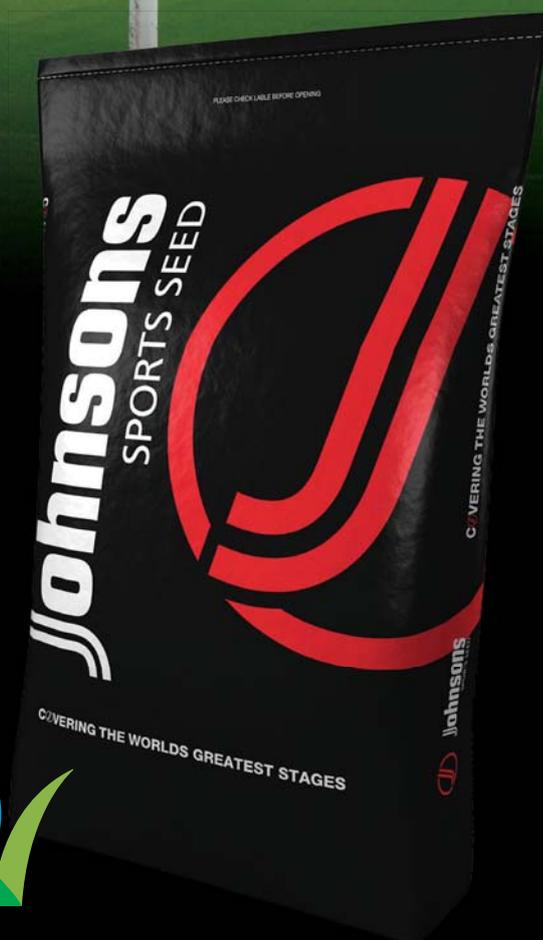


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Towcestrians

The man with a plan



Head groundsman Tom Waldock



The current 'situation' may have put many hopes and dreams on hold but, at Towcestrians Sports Club, it's just another minor challenge in the progress of an ambitious development designed to bring several of this Northamptonshire town's sports together and raise standards, whilst enhancing an established community facility. Jane Carley meets the club's Head Groundsman, **Tom Waldock**, to find out more



The 3G pitch in development (background) seen from the renovated existing rugby pitches

On the outskirts of the town, Towcestrians Sports Club has hosted twenty-five rugby teams from minis to the 1st XV on two pitches, whilst the ground also offered facilities for cricket - the outfield made up from the rugby pitches - tennis, softball and netball, plus a gym in the clubhouse. The local hockey team have played offsite at Northampton for a number of years.

Plans drawn up in 2018 include two more rugby pitches, a state of the art sand filled synthetic pitch for hockey and training, new tennis courts, of which two would be indoors, and for the first time, a dedicated cricket pitch.

When Tom Waldock was recruited from Wasps' Ricoh Arena for the role of head groundsman at Towcestrians last October, the project was still in its infancy.

"I could see it was a tremendous opportunity and the proposals looked exciting. It was also much needed - the pitches were in a poor state from the amount of use they were getting. Together with the committee, I drew up a five year plan for the development and improvement of the grounds, but of course much of it has gone out of the window with Covid!"

Plans that were scrapped included scarifying and topdressing the existing pitches after the abrupt end of the 2019/20

season, although limited renovations were possible. Meanwhile, the two new rugby pitches were constructed and the 3G finished by this summer, allowing the hockey team to come home.

"Pitch three will be heavily used for training and, to counteract the clay soils - the fields were originally ridge-and-furrow farmland, a full drainage system has been installed at a cost of £105,000. It will be very useful for taking the strain off the other pitches," he says.

For Towcestrians Cricket Club, a new ground offers the opportunity to move up a level, with its dedicated outfield. Construction has been a mammoth task with 20,000 truck loads of soil brought in to level the undulating land, which will be encircled by a new perimeter road.

Tennis courts are amongst the final pieces of the jigsaw, the three outdoor hard courts relocating to increase car park space and being joined by a new sports hall with two indoor courts. An outdoor gym and 'trim trail' will also be developed, following the site's attractive tree-lined perimeter.

Social distancing measures have brought many changes for clubs as sports have returned to training this summer, and online booking of training slots has produced an unexpected benefit for maintenance regimes, Tom explains:

"Members are required to book a slot for a



'block' of the pitch on which to train, and we will continue this in the future as it allows us to select specific areas to repair or rest. We have some very good IT support amongst our committee and this is one way that it has really helped us."

Major renovations take place in May, straight after the pitch is traditionally used for a popular beer festival (pandemics permitting) and it's a tight schedule before training begins again in June. It looked a little different this year with the first, second and third XV plus the Colts playing forty-five minute socially distanced slots before a fifteen minute changeover. Youth and ladies teams started training in September, so even

without fixtures, the playing surfaces will have seen plenty of action before the winter sets in.

"There's a strong commercial side to the club's activities so, in a normal year, beer festivals, events related to the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, summer balls and a bike show all take their toll on the turf, but we built in a renovation fee to the hire so repairs are accounted for," he comments.

Budget cuts this year meant the plan to scarify to help rye establishment - the pitches are about 40% poa - was put on

The site plan, showing the new pitches, 3G and proposed tennis development

Softball/Baseball Pitch

New pitch marked on Rugby pitch 2
Back nets behind batting location

Rugby

Pitches 1 and 2 as existing
Pitch 3 widened, levelled and repositioned

New pitch 4 constructed on new land

Existing floodlighting to pitch 1 and new floodlighting to pitch 3 and part of pitch 4

New pitch drainage system incorporated into pitches 3 and 4

Clubhouse/Gym

Two storey Clubhouse extension with six new 'clean' changing rooms on ground floor and additional bar/function space on first floor

New multifunctional gymnasium with vieweing gallery from first floor

New 200 seat viewing terrace overlooking Rugby pitch 1

New patio in front of main clubhouse doors

Car Park

Tarmac and lined car parking providing approximately 100 extra spaces (320 total)

Trim trail/Jogging Track

Approximately 1.2km trim trail/jogging track around perimeter

10 Exercise stations around route

Cricket

Existing Cricket square retained

New Cricket pitch on new land

New Cricket pavilion serving new pitch

Access track and localised parking

Petanque

Three new Petanque pistes to encourage activities for players of all ages

Hockey

New floodlit all weather hockey pitch enabling Towcestrians Hockey to play 'Home' games at Towcester

Ability to enable training for other sports during adverse weather preventing damage to grass pitches

Tennis/Netball

Three new floodlit outdoor Tennis courts, overlaid with markings for Netball

Three new indoor/covered tennis courts with the ability to enable training for other sports during adverse weather conditions

Store/WC

Secure equipment storage for outdoor sports areas. Electrical distribution for future expansion

Localised WC facilities for outdoor sports areas



The shed, soon to be filled with lovely new kit!



A new 3G pitch has been recently completed, bringing hockey back to the club after a number of years, but also invaluable for training



Substantial infill works have been required to construct a dedicated cricket pitch



Developments at Towcestrians include a fully drained new pitch which will be heavily used for training

hold, but Tom was able to sow fifteen bags of MM60 in four directions, use 6:12:6 preseed fertiliser and put on 'lots and lots' of water.

"We use a Roll Cart sprinkler which takes twenty-four hours to water the pitches, so I was coming in three times a day, seven days a week to relocate the cart in the hot weather," he says.

The move to MM60 was inspired by the impressive results he had seen at the Ricoh, whilst the cricket square - a new sport for Tom, previously a rugby and football

specialist - is reseeded with MM50.

"A dedicated outfield will make a big difference to cricket renovations, although we were lucky this year, by the time play actually got started, the new seeds were grown in and ready!"

The fertiliser programme is drawn up with Mark Allen from Agrovista Amenity, starting with Sierrablen at three month intervals, then a Maxwell Premier product mid-season.

"It's very economical but gives a really quick green up," Tom comments.

Aeration is also key, currently carried out



My first task was to put together a budget for the equipment and materials needed and draw up detailed requirements

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Rugby pitch currently becomes cricket outfield for the summer



The existing square, overlapping pitches one and two, gets some end of season renovations



We've got our own Blec Groundbreaker but, whilst we await delivery of our new tractor, we're using a local contractor with a 2.2m Verti-Drain - he's a sponsor so we get good rates!

every six weeks.

"We've got our own Blec Groundbreaker but, whilst we await delivery of our new tractor, we're using a local contractor with a 2.2m Verti-Drain - he's a sponsor so we get good rates!"

Before Tom arrived at the club, much of the grounds work was done by volunteers, backed up by contractors, but the expansion of the facilities made it more viable to invest in a full-time groundsman and equipment.

"My first task was to put together a budget for the equipment and materials needed and draw up detailed requirements," he explains. "The committee have been forward thinking in accepting the recommendations, which will, in time, be paid back by the extra revenue that we can get from the facilities - the 3G pitch alone offers huge opportunities,

and we've already got strong links to organisations such as schools wanting to hire them."

Investment in machinery includes a Ransomes TR320 cylinder mower, intended just for the pitches but currently doing duty across the grounds.

"We have had a change of policy on tractors, swapping from a higher horsepower unit to a smaller, lighter Kubota compact that can be used on the pitches, but will still be capable of pulling the Groundbreaker, plus a topper that can offer higher workrates on the outfields. But, until the Kubota is delivered, I've been putting in about 40 hours a week with the Ransomes!"

A second hand lawn tractor is also on order to tow maintenance machinery for the 3G pitch - a dragmat, Sisis SSS 1000



After renovation, the main pitch looking green and healthy



Pitch four (background) in the construction phase in early summer



We want to make this the best local sports facility in the county. It's a great project and my goal is to continue to deliver good playing conditions. And, in spite of Covid, my five year plan is not far off track!

sweeper and triangular brush.

Marking out is another big job with up to four full size pitches or seven smaller pitches and five or six training areas.

"Once we're up and running there's less mowing to do, so I can string up a pitch and mark out in four or five hours."

It's a substantial workload, and Tom is assisted by two volunteers who have been involved with the club for several years.

"It's a big change for them, but they have been very keen to help; I've also been offered an apprentice, but I'd struggle for time to train someone at the moment."

With nothing on the calendar until January at the earliest, Tom is under no illusion that 2021 budgets may also take a hammering.

"We may lose out on topdressing and scarification once again, but I've emphasised that seed, aeration and selective spraying are a must, and the committee fully supports me. I know some groundsmen have issues with committees but, if you can explain your reasoning and point out the drawbacks of not investing in maintenance, a good committee such as this should always back you."

The ongoing developments would make

for an absorbing, challenging job for any groundsman, and Tom comments: "We want to make this the best local sports facility in the county. It's a great project and my goal is to continue to deliver good playing conditions. And, in spite of Covid, my five year plan is not far off track!"



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Clackmannan County Cricket Club

The Wee County

Clackmannanshire is the smallest county in the UK and is often referred to as 'The Wee County'. **Clackmannan County Cricket Club** was established in 1868, making it one of the oldest cricket clubs in Scotland. During their long history, the club has played at a variety of venues, but the side now call The Arns, on the outskirts of the county town Alloa, home



Gordon Oliver (left) and George Hutchinson

The Arns is where Lee Williams met up with three of the club's volunteers; Norman Robertson, who is the Ground Convenor, and helping him keep the ground in tip-top condition are George Hutchinson and Gordon Oliver. They are all long-serving members of the club.

George tells me there has not been a paid full-time groundsman since the 1950s. "Back then, we had two groundsmen. One of them would be a player or coach and would prepare the wicket for a Saturday's match. The other fellow would cut the outfield and work in the bar when required. We are now all amateurs who work together to keep the place tidy and provide the club with the best surface possible."

Norman first got involved with the club as a player in the 1970s and, one day, just

decided to help out, and he enjoyed doing it. "My first spell here was for about eight years, but then I stopped as it clashed with work. After I left, the legendary David Henderson took over the maintenance of the ground. David, like George, was County Captain and vice president for many years. He was very passionate about the ground and, if you ever wanted to find him, more often than not he would be down here."

Gordon adds; "He was a history teacher at the local school, so everybody knew him. He was a well-known face in the town. He was a very nice guy."

Norman had retired and had heard on the grapevine that David was not keeping very well and had throat cancer. "I thought I would go back to the club to find out if that was the case. I spoke to George, and he confirmed what I had heard. This meant

that David was not able to carry out his work, so I thought I would go back to help out as it would fill up my time, put something back into the club and, just as important, keep me fit."

Whilst Norman was working on the pitch, David would be sat by the outfield, keeping an eye on proceedings. "I would always come across to him and say, what do you think? Could you cast your experienced eye over certain things, to help keep him motivated."

Whilst speaking with the guys, I could see they had a lot of respect for David and appreciated everything he did for the club. Unfortunately, three years ago, he lost his fight with cancer aged seventy years old.

In David's memory, and for those past members and players who have also passed away, the club have built a memorial



which has been named "Hendo Hill". "We built the memorial on the embankment, which is a popular place on a matchday to watch the games as it gives you quite a good view. It was opened for our first intra club match in August this year when we were able to play amongst ourselves after some of the COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted."

The club has minimal funds, so they do not have a set budget to work with and depend on those around them to help out. "If, for instance, a mower breaks down, Gordon has good contacts with people in Stirling who he will take it to and get it fixed. They also have the services of Raymond, who is the mechanic at the local golf club who is particularly good at fixing their vintage tractor and gang mowers.

"It is not a case of you have thousands of

pounds to work on the ground and make sure you do not overspend it. If it is a case of needing some fertiliser, we have an account out with Allan Wright at Agrovista Amenity; the depot is local and ideal for us. It isn't a case of keeping it to a minimum; if we do need something on the ground and it is a low spend, we will get it done."

Gordon comments; "Over the years, we have just tried to be thrifty with the maintenance of the ground. We used to get the square scarified and treated at the end of the season by an outside contractor when we could afford that. Now it is carried out by Norman and anybody else who may want to come along and volunteer."

The club's most significant expense in recent years was the purchase of a new mower which cost them £5800. "It is a Dennis FT610 with changeable cassette



We are very lucky to have such dedicated volunteers at the club who do everything with pride and, without them, there would be no cricket being played at the weekend for all to enjoy



Even with the amount of scarifying and repair work I do during the season, we will still renovate the square. It will be cut to a reasonable height for the winter, scarified and the debris 'hoovered' up with the rotary

options. It is absolutely superb and has made a world of difference out there on the square."

Norman depends on the help of grounds management books and Allan Wright when spotting disease and how to treat the problem. "We had a touch of red thread out there, but how did I know we had red thread? I have a disease identification book which had a picture of it which I keep in the back of my car; this gave me the details on the causes of the disease and how to cure it. I then went to Allan, told him I had red thread and that I believed I needed a fertiliser with a good load of nitrogen in it. So, he then provided me with the appropriate product, we applied it and, within a few weeks, it was gone."

To water the wicket a long stretch of hose is used which is attached to the mains outside the clubhouse. "We are able to spray the very last wicket on the square at a moderate pressure using a small sprinkler. But this is nothing like golf course irrigation, but you pay a lot of money for that privilege. There used to be a line out there at one time, but it was made

redundant a long time ago, George adds."

The club does have a set of roll-on covers which they purchased six years ago, funded by a grant which one of the members managed to find. They also have a set of white run-up sheets and side sheets.

Whilst I was at the club, we were in the midst of Storm Francis, and we were experiencing some rather heavy rainfall. I was impressed at how well the ground was draining, especially when the soil profile of the outfield is predominantly heavy clay. "If this rain stopped right now, and we give it two hours, we would be able to play," comments Norman. "The reason for this is the club invested a substantial £90,000 around twelve years ago in installing a drainage system."

Gordon continues; "We found ourselves in a position where we just had to bite the bullet because, after this type of rain, it would have been like a lake for days. So, we got a grant from Sport Scotland, and then we had to find the other thirty percent of the cost. This meant we had to have a whip-round, and through our fantastic members and local companies around the county, we



Hendo Hill





I would always come across to him and say, what do you think? Could you cast your experienced eye over certain things, to help keep him motivated

managed to get the money to do the work. It has been fantastic, until a couple of years ago when we started to see surface water lying for two to three days, and we got a wee bit concerned. To relieve the problem, we got the contractor in who installed the system. They came in and blew the pipes, and since then it has been okay.”

The square was reconstructed twenty years ago using Boughton Loam. Norman talks me through his meticulous

maintenance regime. “I target the second week in March, weather permitting, to start work as you can still get snow before then. Whether it is right or wrong, I will first go out with the rotary mower set quite high and take the top off for the first three cuts over two weeks. Then that becomes manageable for the Dennis and, if the weather is reasonable, I will set the height of cut to 16mm. I will take the top off again whilst, at the same time, giving the square a light roll.

Gradually, I will lower the height of cut until I get to 12mm.”

“My regime then turns to the scarifier, which is something very different from what was done previously. We have a Graden scarifier, which is a monster of a machine to use; it really works those upper arms when turning at the end of the square. I will use this once a month and, when you see the amount of thatch you take out, you realise it is well worth doing.”

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Getting Personal

Norman Robertson - he wouldn't let you off lightly if he was a judge!

Who are you? Norman John Robertson - Volunteer Groundsman at Clackmannan County Cricket Club.

Family status. Husband, father to two daughters, with two grandsons and two grand-daughters.

Who is your hero and why? My grandfather - a train driver who was always proud to be with me.

What has been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Very happy to get praise and thanks for what I do. That is what it is all about!

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? I would hope he was quite happy to be like me when he was older.

Which famous people wind you up? Jeremy Corbyn, but he could not be called famous. A complete nonentity.

What job would you love, other than your own? A judge. No short sentences from me.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Getting a rope caught in the Dennis FT610 blade and damaging a bearing. I do things a different way now.

What is your favourite film? Brief Encounter.

What scares you. HMRC.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Tales of a Grass Cutter. Rowan Atkinson.

What is your favourite sport? Golf.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? The first man on the moon.



Do you have a lifetime ambition? To be happy.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? The BBC weather girls.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Always treat other road users as complete idiots.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? Where would you find a capuchin?

What's your favourite smell? Twenty pound notes.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Chicago, Four Tops and Donna Summer.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Our opening batsman asked why I was cutting the grass during lockdown.

What's your favourite piece of kit? Dennis FT610 ... it's just excellent.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Proud, critical and self-motivated.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman/greenkeeper? Take pride in everything you do.

What talent would you like to have? Play my guitar.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Political correction to be abolished.



Clubhouse

Norman is always learning by his mistakes and has adapted how he sets up a wicket. "What I used to do was put out my thin rope, get it all measured up and run my mower down the line at a lower height of cut than the rest of the square to define where the wicket is and take the rope away. This was fine until a few years ago when the wind picked up and blew the end of the rope into the cutting area, and it just caught the corner of the blade drawing the line into one side of the mower and damaged the bearing shell. This had to then go to Henderson Grass Machinery to be fixed, which came at a cost, but it was a lesson learned. So, what I do now is I put my two cords out, and I use white line marker and every six or seven yards I will put a dot. I then follow the dots with the Dennis, that way I can't do any damage."

"My first cut after putting the white lines out will be at 10mm, which gives a bit of distinction. Then, I will get the Graden out and scarify from the bottom crease to bottom crease as I like the bit where the bowlers plant their feet to be a little bit tighter. This has saved an awful lot of wear and tear on the square. As I am building this pitch up, I will use the scarifier twice. I will then reduce my height of cut gradually till I get to 6mm. In-between each cut, I will use the SISIS Lawn Rake, being mindful not to cut in too much, especially if the wicket is quite dry, as it could start to break up. Then, by the time I have finished preparing the wicket, the grass will be sat at the height of 4mm. Preparing a pitch to me is a minimum of ten days, and if you do it any less than that you will get heavy wear and tear on your square, and we do not want that."



David Henderson



Finally, it is down to Gordon's skilled hand and precise measurements to mark in the pitch ready for play.

The outfield is cut every Monday with a set of old gangs which have been set at the same height of cut for many years, and it can be challenging to adjust the cut. "You ideally need two of you to adjust the machine. One of us will pull the tractor forward, the other will take note of which gang needs adjusting, then we will take the tractor out of gear and tweak the nut. Then we will pull the tractor forward again, and ten times out of ten it will lock up and then we know we must take a wee bit more pressure off. By yourself, it is a process that is just too time-consuming."

Renovation of the square is carried out in house and can be a long-winded affair with just Norman, George and Gordon and the equipment they have available to them. "As I say, I have a regime with the scarifier which helps a lot and I try and do my wicket repairs one at a time. Whereas in the past I may have repaired them all at the one time towards the back end of the season, but I found it to be very time consuming and

doesn't give you a good deal of flexibility. The benefit of spending a minimum of ten days on the wickets is the wear and tear is very slight."

"Even with the amount of scarifying and repair work I do during the season, we will still renovate the square. It will be cut to a reasonable height for the winter, scarified with the Graden and the debris 'hoovered' up with the rotary as I don't want any old cuts on the grass, or it will go yellow. Then I go back up and down with the Dennis, so everything is looking pretty. Then we will hollow core the surface with a tiner we hire from a local firm, tidy up the cores and topdress with forty to fifty bags of Boughton Loam."

George was keen to point out that he feels the club is very lucky to have such dedicated volunteers at the club who do everything with pride and, without them, there would be no cricket being played at the weekend for all to enjoy. I could not agree more and hats off to all the volunteers around the British Isles who tirelessly give up their time for their sports clubs they love, and long may it continue.



We got a grant from Sport Scotland, and then we had to find the other thirty percent of the cost. This meant we had to have a whip-round and managed to get the money to do the work



**CLACKMANNAN COUNTY
CRICKET CLUB**



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Dollar Academy

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On the A91, which concludes at St Andrews, and just a few miles east of Stirling, sits Dollar Academy, one of Scotland's finest private schools. Catering for over 1300 pupils, many of them from the surrounding area, the seventy acre site nestles at the foot of the Ochil Hills. It was here that Lee Williams met **Robert Meldrum**, the school's long-serving Head Groundsman



“I went to the jobcentre one day, and they said there is a temporary job up at Dollar Academy as one of the groundsmen is off sick. So, I came in on a six-month contract and, twenty-seven years later, I'm still here. I have been the Head Groundsman for the last eighteen years.”

Robert Meldrum had a varied career before getting into the sports turf industry. After leaving school, he wanted to be a chef and did his City & Guilds levels one and two in catering. Once qualified, he worked in several hotels until the economy went down in the late eighties and he found himself looking for a job.

“It was hard to find jobs, so I ended up jumping on a train and going down to London, working as a security guard at Canary Wharf when it was being built. After two years I got a bit homesick. I came back up to Scotland but the economy was still weak. At the time, the only real opportunities were training schemes which topped up your dole money. So I ended up working on the



canals with British Waterways (now Scottish Canals) doing all the ditching on the Forth and Clyde.”

Dollar Academy was founded in 1818 by John McNabb. It is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The open campus site is in the centre of the town of Dollar in the county of Clackmannanshire and is home to around 1300 children aged five to eighteen.

Amongst an impressive list of famous alumni can be found Sir James Dewar - inventor of the vacuum flask and John Barclay - former Scotland Rugby captain.

Outside the main school building, designed by Edinburgh architect William Henry Playfair, fifty-six-years-old Robert explains that his role has seen a slight change of direction since the pupils have come back from Covid-19 closure.

“The school has had to put up marquees on the lawns just in front of the main building

to give more space, so the pupils can adhere to social distancing rules,” explains Robert. Whilst he is well aware that these changes are necessary, it has meant a change to his usual annual routine for the maintenance of the grounds.

Robert has a healthy yearly budget with a purchasing limit of one thousand pound. Anything over that must be approved by the Bursar as it may have to come out of the capital expenditure. Other than that, he is responsible for the day to day running of the grounds department.

“Over the years, myself and the Bursar have worked closely together, so we have an understanding. If I must spend twenty thousand pounds on renovation works, I do not have to go and see him about that because we do that on year on year basis. If I wanted to go and buy something like a new ride-on mower, then I must agree that with him, but other than that we just get on with it



The school has had to put up marquees on the lawns just in front of the main building to give more space, so the pupils can adhere to social distancing rules



Robert Meldrew on his Ferrari



//

We both have the same opinion that, when visitors are coming up the main drive, that is the first impression of the school they have

as he knows we do the job.”

“We both have the same opinion that, when visitors are coming up the main drive, that is the first impression of the school they have. If they see the playing surfaces and lawns looking their best, it gives them a good feeling about the rest of the school. First impressions are what count to prospective parents looking to invest their money into the school; money that comes back to us. To me, that this is the most important thing at the school.”

The whole site covers a substantial forty hectares of land. Robert and his team of three are responsible for the maintenance of the main field, which is on the left as you come up the driveway. In the centre of the field is the main cricket square with eight tracks. In the far corner there are three grass nets and four artificial practice areas. In the summer, this area will have a 400m running track, 110m hurdle box, shotput, discus and javelin marked in. In winter, there are three rugby union pitches for the first, second and third teams.

Adjacent to the main field is a smaller field with a three-lane cricket square with, in the corner, a two-bay artificial net area. In summer, it will have a 200m running track marked in. In winter, this area is used for junior rugby with two small pitches but no posts as they do not require them.

In front of the school is a small junior cricket square and, if required, they will put a small running track in there. At the bottom of the village is the capacity for two full-size rugby or football pitches, but it has been used less and less over the past few years.

At the back of the prep school is a junior football pitch as well as a small astroturf area for hockey and, at the side of that, are nine artificial tennis courts which, in winter, convert into a full-size hockey pitch.

Robert describes the soil profile of the main field as being very ‘glacky’. “Off the pitch on a day like this, it holds water, and it is really sticky. For the last twenty years we must have spent about a hundred thousand pounds, if not more, trying to resolve it.

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We have an irrigation system that comes from the sky; we do not need one really. If there is a good drought in the summer, we do have taps next to the cricket square to attach hoses and sprinklers

When the main drains first went in, it cost around forty-five thousand pounds. Since then, we have applied five hundred tonnes of Davila sand from a local quarry which is free draining - every year for the last fourteen years. Additionally, gravel and sand banding work has been carried out in the low points and worst areas. All the money has been spent on improving the playing surface on the main field, nothing on the other areas."

I asked Robert if, with the changing weather patterns and the winters becoming much wetter, there's a need to carry out more drainage work in the future? "Not really, except for the areas behind the cricket squares and at the edge of the field where I would like to do some work. With the drains now on the main field, all I have to do is verti-

draining with a bit of heave to loosen up the soil. On a day like today, as soon as the rain stops, you would be able to play on there."

This question then led us on to the need for an irrigation system. "We have an irrigation system that comes from the sky; we do not need one really. If there is a good drought in the summer, we do have taps next to the cricket square to attach hoses and sprinklers. We also have access to a large water bowser we can borrow from the local golf course if there is any need."

Robert is hoping to invest in some new covers for the squares as the ones he has have become unserviceable. "I'm hoping to get some proper new covers I have spoken to the Bursar about the issue. We are currently trying to get funding through Cricket Scotland as they use this facility in the summer."

Robert talks me through the seasonal maintenance of the main showpiece field. "In summer, we will cut with the John Deere 3235C at a height of 23mm. In winter, for the rugby, the height of cut is going to be higher this year. Our rugby coach wanted it quite short last year, so we were cutting at 30mm and there was quite a lot of damage done. As you know, rugby players like to work off a line. They come out of the pavilion, go into a line, and that is where they stop and start practising and running back and forward, causing a lot of wear in one area. The new length will be reviewed nearer the time."

"I will get a contractor into verti-drain a few times a year, normally before I apply my sand and then we will brush it into the holes. We don't carry out any scarification on the main field, just the cricket square."





The pitches are marked out once a week using a Bowcom Trike, and when the pitches need the lines straightening back up, or it is an important game, they will go out with a Beamrider. "For the running track, we have fixed points in the field, so we get Martin Kohler in from Fleet Linemarkers to come in with their MAQA linemarking machine. This saves us a lot of time as it can be very time-consuming marking in a 400m track from scratch."

Robert does not rely on a fertiliser programme as it can be challenging to apply chemicals and fertilisers whilst the pupils are around. "It is a matter of getting some granular or liquid fertiliser down when they are off on summer holidays, Easter and autumn break. We have recently purchased a mixing tank and a ten-metre tractor-mounted boom sprayer. I have had to take two of the booms off because it is far too big for the site with all the trees, so it is now

down to six metres. With everything that is happening with the pandemic, I have not had the chance to get out and spray. I have been out just once this year with a selective weedkiller. I do need to get out and get some fertiliser on there soon but, at the minute, it is not looking too bad."

The school purchase all the machinery for the grounds department outright, using local dealers where possible. "Depending on how much things cost we may look at buying

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- Echo Hedgecutter x 3
- Fleetline Beamrider Marker
- Fleetline Combi Marker
- Flymo
- Gem Mixing Tank

second-hand, but generally we purchase everything new. Our machinery does not tend to get much wear and tear here so we can have our machines for quite a few years before they need replacing. We have a good local mechanic, Bryan Fay, who services and fixes any of our machinery that is out of warranty."

Robert believes there is always room to improve the machinery he has available to him, with new products being made available each year. But he feels, at this moment in time, they are well equipped for the way they work and knows if he really needs something to improve the playing surfaces the school will support him where possible.

There are no major projects in the pipeline for Robert and his team as pretty much everything is in place. "We have a small project I would like to do this winter. The matting in the cricket nets is getting old and needs replacing, and the drainage work I mentioned earlier. I cannot think of anything else we would be looking to do."

The school considers the local flora and

fauna to be important and has spent quite a bit of money on developing wildflower areas. "We began by sowing wildflower seed in unused areas around the fields and started to get some great comments. So, we have gradually sown areas around the prep school, next to the car park, behind the dining hall and even in the village itself."

"We do a lot of tree planting, and we have a tree management company that comes in and keeps an eye on the place for us. We have a lot of interesting old trees around that were planted when the school was first opened. Last year, we planted some eucalyptus trees to replace a giant redwood which unfortunately had to come down five years ago. There is quite a diversity of trees around here, and it is just a nice environment to work in."



The history of Dollar Academy

The school was founded by the Rev. Andrew Mylne, a leading educationalist of his day, following a bequest by Captain John McNabb, a local who was born in 1732 to a poor family, but who made his fortune at sea. McNabb captained, owned and leased out many ships over the decades and it is known that four voyages transported slaves to the West Indies in 1789-91, forty years before the Abolition Act of 1833.

The school believes that it is important to recognise this aspect of its history, and pupils are taught openly about McNabb's link to slavery in several subjects in the Senior School. In order to understand the exact extent of John McNabb's involvement, further research was commissioned, in collaboration with leading external advisors, in 2019. When this research is concluded, the school will consider various future courses of action. Once completed, it will help them to better understand this part of their history so that it can play an important educational role. To be clear, Dollar Academy abhors slavery in all its forms.

John McNabb died in 1802 and, in his will, he specified that the interest on half his estate was to provide "a Charity or School for the parish of Dollar and shire of Clackmannan where I was born."

There were long legal delays until 1815 when the eminent educationalist Rev. Andrew Mylne was appointed Minister of the Parish by local landowner Craufurd Tait. They conceived of a great academy to educate the boys and girls of Dollar parish, and also pupils from outside Dollar, who would board with teachers. To attract pupils from outside the parish, excellent teachers would be appointed.

The Founding of Dollar Academy

In 1818, Rev. Mylne was appointed Rector of the new Academy, and the top Scottish architect William Playfair was commissioned to design the building. One of the first things to strike visitors arriving at the school is the impressive Doric facade. The grand neo-classical design sets an inspirational tone for pupils and teachers alike. Visitors to Edinburgh's Royal Scottish Academy or National Galleries might recognise his distinctive style.

Playfair also designed the fine houses for teachers and boarders

in Academy Place. In 1832 an Infant School was started, accepting children from the age of three. As a result of the school's growing popularity, more accommodation was needed. Several classrooms and a large school hall were added in 1868 and a gymnasium in 1893. The Prep School was built in 1937.

The War Years Sacrifice, Strife and Success

The Academy and its community were no exception to the immense loss suffered as a result of World War I. No fewer than 164 former pupils and staff gave their lives. World War II brought with it further sacrifice, with a total of 76 fatalities.

Between the two wars Dollar was hit by financial difficulties and was temporarily run by the county council. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of former pupils, however, the school was returned to an independent board of governors in May 1934.

The Rebuilding after 'The Great Fire'

In 1961, a catastrophic fire totally destroyed the interior of the Playfair Building. All the classrooms and the library with its 12,000 books were lost. Locals and staff rallied to help, and teaching continued in the Prep School, Harviestoun Castle, local halls and even in private houses. The inside of the Playfair Building was reconstructed on three floors instead of the original two and finally re-opened in 1966.

In the years that followed, new buildings and facilities were added. These included the Games Hall, the Swimming Pool, the Dining Hall, the new Music Department and Auditorium (the Gibson Building), the Computing and Mathematics Centre (the Younger Building) and the Home Economics Centre (the Iona Building).

More recent years have seen the addition of three new science labs, extensions to the Prep School and the opening of the Maguire Building with its facilities for Art, Physical Education and Drama, as well as the circular Captain's Room for conferences and meetings.

The all-weather surface for hockey and tennis saw its first matches in 2009, and all three boarding houses were completely refurbished in 2011. The Westwater Building, home to the Languages Department, was completed in 2015 and is named in honour of one of the five Dollar pupils who died at Gallipoli 100 years earlier.

Getting Personal

Robert (Rab) Meldrum - We heard a rumour that he likes heavy rock!



Who are you? Robert (Rab) Meldrum.

Family status? Single dad with a daughter (14) and son (13).

Who's your hero and why? Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who had an absolutely outstanding mind.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Visit of Princess Anne.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? Really!? Yeah, okay then.

Which famous people wind you up? Would not call him famous, but Piers Morgan.

What job would you love, other than your own? HGV Driver (previously had a licence).

What is your favourite film? Predator.

What scares you? Heights.

What is your favourite sport? Darts.

What would you cast into Room 101? Donald Trump.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Barack Obama, Gordon Ramsay, Ian Munro (current Rector of Dollar Academy)

What's the best advice you have ever been given? From my previous boss Lee Spendlove - 'Rab, you can do it'.

What's your favourite smell? Newly cut grass.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Led Zeppelin - Remasters, Motorhead - No Sleep 'til Hammersmith, Fleetwood Mac - Rumours.

What's your favourite piece of kit? John Deere 3235.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Annoying, forgetful, approachable.

What talent would you like to have? To be able to play the electric guitar or the drums.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Everyone should have a rescue labrador or German shepherd and be allowed to take them to work. Thankfully I can.



Leicester Grammar School

He can't be Hoodwinked



You come into the job with a good idea of what it is going to be like, but I found out quickly that, no matter how much planning you do, it can go straight out the window ... especially when something like coronavirus happens

Leicester Grammar School is an independent co-educated day school situated in Great Glen. Before its development in 2007, the school had no playing fields of its own and transported pupils to various sporting facilities by bus! It now boasts seventy-five acres of sports facilities and Head Groundsman, **Michael Hood**, is the man entrusted with the challenge of looking them

Founded in 1981, Leicester Grammar School (often abbreviated to LGS) was founded after the loss of the city's state-funded grammar schools. The site now consists of four full-size and three junior rugby pitches, first and second-team cricket squares, nine practice nets, eight hard tennis courts, six netball, water-based and a sand-based hockey pitch.

The soil profile of the grass surfaces was constructed out of what used to be clay-based farmers' fields which is not ideal and doesn't help with drainage. Michael commented: "Over the last eight or nine years, we have put on three hundred tonnes of Mansfield Sand per year in an attempt to bring the levels up. Still, in winter months, this place is underwater - especially last winter with the heavy and prolonged rain spells. So, we are currently working our way through all the pitches to install primary and secondary drainage."

Due to most of his staff on furlough, Michael has struggled over the last few months to carry out the regular maintenance regime, however with students slowly being phased back into school, he is hopeful to return to a degree of normal. "Usually, during summer months, we will cut the cricket outfield at 18mm with the John Deere 7700A fairway mower. In winter, for the start of the rugby season, we will gradually bring the height of cut up to 30mm. Aeration is carried out using our own Imants Shockwave, which we will use as much as we can on the outfield in different directions from September to December, depending on the weather. For the squares, we have a Toro ProCore 648. Every summer we will mark in the athletics track using the Fleet Beamrider, which helps make the job much easier. In rugby season, we will usually overmark the pitches once a week."

March is renovation month (taking advantage of the three-week school





Early morning brushing



I have had to retain some of the fertiliser in stock for later in the year and, basically, I have to stop spending in the short term

three weeks up until September, we will top it up using our 300-litre Team Sprayer with a mixture of ICL Sportsmaster Liquid Iron and a product called Liquid Onyx - an organic plant-based biostimulant. In November, I will apply another application of Sierrablen Plus, which will see us through the winter.”

Having been in his current position for just over a year, Michael is still getting used to everything. “It is still early days and I think now is where you learn the most. You come into the job with a good idea of what is required and what it is going to be like, but I found out quickly that, no matter how much planning you do, it can go straight out the window ... especially when something like coronavirus happens!”

Michael has a lot of experience to fall back on, after first getting involved in the industry at just fourteen years old, when he got himself a Saturday job cutting and marking out at his local grass tennis court. “My dad encouraged me to do it to get me out of the house and he showed me what to do - it didn’t take long to prepare with it being a single court. When I left school, I was a member at Glen Gorse Golf Club (just up the road from here) and they took me on as



Over the last eight or nine years, we have put on three hundred tonnes of Mansfield Sand per year in an attempt to bring the levels up

holidays). “First, we will scarify and collect the whole site with the Amazone Groundkeeper GHLT 135. Local contractor, Woodward Turf Care, then come in to verti-drain all surfaces, as deep as possible, before we apply three hundred tonnes of sand and then overseed with ICL ProSelect Premium Pitch - a perennial ryegrass mix - using a dimple seeder.”

Michael tends to use a mixture of ICL slow-release granular fertilisers and liquids, when he can get out on the pitches. “In March, I will apply ICL’s Sierrablen Plus then, every





an apprentice greenkeeper. I spent seven years there, where I gained my NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in Sports Turf, PA1, 2 and 6 spraying certificates and chainsaw certificate. It got to a point where there was no internal staff progression and I was still bottom of the pack, so I knew I needed to move in order to progress my career."

"Five years ago, I joined Oakham School as a groundsman, which was totally different from greenkeeping. It allowed me to learn about other sports such as cricket, football and hockey and work on different surfaces. It

was a little bit further for me to travel, but the experience I gained in the two years there, was definitely worth it. I felt I needed a job closer to home so, after speaking to Ed (who was the head groundsman here at that time), he offered me a position as an Assistant Groundsman, which I accepted. Twelve months ago, when he left, I put myself forward for his job and I got it."

Helping Michael maintain the school's playing surfaces is Les Berry who has been here for twelve years and worked on the farm before the school was built. Michael



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Getting Personal

Michael Hood - he would like to be an astronaut, but he can't tie shoe laces!

Who are you?

Michael Hood, Head Groundsman at Leicester Grammar School.



Family status. Married with three children.

Who's your hero and why? Thierry Henry - The Goat.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Becoming Head Groundsman.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? Legend.

Which famous people wind you up? Sean Dyche.

What job would you love, other than your own? Taxi driver or an astronaut.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Answering these questions.

What is your favourite film? Four Lions.

What scares you? Birds.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Sorry guys ... I don't really know what I'm doing! Mr Bean.

What is your favourite sport? Football.

What would you cast into Room 101? Noisy eaters.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? Chichen Itza in Mexico.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Ron Burgundy, Seth Macfarlane and Margot Robbie.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Never miss a good chance to shut up.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? The unicorn is the national animal of Scotland.

What's your favourite smell? Freshly cut rye grass.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Eminem - The Marshall Mathers LP, Bob Marley and the Wailers - Exodus and The 1975 - A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Which way do you lay turf.

What's your favourite piece of kit? SISIS scarifier.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Honest, reliable and versatile.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman/greenkeeper? Keep going.

What talent would you like to have? To be able to tie shoe laces.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Everyone must finish work at noon on a Friday and go straight to the pub.

Left to right: Les Berry, Jack Tarleton-Lord, Oliver Gilbert and William Webb



says: "He is a fantastic servant to the school and always finds a way to get things done. Ciaran Kilduff (eleven years' service) - NVQ Level 2, PA1, PA2 and PA6, Chainsaw certificate – he has an extremely healthy perspective and there is nothing he can't do. Oliver Gilbert (six months) NVQ Level 3, PA1, PA2 and PA6, chainsaw certificate – I worked with Oliver for seven years at Glen Gorse Golf Club. He is a great addition to a strong team and a dream to work with. William Webb (eighteen months) - NVQ Level 2, PA1 and PA6. William has taken on the role of looking after cricket during the season and is doing an unbelievable job. And last, but my no means least, Jack Tarleton-Lord (two years) - NVQ Level 2, PA1 and PA6. Jack is ever

present and is known to the team as the outfield master."

Maintenance on the site doesn't come without its problems and Michael has had issues with green algae build up on the water-based hockey pitch for the past three years, so he turned to John Mullins from Agrovista Amenity for advice. John explains "We found the Dosatron system (which is fitted on to the irrigation system) was being used to apply a chlorine-based product, but the algae was not being controlled. We set up a trial with Huwa San TR50 and started to apply it through the irrigation system and the algae was no longer an issue."

"Sometime after this, work was carried out on the watering system, but the Dosatron pump





The industry has moved on in a big way - mainly with advances in technology, machinery and products available

wasn't bled so, whilst it looked like the Huwa San was getting applied, it wasn't! After a visit from Nigel Bennet at Roam Technology and from the Dosing unit company, the system was reset and the algae is now under control again. The added advantage of Huwa San is they don't have the high cost of a regular mechanical deep clean."

The school lease a lot of their machinery, but their current agreement is coming to an end. "We are going to purchase the tractors

at the end of the lease, as they last forever if they are looked after. Then, we will look at another five-year deal for the cutting machinery. Our current deal is with John Deere, but I will get Toro and Jacobsen to visit and demonstrate their machines to see how they all perform. To be honest, I am a confessed Toro fan, but everywhere I have worked has used John Deere. My wish list would include a Verti-Drain, as it is essential to get more air into the ground and keep

the link between the surface and the drains, to help with the percolation rates. Also on the wish list would be a topdresser, so that we could apply the sand little and often - rather than all at once in March."

Servicing of the machines is mostly carried out in-house as part of the winter project, except for grinding which is undertaken by a local firm. "We tend to buy in all the filters and oil etc. It is a pretty simple job to be honest."

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Sand banding on the cricket squares



We are going to purchase the tractors at the end of the lease, as they last forever if they are looked after

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- STIHL HS86T brushcutter
- STIHL HL100 long reach brushcutter
- STIHL MS250 chainsaw
- STIHL HT101 pole pruner
- STIHL FS90R strimmer
- STIHL FS130 strimmer
- STIHL BR600 Backpack Blower
- Ransomes Spider mini slope mower
- Amazone GHLT135
- Billy goat
- Team Sprayer 300L
- Fleet Beamrider
- Vitax pedestrian sprayer
- TFM trailer

Moving forward, Michael is hopeful the second-tier drainage work will commence this year as planned and they will be able to finish off the sand banding on the cricket squares, which was started last year. "The sand banding will be installed diagonally to the primary drainage that was put in. I also hope to get Jon Lawson in from Sports and Courts Line Marking Limited, to colour coat the tennis courts and rejuvenate the all-weather sand-based pitch."

Michael believes the sports turf industry has moved on in a big way since he first started his career - mainly with advances in technology, machinery and products available, but he's worried about the long-term effects of Covid on the industry. "For us, it has meant budgets have been reduced and some staff remain furloughed. I have had to retain some of the fertiliser in stock for

later in the year and, basically, I have to stop spending in the short term. Hopefully, with pupils returning to school and things getting back to normal, this should improve."

As our site is only twelve years old, we are trying to introduce colour by creating multiple wildflower areas. We are using Cornflower Meadows which contains corn cockle, corn chamomile, cornflower corn, marigold field poppy, scented mayweed night, flowering catch fly, common forget me not and long headed poppy. We've also planted over six thousand bulbs in the past two years including Tulip- City of Vancouver, Pink Impression, Golden Apeldoorn, Parrot Negrita, Dafodils- Narcissus Tete a Tete, Fritillaria Meleagris, Anemone Blanda, Puschkinia Libanotica, Alliums Globemaster, Gladiator and White Giant.



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Bromsgrove School

Hare to stay

There is no Harry Potter bell tower, no sweeping driveway through undulating fields and the entrances are, frankly, unprepossessing. Despite the millions of pounds invested in recent years, Bromsgrove School keeps one hundred acres of secrets from a casual visitor, hidden like a vast walled garden. Kerry Haywood met Head Groundsman, **Richard Hare**, to find out more about this 'gentle giant' of a school

Dating back to the fifteenth century, the buildings are low and set back from nearby roads. An aerial photograph shows that half of central Bromsgrove is taken up by the ancient school and its grounds, but you would never know it from street level.

Richard joined the school in 2013 and, like many, had an interest in sport from a very young age. "I played a lot of cricket and football; from junior teams through to a reasonable standard of adult sport and lots of work on the grounds was carried out by volunteers, which is how I became involved. I eventually moved to Worksop cricket club

which, up until 1997, hosted Notts first team games. At the time, I was working as a lorry driver in the evenings/nights, working on the ground during the day and I had a young family ... something had to give. Back then (and probably still the same today), it was the case that, at lower levels of the industry, the money just was not there and I could earn more working as a lorry driver. However, it was mum who was quick to point out that I was working myself to the bone, so I had to make a decision between the two.

"In 2005, a position became available with contractor Pugh Lewis and I completed a summer with them before being offered a job at King Edward Grammar School in

Aston, where I worked for eighteen months. I moved to King Edward Camphill as Head Groundsman and, after a short period, I was offered the position of Deputy Head Groundsman at King Edward Birmingham, which is an independent day school ... dare I say some of the top groundsmen in the country all have links there including James Mead, Dave Warner and Andy Richards. Whilst there, I completed my NVQ Level 2 in Horticulture and Level 3 in Sports Turf.

Back to current time, it has certainly been interesting over the past six months, but we have kept busy. We had six members of staff who worked all the way through lockdown, three returned on the 1st of June



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It's been strange times for everyone this year, but I feel we are lucky as an industry to work predominantly outside. We have adapted ways of working, which means that every team member wipes down a machine after use



We are definitely moving towards more battery-powered equipment to reduce noise levels and become more efficient. All of the gardeners' vehicles in use for transferring equipment are already electric

and the remainder started back late August. Oliver Baldi-Turner and I helped at Barnt Green Cricket Club over the summer as they were struggling. Returning to an amateur environment was actually a revelation ... it is a different world and it made me realise how lucky we are to work at a venue with good budgets, support and equipment and it brought home to me how hard it is keep amateur sports grounds up to the standards expected, without the financial backing and lack of equipment.

We have a strong team of fourteen who not only look after the school grounds, but many other sites including: pre-prep (which is around half a mile away from the Senior and Prep School campuses), boarding houses which require landscaping maintenance, Housman Hall Boarding House (which is just off the main school site), The Ryland Centre which offers athletics and a fitness suite and also Winterfold House School - where three of the team maintain the forty-acre site - totalling two hundred acres in total to look after.

The team is split between eight groundstaff and six gardeners. Most people (when they are lucky enough to be offered a

head groundsman's job at a school) will have a sports background and can look after cricket squares, prepare a rugby pitch etc. then, suddenly, you're thrust into looking after fourteen hundred trees, fish ponds, forest schools etc. ... it's quite a daunting task, so I'm lucky to have such a strong team on the landscape/gardening side as well as the groundstaff! My gardening knowledge is limited, but I thrive on looking after such a well-rounded team and getting the results, we are proud of ... right across all the sites.

We conduct a tree survey every two years and the team are experienced to undertake minor work, however we do have Benbow Brothers come in to do all the major works and a local tree surgeon will carry out any work that is too big for our team, but not big enough for Benbow Brothers. We spend a lot of money on trees and we have quite a big budget to maintain them; it is never ending but very rewarding. The oldest tree is some three hundred years old.

The soil is a mixture of sand and clay across the site and it has reasonably good drainage. It still means we do a lot of work on the pitches; even during lockdown, we added three hundred tonnes of sand. It helps



Fish pond





that we have all our own major equipment including a Shockwave and Verti-Drain that will be used constantly throughout the winter months. Given the vast amount of building work over the years, the profile does change slightly around the site. Historically, builders used to undertake the landscaping around new and refurbished buildings, but we now undertake all this work, which is something the gardening team enjoy doing.

Despite having good drainage, we do suffer with some areas getting very wet. Carrick Sports have undertaken quite a lot of work for us, which includes a rolling programme of drainage works. Although the work did not take place this summer



During a very wet winter last year, we had to cancel a handful of games, so it will be interesting to see how we get on after all the remedial work

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Poppies and wildflowers next to netball court 2

(because of lockdown), the work has made a massive difference to the areas that have been completed. During a very wet winter last year, we had to cancel a handful of games, so it will be interesting to see how we get on after all the remedial work, once sport gets back to a full timetable. When we are on top of the drainage, I am sure we will then move on to looking at an irrigation system.

Mark Allen, Amenity Specialist from Agrovista Amenity Ltd, will regularly take soil samples and the root growth is generally healthy. In conjunction with Matt Gresty from Limagrain UK, they have compiled an annual programme - entirely based around individual areas' performance and exactly what is required. We buy one-hundred and thirty bags of seed per year and oversee all areas with what Mark calls a 'special Bromsgrove mix' ... it is a good job we have a

great working relationship.

We do not tend to use many fertilisers on any of the fields, cricket squares being the exception. Most of the cuttings go back in and I am a great believer that 'if it looks healthy, it's doing okay'. Recently, Complete Weed Control (Steve Lovridge) applied a tank-mix fertiliser and selective herbicide, which we aim to carry out twice a year to give it a boost. We also will apply a slow release fertiliser onto the first team rugby pitch and surfaces where the drainage work was completed in the Autumn. We don't suffer too badly from disease so we're lucky in that respect.

The school take sport very seriously, which means a lot of use for all the grass and artificial surfaces. There are also cricket festivals to contend with throughout the summer, which means it is a full year-round schedule. The school has priority over all

pitches and courts, but they are also hired out to the local community; particularly the use of the three astro pitches.

Both the groundstaff and gardeners all have specific areas they work in, but they are all proficient across each department. I think it helps encourage pride in their areas and is easy to manage.

Over the past couple of years, projects included the installation of grass cricket nets, which should have been used for the first time this Easter, but were not due to the pandemic so we are looking forward to those coming into play. Currently, one of the buildings projects is due to be finished, so we are busy designing the area around it to landscape.

On the ecology front, we have done so many projects over the last seven years; including the improvement of many of the gardens, tree work, installation of beehives



It has been hard to plan for the coming year as nobody is sure what is around the corner. I hope that things will get back to some sort of normality soon





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Returning to an amateur environment was actually a revelation ... it made me realise how lucky we are to work at a venue with good budgets, support and equipment

and fruit trees etc. However, I would say the most rewarding has been the introduction of wildflowers areas around the site.

I have always had an interest in wildlife and, after a few discussions with Mark, he invited ecologist John Handley to visit and look at the possibility of introducing areas of interest. Following the initial visit, we actually set up a training session with all staff where we all took a walk around the site and John pointed out areas where we could improve,

as well as discussing so many things we had never even considered. I thought it would be more interesting and engaging for the gardeners, but the groundstaff really bought into the concept and how it would improve the overall impression of the school. Now, when we are planning new areas, we are much more informed and consider things such as pollinating plants, incorporating more hedging etc.... It has just made us think differently.

Over the last seven years, we have introduced a wildlife-friendly garden, built an orchard, which consists of fifty different fruit trees all of Midland varieties, and added multiple wildflower beds with mixes. Together, they have not only improved the aesthetics of the site, but also had a huge effect on the amount of wildlife by increasing the number of birds, bats, swallows, buzzards, sparrow hawks nesting etc. We are also responsible for six wildlife friendly



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We are much more informed and consider things such as pollinating plants, incorporating more hedging etc.... It has just made us think differently



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ponds and a well-stocked fishpond, which has a large sturgeon, carp and goldfish. Over the past few months, I had to quickly learn how to maintain the fishpond myself, as the member of staff who was responsible for this work was furloughed.

We also have seven beehives on site and constructed a purpose-built area next to the orchard. They have just started to produce honey, so the locals are happy.

We have been lucky this year not to suffer with chafer grubs and, as a result, badgers and foxes have not been digging to get to them. As a rule, we do not tend to have much bother from them ... touch wood!

We use a local dealer for all our machinery and expect staff to be able to carry out the basic maintenance of a machine including the day to day greasing, cleaning etc. Then, once every two weeks, we have mechanic Chris Perkins come onto site; he completes the servicing of machines, and undertakes any major maintenance work that needs doing.

We are definitely moving towards more battery-powered equipment to reduce noise

levels and become more efficient. All new hand-held equipment purchased such as leaf blowers, brushcutters etc. are electric Stihl machines and we are currently looking to replace the two John Deere diesel gators for the electric equivalent. All of the gardeners' vehicles in use for transferring equipment are already electric.

We have a monthly grounds meeting to discuss requirements with all the grounds team, which also includes a representative from the school's Health and Safety department, however these meetings are currently on hold. All the staff have yearly appraisals and they know my office door is always open if they ever need a chat.

I work to a set budget decided by the Bursar, although the pandemic has certainly affected things this year. As I am sure is the case with all industries, it has been hard to plan for the coming year as nobody is sure what is around the corner. I hope that things will get back to some sort of normality soon.

We have a good Bursar who backs us in terms of what the school needs and is keen to invest in people and training alike. Having

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gone down the apprentice route, Oliver Baldi-Turner, Luke Harper, Jordan Murphy and Luke Wiggett were all offered full-time positions at the end of their qualification.

All our apprentices are fully supported throughout their training and the school encourage on-going courses for their respective departments. They even have a dedicated room where they can complete coursework during quieter times or when required.

Other team members include: Deputy Head Groundsperson - Simon McAulay (ten years' service), Deputy Head Groundsperson - James Towner (nine years), Senior Gardeners; Ashley Cook (ten years), Scott Devereux (eleven years) and Jeremy Hall (nine years), Gardeners; Nigel Bishop (two years), Luke Harper (six years), Jordan Murphy (four years), Steven Taylor (who has been at the school for an incredible fifty years), Groundsmen; Oliver Baldi-Turner (six years), Matthew Sale (five years), Matthew Stoneystreet (eleven years) and Luke Wiggett Groundsman (three years).

Every team member has completed their spraying and some chainsaw certificates and are trained to do their own risk assessments. The pay structure here works well between Levels 2 and 3, which is an

added incentive for the team to develop and continue to improve.

It has been strange times for everyone this year, but I feel we are lucky as an industry to work predominantly outside. We have adapted ways of working, in line with both the school and department Covid risk assessments; every team member wipes down a machine after use and there is only one person allowed in the workshop at any one time, they must keep two metres apart and only travel in vans around the site on their own, if possible. However, overall, working outside means we can easily maintain social distancing and comply with government guidelines and we are slowly getting back to a new 'normal'.

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 Redexim Verti-Drain 7316
 Imants Shockwave
 Sisis Quadraplay
 Sisis Multislit 1200
 Sisis Rotorake 600HD
 Sisis Auto Rotorake MK5 (various reels)
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It's quite a daunting task, so I'm lucky to have such a strong team on the landscape/gardening side as well as the groundstaff

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Chatsworth

Palace of the Peak

Chatsworth, said by many to be the Palace of the Peak, is set on the banks of the River Derwent in the heart of the Derbyshire Peak District. Since 1549, it has been home to the Cavendish family and currently is to the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. **David Mears** was given rare opportunity to visit, tour and talk to a number of the gardeners' team recently

Arrangements to visit Chatsworth had been handled by Mick Brown, Horticultural Technician, and it was he who acted as my guide for most of the time. It had been requested that no single person be interviewed, as is the norm, but that I'd talk to a selection of people with differing skills and experience so as to reflect the contributions of everyone in the team and not just one individual. Learning the vastness of the estate (there's five miles of walks within the garden alone!) and the number of people working there, this seemed a sensible suggestion. There are two very distinct teams, one that focuses on productive horticulture and one that carries out all

grounds maintenance but are also responsible for delivering a large garden development project and managing the decorative areas in Chatsworth's garden. We'd agreed to concentrate on the latter and, having met early at the stables, we entered the garden. The heavy rain (not forecast!) that I'd experienced driving through cloud on the A621 to Baslow, had eased and we now had a slight drizzle; not good for photography but the skies seemed to be clearing!

Mick told me a little about himself: He's been at Chatsworth for thirteen years, grew up working with family in an east London floristry business, retrained as a gardener and was lucky enough to have been taken



The Emperor Fountain and House from the Canal Pond

on at Chatsworth. He has two colleagues who manage the areas of the garden we are to see and he and they report to Steve Porter, Head of Gardens and Landscapes. Mick's role is to manage the volunteer programme, trainees and the plant collection and to help develop the team's skills and knowledge. This team alone comprises around twenty-five gardeners, seventy-five volunteers and a range of trainees.

Our first stop was to photograph the large Vinery, then we turned and photographed The Case. Both are Victorian and designed by Joseph Paxton, Chatsworth's most renowned Head Gardener. The Case is a splendid construction with a heated back wall where peaches, apricots, greengages,

nectarines and more are grown. We then went to the newer display greenhouse, erected in 1970. The unusual construction with exterior stanchions is designed to provide maximum interior space and light. The building is split into three separate zones: Temperate, Mediterranean and Tropical. It was here that we met Ian Bell, Greenhouse Gardener, whose responsibilities are maintenance of public areas in the greenhouses and new vinery where exhibition grapes are grown. Ian, who has been at Chatsworth for 19 years, has taken advantage of the Covid-19 restrictions (the greenhouses are not open to the public as social distancing cannot be maintained) and has carried out major work on some of



We have always been very aware of what the estate means to people, the impact it has on communities, and the responsibility we have, as custodians, to care for it



Mick Brown, Horticultural Technician



The Vinery



Ian Bell with freshly cut grapes



Just cut bananas

the plants. He's taken five large camellias out as overcrowding was an issue and planted new shrubs which reflect the The Duke and Duchess's tastes. As Ian commented, "The Duke and Duchess are very much involved, have a passion for flowers and know what they like". Ian's portable radio burst into life just then with a request that he selects and cuts a suitable bunch of grapes to add to other fruits for the house. "Would you like to come?" he asked. So off we walk to the vinery and Ian skilfully selects a bunch and cuts it, presenting it to his colleague to add to the basket. I couldn't help wondering why most of the bunches of grapes were contained in delicate muslin type bags. Ian explained that a blackbird had been in and that wasps too had been more of a nuisance this year. The bags protected the bunches whilst still allowing light and air through.

Job done, we returned to the three-zone greenhouse. Ian, as with everyone else I met, is passionate and proud of his work. He showed me a lovely species of *Dicksonia Antarctica* (soft tree fern) which he's nurtured. We moved on, admiring other plants, and another call came through for a couple of large lemons. Ian disappeared into the plants and found what he needed. He asked me to come and see. These Imperial Lemons (actually a cross between lemon and grapefruit) are a sight to behold, as the photo shows; nearly the size of a football but used in the house to make marmalade!

On we went into the tropical zone (not normally open to the public so as to maintain

heat and humidity) and we looked down on a pond of hybrid giant water lilies (*Victoria Amazonica*). Ian is particularly proud of these; they are grown fresh from seed each year, so are an annual. As Ian said: "Quite difficult, but well worth the effort!" Who'd argue with that? We then walked round to view a lovely growing bunch of *Musa Dwarf Cavendish* bananas, now the world's main commercial crop! First grown by Joseph Paxton in 1835 after he obtained one from Mauritius, and then subsequently grown in large volumes.

It was "time for coffee", said Mick as we left and walked down to an attractive kiosk. Mick suggested that I tried one of their sausage rolls, fresh from the oven. What a good suggestion; not a regular sausage roll eater, this was rather special and most tasty! On our way back to continue our tour, we passed Ian who showed us a bunch of bananas he'd just cut.

We pressed on, passing the Emperor Fountain (Excellent view but poor light; so, I made a note to come back later!). This very high fountain, situated in the canal pond, was the 6th Duke's idea and Paxton put his engineering skills to the test by creating a record-breaking, gravity fed water plume, on record as having achieved a height of 90 metres! It was installed in 1844 to impress the Emperor of Russia, Czar Nicholas. When the Duke heard that the Czar might visit Chatsworth, the idea of welcoming him with an even higher fountain than the one at the Czar's palace in N.E. Russia (Peterhof), appealed to the Duke. Unfortunately, the



The Case



Ian picks an Imperial lemon



A 'special' sausage roll



Hybrid giant water lilies

Czar didn't visit Chatsworth, but nevertheless the fountain was named after him.

We passed Matthew Bullen and Jeff Madin (we'd catch up later) strimming on our way to the Rock Garden and Strid where we met Dave Spencer, Senior Supervisor Domain Department. Dave started at Chatsworth as a casual, then offered full time position in 1976, and has been here since. He is responsible for outdoor maintenance on all grounds, including hedges, trees, grassland, fences, dry stone walls, roads and land drains. This Victorian project was undertaken by Paxton with the 6th Duke who wished to be reminded of his visit to the Alps whilst on the Grand Tour of Europe. The heavy grit stones,

originally brought from Dobb Edge north of Stand Wood in 1842 when work started, were held together, where necessary, by iron rods that Paxton installed and secured with lead. Deterioration has taken place over many years and, especially with a number of large overhangs, has presented problems. Dave was up high with a powerful drill and a rather long SDS bit, drilling through to be able to insert replacement stainless steel rods which will be secured with a modern epoxy resin. The Strid, incidentally, is the deep narrow stream running through the Rock Garden and gets its name from The Strid on the Duke's Bolton Abbey Estate where the River Wharfe flows through a chasm. At the top of the

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Jeff Madin strimming



Matthew Bullen strimming



The Emperor Fountain



Rock Garden 2018: Phase one planting

Rock Garden is the fourteen-metre-high Wellington Rock waterfall.

The Rock Garden has been an ongoing project over the years with the latest major project, commenced in 2017, being remodelling to provide improved access, including wheelchairs. This has included the work of the celebrated garden designer Tom Stuart-Smith who redesigned the planting. He wanted everything pulled together with a more cohesive planting palette. As Mick put it: "The original concept of the 6th Duke of wanting 'a garden of rocks' has not been forgotten, so the rocks remain dominant with the plants being subservient." The photo here is of Phase One replanted area in 2018 which shows the new paths. "We have been respectful to the original Paxton and 6th Duke's concept," says Mick.

Our tour continued to the Great Conservatory or, as Joseph Paxton called it, the "Great Stove!" The concept of Paxton and designed by the 6th Duke's architect Decimus Burton, this huge glasshouse (84m long, 37m wide and 19m high) took Paxton four years to construct and was completed in 1840; All that remains are the base walls. The Crystal Palace sprang to my mind and Mick told me that Paxton did, in fact, go on to use the techniques and skills he had developed at Chatsworth for his

masterpiece: The Crystal Palace in 1851. Tasteful use has been made of the area however and split into three sections; first a Tom Stuart-Smith garden, then a maze (established in 1962 by the 11th Duke and Duchess) and finally a tropical planting.

We then came upon one end (glade four) of an immense project called Arcadia; The transformation of a 15-acre area, within the 105-acre garden, of mostly sloping land that had never previously been planted. The project is part of the biggest transformation of the garden for almost 200 years. The concept of Arcadia is to split the lengthy area into four different glades. Each glade will have a different look and all will be interconnected by three woodland walks.

The 25-strong Chatsworth Garden team, directed by Head of Gardens and Landscape, Steve Porter, working with the help of four trainees and 70 volunteer gardeners are handling this huge project in-house. It is hoped to have the project completed very soon (there's been a slight delay due to Covid-19!). They are working to a plan by Tom Stuart-Smith which is supported by the Gucci fashion house. The whole area was cleared, hundreds of new trees planted and over 1000 tonnes of mulch laid before the team could start work on phase one with over 80,000 plants going in!



Dave Spencer working in the Rock Garden



The Maze

The particular glade we were at was being made ready and badger proof. It is designed to have a more natural feel. Whilst Tom Stuart-Smith is the overall Arcadia designer, he has enlisted the help of Sheffield University's Professor James Hitchmough to seed this final glade. A special seed mix has been created for this area and is site and climate specific. The planting you see now in the photo shows plants being established in a specially prepared base prior to seeding to create a perennial meadow.

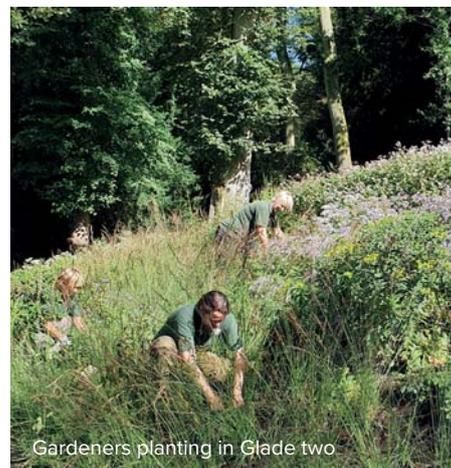
With Mick keeping an eye on time, gardener's movements and best time to catch folk, we travelled down, catching a good glimpse at the Maze as we passed, to The Hub where I caught up with Jeff and Matthew, we'd seen earlier strimming. Jeff Madin, Machine Specialist (Gardens Team), has been at Chatsworth for thirty years and really enjoys the job. He has responsibility for all machinery used in the garden. He told me that members of the team have their own main machine and take ownership by maintaining it. All are H&S trained and six have chainsaw certification. Matthew Bullen, General Gardener and Arborist has also been at Chatsworth for thirty years. He's very happy working here and loves tree climbing!

We moved on to the Kitchen and Cutting Garden where I had the opportunity to chat

to four people. First, in the 3-acre site, I spoke to Sophie Bromley, Cut Flower Grower, who has been at Chatsworth for just over a year and says "I just love it here!" Sarah Thompson, Cut Flower Grower, started as a volunteer four years ago, applied for a vacant position and has been employed now for a year. Jack Hubbard, Apprentice Gardener, working in the Cutting Garden presently, was a volunteer for a year and then secured a place as a Level 2 Apprentice Gardener. As with all apprentices, he's worked in all areas of the gardens to ensure he obtains a rounded training experience. He came to Chatsworth from Essex where he had been greenkeeping to continue his horticultural training, which he loves.

"So how is the job?" I asked. His response and smile says it all: "Enjoying it tremendously!" His End Point Assessment is due soon!

Next, I spoke to Veronica Wheeldon, Garden Volunteer. She took early retirement from teaching, went on a horticulture course and gained a diploma. She'd heard that Chatsworth was taking on volunteers, so she applied and was accepted. She's on site every Tuesday and has been for thirteen years, working in different areas. Her comments were: "It's a wonderful place to



Gardeners planting in Glade two



Sophie Bromley and Sarah Thompson



Volunteer Veronica Wheeldon



Arcadia's wet glade



Arcadia Project Glade 4



Apprentice Jack Hubbard



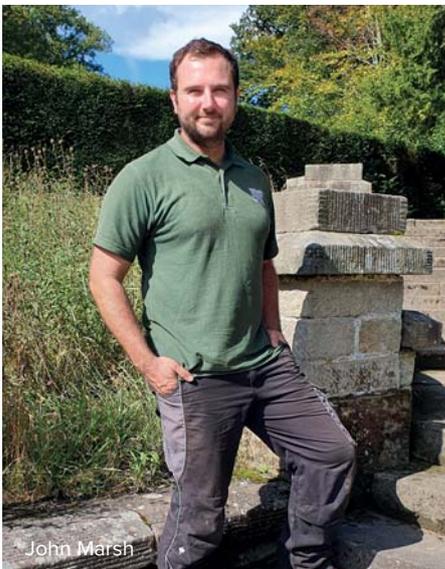
Socially distanced Matthew Bullen (left) and Jeff Madin at The Hub



Glenn Facer



Britta Horsthemke



John Marsh

work!" We then went down to Glenn Facer's domain and found him outside his greenhouse. Glenn, Kitchen Gardener Veg and Fruit, must be one of the longest serving employees here as he chalks up thirty-one years in November 2020. Twelve years of this time has seen him in the Kitchen Garden. He went to a garden centre after leaving school, applied for a job at Chatsworth and was taken on to look after borders and hedges in the garden. Doing what he does now he says: "This is the job I wanted and I love it!"

On we moved to look at the work started in 2015 but coming to fruition soon; The Trout Stream and Jack Pond. Redevelopment of the Trout Stream is intimately connected to Dan Pearson's creation of Chatsworth's and Laurent Perrier's 'Best in Show' garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2015, which provided the conceptual inspiration for new planting and seating along the Trout Stream, which ends at the Jack Pond. A simple stream running, more or less straight, alongside a path has been reworked to have a more interesting and meandering course. We saw the near culmination of Dan Pearson's work coming together which includes a Pavilion, reflective pool and new planting scheme around an historic water feature called The Jack. I particularly admired the beautifully crafted small sluice

gate, so in keeping!

We drove next up the path along the Trout Stream and came to Arcadia's Wet Glade which includes 35,000 new plants. We also stopped to admire the new sculpture by local artist Laura Ellen Bacon, inspired by the vast network of dry-stone walls across Derbyshire. We carried on and passed four of the team planting in Glade Two; it was hard spotting them all! A lovely view next presented itself; the Grotto pond with the greenery reflected in the clear water.

Moving on now away from Arcadia, we came to the entrance to the Pinetum, created during 1830-31. This area, Joseph Paxton's first major project as Head Gardener, was transformed by assiduous planting of the 6th Duke's collection of conifers from the Americas, Africa and Asia. It is stated that they were both men of vision as neither of them would see their beloved collection grow to maturity! Additions were made from 1950 by the 11th Duke and Duchess and now the 12th Duke and Duchess are keen for further development of this collection.

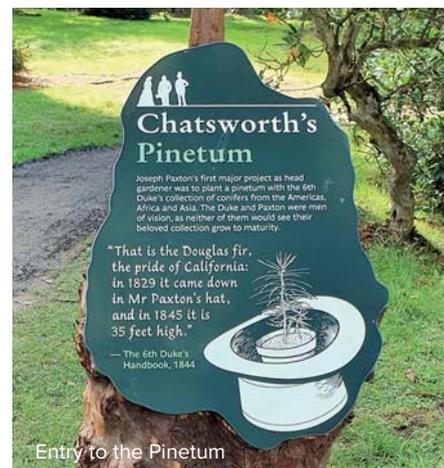
Looking out from the edge of the Pinetum across the valley to Capability Brown's parkland, we saw in the foreground an SSSI site, part of the early park, rich in ecology and containing an important collection of veteran oaks. We ventured on heading towards the Hub by another route and



The Laura Ellen Bacon sculpture



View across Capability Brown's valley from the Pinetum



Entry to the Pinetum

stopped for a word with John Marsh, Gardener and Mentor Co-ordinator. He is one of a team of two (the other is Nicky). John has worked at Chatsworth for seven years and is responsible for the mentoring side in the garden. His work includes mentoring students, apprentices and volunteers. He finds the mentoring rewarding, especially when he sees careers progress. Along came Britta Horsthemke, working nearby. She's probably the one who has been at Chatsworth the shortest time; this was her seventh day! Originally from South Africa, Britta has spent quite some time in the UK - care work and housekeeping initially - but had a keen interest in

gardening, so decided to make a career change. She applied to go on a PGG (Professional Gardeners' Guild) course. This three-year programme saw her allocated to three properties (one included Buckingham Palace gardens). I asked if she had any comments regarding her brief time at Chatsworth. She said: "I have waited for this, it's just what I wanted!"

We arrived at the Hub and I spent a while chatting to Steve Porter who has been at Chatsworth for thirteen years. As Head of Gardens and Landscapes, all team heads report to him. I was able to put to him some of the questions we usually ask and not answered already;

I asked about the soil. "We are on a gritstone edge and the soil is very varied as is the pH" said Steve. "This is a glacial valley." Consultants are called upon to advise and specialists and famously knowledgeable people have been involved, particularly with major projects. Over many years names such as Capability Brown, Joseph Paxton, and more recently, Tom Stuart-Smith have had major input.

Soil testing is frequent and composting is carried out on a large scale. Ecologists help to improve facilities. Contractors are not often called in as most work can be carried out in-house with a substantial range of machinery and equipment. There are two



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Steve Porter



The hedge trimmers, Phoebe Chambers (left) and Mel Pudelko

local contractors with specialist kit that are available and, in fact, one was there whilst I was on site, using a large stump grinder.

Chatsworth do not hire out land as such but do run public events such as horse trials in the spring. They also operate a 9-hole golf course, a swimming pool, a gym and bowls club. All are open to membership and are affiliated to the estate.

The total Estate, outside the garden and parkland, exceeds 25,000 acres, with the public areas, parkland covering 2,000 acres and the garden 105 acres.

Being affected by natural occurrences is usually manageable but, because they are in a valley, flooding of the River Derwent can be troublesome. There is a River Keeper employed responsible for the habitat and ensuring good flow.

Everyone has allocated tasks and, whilst some have special skill sets, most gardeners can chop and change if need be and handle most jobs. When a big job is underway, others can be called upon to assist. "The numbers are there if needed!" said Steve.

I asked about presentation. "Obviously, it's of the utmost importance!" Steve says "We

maintain the highest horticultural practices and this is driven by the family" he adds. The family are very much engaged and passionate. People visit to see the wonderful garden and have expectations; they do not expect the place to be stuck in the past. Steve tells me that we need to remember that everything we see has been changed or manipulated by the family. In the 1750s for example, and with Capability Brown's involvement, major changes included changing the course of the River Derwent, damming to create lakes and relocating the village of Edensor completely so that it was out of sight of the house! Brown also remodelled the landscape to the west of the house to create the lovely rolling vista you see now. Tens of thousands of trees were also planted at that time too; a huge planting programme.

The projects described are carried out by the in-house teams but, on occasions, students from nearby colleges or university can be supplied to help planting and gain experience. Apprentices are taken on, as described earlier, and this works well. Often volunteers or trainees have gained full-time employment.

Chatsworth ensure everyone working on site is suitably trained/qualified and there are 4-5 first aiders on each team but also extra for hazardous work. A Health and Safety officer is employed.

Local fauna and flora are important too

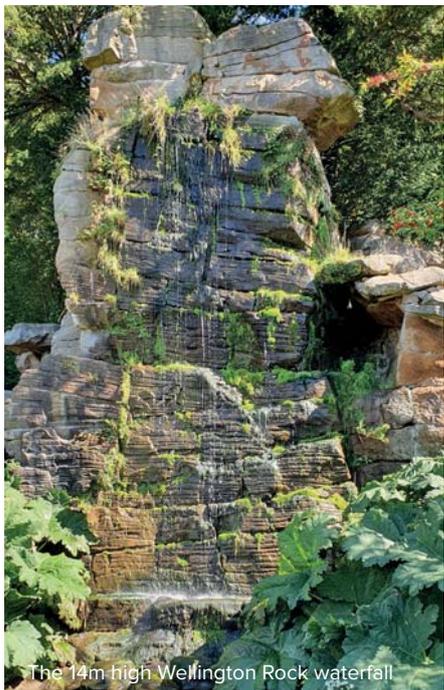
and goes with the job, as does care for the environment. Most wild animals are tolerated but badgers are an issue at present (hence the badger proof fencing around the Arcadia Glade 4 planting!) Pheasants can be a nuisance also. There is a sustainability officer in place but all are aware of practices. Contact is maintained with the Environment Agency, particularly with regard to flooding and reservoir issues.

Machinery is sourced as and when required, usually fairly locally, but there is no brand allegiance. As Steve says; "We buy the best piece of equipment for the job and at the best price." He also mentions that they are going down the electrically powered route for some kit. "An electric strimmer will not be as intrusive to visitors as a petrol one for example!"

One piece of kit that has paid dividends is their Amazone flail collector. "It saves so much manpower and is providing a better finish, enhancing the wildflower meadows; a great piece of kit!" says Steve.

Most day to day servicing is carried out in-house but large kit (tractors, etc.) are serviced by local dealerships to maintain warranty and proof of servicing.

Steve tells me that his operating budget has been curtailed due to Coronavirus. Big projects are funded separately, but, like the operating budget, the bulk of costs are covered by the revenue generated from ticket sales for visitors to the house and



The 14m high Wellington Rock waterfall



The Chatsworth Grounds and Garden team



garden. Grants and sponsorship can also play an important role in conservation and development projects; an example being the Arcadia project, partly funded by Gucci.

As the weather had now improved greatly and the sun was shining, I bid my farewells and thanked Mick for his time and for the extensive information he'd imparted and returned to the garden; I needed better photos of the house, fountain and valley view!

I met Phoebe Chambers and Mel Pudelko on the way (we'd missed them earlier) so we took a photo and had a brief chat. Assistant Gardener, Phoebe has been at Chatsworth since September 2018. She said: "I had a

placement here on a PGG course, then I saw a job opportunity here and applied." She succeeded in obtaining the full-time job. "I love the variety of work and we can use our own initiative" she added. Assistant Gardener, Mel has worked her way up so to speak, with a year and a half as a volunteer, six months as a temp and now full time. "There's always something different especially seed planting and then there's the views". She said that they regularly receive good comments from visitors.



A splendid place

Chatsworth is steeped in history and is a splendid place to visit and work. High standards are maintained and development is ongoing. It is clear, particularly from the comments freely given by those I spoke to, that there is an excellent working environment and all enjoy their jobs, be they employed, apprentices / trainees or volunteers. The fact that many trainees or volunteers have gone on to gain permanent positions at Chatsworth must mean something!

The Duke and Duchess are very much involved, interacting with staff and volunteers; their vision, enthusiasm and taste permeates the place. Their website statement exemplifies this:

"We have always been very aware of what the estate means to people, the impact it has on communities, and the responsibility we have, as custodians, to care for it.

We feel very privileged to have the opportunity to work with the many wonderful people who are committed to helping preserve Chatsworth for the long-term benefit of the public."

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Snow and Ice

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To coin a phrase used widely in the world of marketing and advertising, artificial sports turf offers a clear 'Unique Selling Point', or USP; that is, the capacity to support levels of use far greater than its natural grass counterpart could hope to provide.

The potential benefits of this - maximised revenue, year-round availability, prolonged surface life, to name a few - are increasingly attractive in today's economic climate, where mounting overheads and a squeeze on our disposable income may threaten the financial practicality of sports facilities.

However, increased usage is not necessarily a given; regular and thorough care and attention is required throughout the life of an artificial pitch to achieve this,

and for the benefits to be realised. A poorly-maintained pitch will soon experience inadequate drainage, reduced performance levels and increased pile wear, leaving the carpet at risk of failure. Whilst the consequences of this might not be immediately apparent, the arrival of each autumn and winter brings with it weather conditions that can impact greatly upon a vulnerable pitch.

If maintained correctly, an artificial pitch should be playable in most weathers, but it is a common mistake to assume that such surfaces are 'all-weather', as grounds teams will no doubt have discovered when heavy snowfall hits the UK.

The last thing that owners and operators of an artificial pitch want to be confronted with is a compulsory closure brought about

by flooding and standing water, or else by failed seams or hazardous silt deposits creating health and safety issues that cannot be risked. After all, a considerable investment has been made on the understanding that the returns would be equally high; from a financial perspective, prolonged downtime can be disastrous. Enforced cancellations in winter soon create a downward spiral of lost revenue, from which it can be hard to recover.

Beyond this, failing to properly maintain an artificial pitch in the long term will result in even greater disruption - and cost. And, with artificial turf, a product chosen specifically by schools, leisure centres and sports clubs for its versatility, endurance and resilience, it makes no financial or commercial sense to ignore the



It's that time of year when various named storms sweep across the Atlantic to batter the UK, whilst various other weather patterns bring freezing temperatures and occasional heavy snow. It is a time when 'all weather' pitches struggle to live up to their epithet. Synthetic Pitch Maintenance expert Nick Harris provides a few pointers about what you should, and should not, do when adverse weather strikes your synthetic pitches.



maintenance responsibilities that facilitate these considerable advantages.

And so to autumn and winter - heavy rainfall, wintry winds, persistent frosts and icy temperatures are all contributory factors that can affect both the performance criteria and drainage capabilities of an artificial pitch that has not been adequately maintained.

Frost and Frozen Pitches

During winter, artificial pitches retain a large moisture content and, inevitably, this moisture will freeze, causing the surface to become hard and often unsafe to play on. It is not uncommon for the surface to remain frozen, even when surrounding natural grass areas have thawed, due to the low core temperature of the artificial turf and the insulating effect that the infill and carpet

creates. Reduced daylight hours during the winter months can also result in shaded areas remaining 'frosted over' all day, impacting, in turn, upon the ability to thoroughly sweep or brush the pitch.

Trials have shown that an even spread of vacuum-dried salt across the surface can help prevent the carpet from freezing, as it will dissolve, leaving no impurities in the surface. However, the benefits are very varied in different weather conditions, and the salt should be used to help prevent freezing rather than used as a defrosting agent. The results and longevity of this substance can vary from site to site and in differing weather conditions, so the success of using such a product cannot always be guaranteed.

Rock salt and grit should be avoided at all

costs as these could lead to contamination of the surface.

It is estimated that an initial treatment of approximately one tonne of salt for a full-size surface, or 125kgs for a five-a-side kick-about facility, will provide sufficient protection during a few days of cold weather, although this will depend on the intensity of any rainfall, frosts and snow that may occur over the period and its overall impact on the facility in question.

The effects of frost and freezing conditions can also impact on the condition of the synthetic carpet itself. Autumn and winter sees an increase in the number of calls for repairs to artificial pitches. The first sign of frost and any weakness in the seams of a surface are exposed as the water expands and, in effect, 'blows' open the



joints. Structural failures or weaknesses should be identified and repaired as soon as possible to reduce the risk of injury, and avoid more costly remedial work in the future.

Snow

Snow, although not a frequent or prolonged weather condition, nevertheless creates chaos and disruption to the continued use of artificial pitches. In most cases, it is unlikely that much can be done to remove snow from the playing surface in the short-term, especially without a suitable area to store large piles of snow. If you do consider clearing snow from your surface, it is vital that this is done when the snow first falls. If allowed to thaw and re-freeze, it will be almost impossible to remove the ice without damaging the surface, as it will stick to the carpet.

Snow clearing should only be completed with the appropriate machinery and tools; snow ploughs can be utilised, but the drive unit should be suitable in size for the pitch, and the plough blade should also be made of a suitable material. Rubber-flanged blades will help to protect the synthetic carpet from damage. Alternatively, powered brushes could be used, but first check that the bristles are manufactured to an appropriate specification so as not to damage the surface.

In both cases, operator experience is crucial so as not to remove any infill with the snow. Attempting to take off large amounts of snow from a synthetic surface can affect infill levels in this way and, if left unremedied, infill displacement can weaken the fibres and increase the rate at which the carpet wears, compromising the playing characteristics and foreshortening the life expectancy of the surface.

Standing water and drainage issues

Perhaps the most common issue to be experienced on artificial turf pitches during the autumn and winter months is with standing water, the result of heavy and often continuous downpours that the surface's drainage system simply cannot withstand. In extreme cases, the aftermath of a snowfall can also expose inadequate drainage properties. The reason for this is clear enough; over time, contaminated material -

such as leaf and tree debris, dirt, detritus, silt and broken-down carpet fibres - becomes embedded progressively deeper within the carpet infill.

Regular brushing and mechanical removal of this material will help to minimise contamination levels, if administered at appropriate intervals throughout the life of an artificial pitch but, ultimately, whether it is the result of insufficient maintenance practices or simply the age of the synthetic carpet itself, the likelihood is that rainwater will eventually fail to drain away completely.

During periods of heavy rain, you may notice that tide marks or silt areas appear on the surface. This will have been caused by rainwater backing up and flushing out the contaminants from the infill, depositing it onto the surface as it slowly drains away. If left unattended, such material is likely to pose an ongoing health and safety issue for the users of the surface.

At this stage, the granular infill will have to be removed and replaced via a deep-cleaning process. A replenished infill will support and protect the synthetic fibres, restore the correct drainage properties and help to improve overall player experience. The only alternative would be to resurface the pitch - at considerable expense - but, in most cases, this is an avoidable outlay when an extra five years of use can, instead, be secured - and additional revenue generated - by a restorative deep-cleaning process, followed by an appropriate aftercare programme.

Where budgets are more restricted, interim measures can help to aesthetically improve your surface in the short-term, but will not solve the root cause of the problem. Surface issues, such as standing water, are often symptomatic of deeper-seated problems with an artificial pitch, which will only worsen if ignored.

A pitch's fragility is more commonly exposed by the climatic conditions of the autumn and winter period, but can reveal itself at any stage of the pitch's life, particularly if the ongoing upkeep is minimal. To combat this, a programme of routine and specialist maintenance throughout the life of an artificial pitch can help to ensure its longevity and safety, as well as preserving its aesthetics and performance levels.

The basis of any good maintenance regime is preparation and forward planning; establishing a routine to ensure familiarity with the layout and construction of the pitch will allow any minor issues to be identified and addressed before they become major problems. Furthermore, the factors affecting player performance and pitch endurance, such as carpet pile wear, infill distribution and drainage capabilities, are intrinsically linked to the level and quality of maintenance being completed, as well as to the hours of use the pitch receives.

As a rule, for every ten hours of use, one hour should be allocated for maintenance, and the processes and frequencies must be adapted to reflect the condition of the pitch as it ages. Understanding the specific maintenance needs of your artificial pitch will go a long way to helping you generate maximum use, performance and revenue from your sports facility.

So, whilst there are processes designed specifically to combat the effects of a cold, damp climate on the playability of artificial sports pitches - a revival package offered by a specialist company to tackle surface-level aesthetic qualities; PDV salt applications to protect the pitch from the effects of frost - maintenance should not be treated as a once-a-year requirement.

The vast majority of procedures can, and should, be completed all year round, enabling you to provide a consistent playing surface from January through to December. Indeed, if greater emphasis is placed on preventative maintenance whilst weather conditions are more forgiving, you may just find that less corrective work is required when the winter cold creeps in.

This article, from the Pitchcare archives, was written by Synthetic Pitch Maintenance expert Nick Harris



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Cost control

Reassurance from maintenance in uncertain times



In their last article, Reesink Turfcare took an in-depth look at the importance of the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of turfcare machinery, concluding that it is, now more than ever, vital to consider the overall investment of the equipment's expected 'life cycle', rather than focusing on the short-term cost. In this article, **David Jackman**, operations manager at Reesink Turfcare, takes a look at how to control spending and avoid spending surprises, allocating maintenance budget when the economy is uncertain, managing this cost component over time and warranties

The coronavirus outbreak has impacted the UK economy at a level unprecedented in modern times and, whilst a recovery is underway (according to UK Parliament), there is uncertainty over how fast economic activity will regain lost ground. It is understandable that there is reluctance from businesses and consumers to return to 'normal' spending patterns, but that doesn't seem to be a rule that applies fully to the golf industry.

As we know, the industry has fared incredibly well post lockdown in membership and/or pay-to-play increases, with the majority of clubs clawing back on the deficit from the start of the year within six weeks of re-trading, according to The Revenue Club.

Rounds have gone up, membership is on the increase, there's a rise in younger golfers, lapsed players are back; it seems golf has been given a big opportunity to broaden its player base, improve the sport's popularity and make up some serious lost ground.

With more people wanting to play, the best way for clubs to shine is through the course. The need for health and mental well-being is only going to become more of a focus and providing a beautiful place to play the game will make the difference when it comes to bringing in new business.

Some clubs may have reduced greenkeeping teams, perhaps there is more work to do after basic maintenance for so long, but now more than ever it is important to be able to rely on your machinery fleet. View it as an extended part of the team and get the most out of the investment and, just as you would invest in your employees with training and development for example, it is important to have a good preventive maintenance programme to protect one of your biggest assets, your turfcare machinery.

Maintenance and all that it entails

Equipment is one of the largest investments a golf course makes. But that equipment only delivers a return when it's working properly. That's why preventive maintenance is essential to get the most out of your machines.

It is inevitable machinery will break down at some point and you simply have to deal with it. But it's not just repairing broken machinery and minimising the downtime when a problem occurs, maintenance also safeguards your investment, ensures a better performance for longer and ensures a higher residual value.

Many clubs will have benefit from a workshop and part- or full-time mechanic, but many more don't have that. And, in those cases, there will be a machinery maintenance programme to take away the workload, stress and burden.

An effective preventive maintenance programme includes equipment inspections, scheduled servicing and replacement of parts as needed. For turf equipment, service intervals are typically based on hours of operation. A robust regime will reduce and/or prevent unnecessary, costly and unexpected breakdowns - it is surprising, for example, how the areas of maintenance that generate service time or bills are relatively easily avoided, such as lack of greasing, contaminated fuel or oil and blocked radiators or oil coolers.

A proactive cleaning and greasing regime will protect the residual value of the investment and reduce overall service costs, whilst prompt operator action to indicators such as noise, smell and vibration changes can save money through early intervention. Clean air and oil are the fundamentals to long engine life and reliability, in a similar way to cleanliness, good quality oil and controlled operating temperatures are key to hydraulic system reliability.

We'll discuss the components of a successful preventive maintenance programme in more detail in a moment, but first, it's worth exploring why it makes sense to have a programme in place.

Why preventive maintenance is important

1. **Safety** - equipment and vehicles must be safe to operate. If worn components go unrepaired, it increases the risk of downtime or even worse, accidents
2. **Availability and productivity** - the team depends on equipment being ready to use when they need it. Preventive maintenance helps you maximise machine availability

3. **Longer machine life** - performing regular scheduled maintenance helps extend the working life of your equipment, which helps stretch your investment further
4. **Cost savings** - preventive maintenance is proactive. It helps minimise breakdowns that require more costly unscheduled repairs
5. **Effective budgeting and cost control** - look for a plan that has a fixed cost for the period of the contract and there is the choice of monthly or quarterly payments
6. **Peace of mind** - reassurance comes from knowing you can be assured your machines will perform to the best of their ability and support comes quickly when needed

Components of an effective programme

Doing scheduled maintenance and adjustments will prolong the life of your equipment, help prevent expensive downtime and give the best possible performance.

1. **Regular, thorough servicing.** Experience has shown that a high percentage of problems that occur in turf equipment have developed over a period of time and could have been prevented by adjustment, lubrication, or other required maintenance
2. **Highly trained technicians.** Today's equipment is becoming more and more sophisticated with electric, hybrid and computer technology. If you don't have a

warehouse and full-time mechanic, then consider outsourcing your service programme to ensure your machinery benefits from servicing by people with the necessary skills and commitment to stay current with trends and ongoing training

3. **Limiting downtime.** There's nothing more frustrating than a machine out of action. Breakdowns costs time, and time is money. Downtime is basically a record of the cost of lost operator hours, lost income (if applicable) and replacement equipment hire costs. When recorded accurately it helps to support an 'instinct' that equipment is unreliable and 'costing' money. It can also support a considered decision to change equipment before its planned time. There is a direct correlation with maintenance practices reducing and, in some cases, preventing downtime. An aging or poorly maintained equipment fleet is likely to generate unwelcome repair costs and spiralling downtime creating additional difficulty in controlling maintenance budgets.

What does a maintenance plan specifically cover?

There's a range of maintenance plans on the market to suit the needs of every customer; flexibility and choice are key, with plans being able to be set for a base line of servicing based on tighter budgets, to a full care plan where it is easier to list 'what isn't covered'. These gold standard plans, when linked to a new equipment investment, can

provide years of fixed price maintenance and budget certainty - the financial surprises are removed. As well as robust and preventative maintenance, these plans focus on aspects that also affect the quality of cut and presentation of the surface, the significant reason for regular maintenance and adjustments. Important aspects include:

Sharpening rotary blades

A dull blade will produce a ragged cut and will require an excessive amount of engine horsepower to rotate the blade through the grass. More horsepower demand also means more fuel consumption. The most common causes for rotary mowers not giving a good quality of cut are due to dull cutting edges and/or bent blades.

Cylinder mower quality of cut

Remember that the 'effective' or actual height of cut depends on cutting unit weight, cutting unit accessories and turf conditions. It is important that accessories fitted to cutting units are cared for regularly too. Also remember that the 'effective height of cut' will be different than the bench set height of cut. In some turf conditions, mis-selection can contribute to bottom blade and cylinder wear if too low.

Factors That Affect Quality of Cut

There are many! Tyre pressure, engine governed speed, cylinder bearing condition/adjustment, cylinder and bedknife sharpness, bedknife parallel to cylinder, bedknife to cylinder contact, bedknife

Equipment is becoming more sophisticated with electric, hybrid and computer technology. Take Toro's all-electric eTriFlex 3370 and hybrid counterpart the 3360 for example. If you don't have a warehouse and full-time mechanic, then consider outsourcing your service programme to ensure your machinery benefits from servicing by people with the necessary skills and commitment to stay current with trends and ongoing training





Left: With the up-to-date and extended fleet, Reesink is now more equipped than ever to provide customers with an effective and dependable service

Below: Reesink Turfcare has developed three new easy-care maintenance plans rated Gold, Silver and Bronze for machinery maintenance and servicing for its Toro customers.



attitude (angle), roller(s) parallel to cylinder, height of cut, correct bedknife, cutting unit alignment and ground following, roller and roller bearing condition, cylinder speed, traction speed, cutting unit drop speed and sequence, cutting unit counterbalance or down pressure setting.

When to sharpen cylinder mowers

When the grass is not cut cleanly and there are streaks and stragglers, the cutting unit is noisy or your schedule says it's time to sharpen! One sure way to determine the answer to this is by actually checking the cutting edges of the reel and bed knife to see if they are dull, nicked, bent or being run without "light contact" against one another.

Cylinder mower height of cut adjustment

Cylinder mower performance depends on proper set-up and adjustment procedures. An error of .010 inch (.25mm), in height end-to-end, or from one cutting unit to another, is visible as a mismatch on many golf course greens. Although there are design variations in cutting units, most require the same basic procedures. A surface plate, accurate height

of cut tools and proper instruction are essential for setting up a cutting unit.

Maintaining cylinder mower performance

To accurately maintain height of cut and performance, routinely check the following components: cylinder bearing for looseness, end play and roughness. Replace if necessary. If adjustable (e.g. tapered roller bearings), adjust to 'no' lash while maintaining free rotation of the cylinder.

What does a maintenance plan cost?

It's probably more relevant to say what value does each plan bring. What value will it bring to you and the team and the longevity and performance of the equipment?

There are so many plans with varying costs attached, but the main cost benefit is the control. Whichever plan you go for, certainly with Reesink Turfcare anyway, those costs don't fluctuate throughout the year. What you sign up for is what you pay every month, no matter what happens with the economy, there will be no fluctuation. Even if machines need a lot of work, you know there'll be no surprises.

Once you've decided a maintenance plan will bring value to your club, my advice is to set your budget, then look for a plan that falls within that. Can you afford the most comprehensive one? Make cost comparisons - what does each plan bring versus the estimated cost if you did it within the team?

Which plan you choose will also depend upon whether you're choosing the plan at the point of purchase on a new fleet or for an existing older fleet. Some plans give you machinery warranty too, a highly valuable asset. Plus, how well regarded is the company - is the backup and support network extensive and esteemed and the spare parts supply process reliable and fast?

Reesink Turfcare has developed three new easy-care maintenance plans rated Gold, Silver and Bronze for machinery maintenance and servicing for its Toro customers. To find out more about these plans call 01480 226800, email info@reesinkturfcare.co.uk, or visit reesinkturfcare.co.uk



Frank Newberry

How to Respond to Bad News

In the previous issue, **Frank Newberry** looked at how to give bad news to people in the workplace. In this article, Frank offers some tips on how we might respond better - when we are on the receiving end of bad news



In this article, I will look at: 1) **Being prepared** - the need to be alert to the signs that bad news may be on the way, 2) **Being aware** - of why bad news hurts some people more than it hurts others, and 3) **Being ready** - to adjust our reactions to the pain that can come with bad news. If we take redundancy (in the Covid-19 era) as our 'bad news' example - we can explore what may be a hot topic for some of us.

Rule 1: Be Prepared for the Signs

I have been made redundant a few times in my career and, looking back, I have to say that being alert and prepared was key to my enduring the bad news experience. Now, we may not be able to predict exactly when we will get bad news, but there could be signs all around for us to see. Signs in the national news, the local news, the gossip at work about what is happening elsewhere, and the strategies and tactics government agencies are encouraging employers to adopt at present.

We will also have our own individual suspicions. Nagging away in the back of our minds, our suspicions may be causing us to have questions like: 'Will I be the first/next to go?', 'How will I manage?', 'How will my family be affected?'

So, rule one is to 'Be Alert to the Facts'. Check them out, ask questions - we all have the right to know about changes that could affect our working arrangements and our livelihood.

Of course, shocks and surprises will always occur but this, although distressing and disturbing, might be easier for our emotions to bear than the slow and painful build-up of suspicion and doubt. Suspicions that could ultimately leave us blaming ourselves for not seeing the signs before the bad news was upon us.

A good employer will tell us early on, and keep us updated, on any changes that are likely to happen. A good employer will answer all our questions and concerns. Being alert could mean we have to ask for a

meeting at work to get the clarity we need. We may even need to prepare ourselves to help less-good employers to 'get it right'.

Our willingness to check things out may be directly related to how much we value our job. Do we care about doing good work? Are we really bothered? Does our employer know that we care about doing a good job?

Rule 2: Be Aware of Feelings

Let us work with the answers to the preceding questions and explore the extent to which we 'give a damn'. If we do care - the level of emotional pain we might suffer if we lose our job is going to be greater than if we do not care. Rule two then is to 'Be Alert to the Feelings'. You are more likely to feel pain if the following facts and feelings apply. If you are:

A

1. Personally invested, i.e. you give a lot of time and effort to the work and care about it very much
2. Burdened with considerable financial commitments and family responsibilities at the moment
3. Competent at doing the job and you get good results for the employer
4. Currently enjoying a good working relationship with colleagues and managers
5. Convinced that your department needs people like you, especially at the moment
6. Persuaded that the organisation as a whole will suffer if you are made redundant

By the same token then, the pain of a redundancy would be less for you if the facts and your feelings suggest you:

B

1. Don't care about your job
2. Have few financial or family commitments at the moment
3. Are not very good at the job and your results are not too special
4. Do not have strong working relations with colleagues and managers

5. Are reluctant to believe that your presence is essential to the department's success
6. Do not think that the organisation as a whole will suffer if you leave

I have to report that, in my personal experience, most people I meet in the turfcare sector fall into category A above. Attending training seminars is just one of the signs that they care about the job. I also have to acknowledge that many more people do not attend training seminars! They are quite happy to just turn up and do the work to the same old standard and, of course, their employers are well aware of this attitude.

Now, if there is talk of redundancies and you do care about the work, then you will need to 'hope for the best', but 'prepare for the worst'. This brings us neatly to something called the Kübler Ross Grief Cycle - a well-known model that puts helpful labels on the phases many of us go through when we have to deal with bad news.

A working knowledge of the Grief Cycle is something we can use to prepare and respond to our negative reactions. Initially, the bad news may well have shaken us up, and we could be very confused about what to do next. If we can understand our reactions to the bad news - we can control our reactions better. Maybe not all of them, but at least some of them.

Rule 3: The Grief Cycle - being ready

Let us go through the five phases of the Grief Cycle:

1. **Shock/Denial:** After the shock of the bad news - the first reaction is often one of 'denial'. For example, we might find ourselves saying 'this can't be right', or 'there must be some mistake'; denial may go on long after the bad news has been confirmed. Some people even go into denial for long periods. I know of one individual who kept checking back with the employer for months, asking if he had 'changed his mind about the need for redundancies yet'

2. **Anger:** Once the news has sunk in it is quite normal to go into 'victim mode' and have feelings of 'anger'. We might ask ourselves: 'why me?', 'this is so unfair' etc. Another reaction at this point would be to find someone to blame for the bad news, e.g. incompetent people at work, uncaring bosses, stupid people who have let us all down. I know of one individual who lost his job but carried on turning up for work for months afterwards, playing 'the victim' - chatting to old colleagues, complaining about his situation but not taking any action to move on
3. **Bargaining:** After 'anger' we can move into the 'bargaining' or 'negotiating' part of the cycle. We might think that 'maybe we can persuade the employer to retain us if we volunteer for extra work for the same pay?' 'Perhaps we can gang up on the employer and all threaten to strike if we cannot keep our jobs the way they are?' Less dramatically, we might ask 'what is needed to keep the job at this point?'
4. **Depression:** The 'bargaining' phase can give us a little hope and as such may postpone the inevitable feelings of disappointment and despair that redundancy will bring. Lethargy and self-pity may set in during the 'depression' phase and we may not feel like doing anything for a while. Our self-confidence and emotional resilience could be affected, and, again, this would be normal in the

circumstances. We need to notice it, acknowledge it and eventually be ready to practice what author Paul McGee calls SUMO, i.e. 'Shut Up and Move On' - we move into the 'acceptance' phase with no more wallowing in self-pity

5. **Acceptance:** We can hold out for as long as we can, wishing and hoping, but eventually 'acceptance' will have to happen. It will mean adjustment and challenge. It will mean facing the world as it really is and not what we want it to be. It is never easy to give up a job we love. I have had to do it a couple of times but, as time went by, I got equally rewarding work and was even able to do the work I love on a voluntary basis

So, good luck with responding to bad news. May you be able to do it in a more positive and resourceful way when it happens next time.

If you have concerns and questions about this topic, please feel free to contact me via my website www.franknewberry.com. Just click on the Contact tab.

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Machinery and Supplies

Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



Aspen Fuel have announced the introduction of two new package sizes to their range of 2-stroke and 4-stroke Alkylate Petrol. In addition to the standard 5L and 200L units, new for 2020 are 25L and 60L options.

These new sizes give users the flexibility to specify their fuel quantity by the container, pallet or drum that best suits their usage, storage and transportation requirements.

Being virtually free from sulphur, benzene and other harmful substances found in regular pump fuel, hazardous emissions from equipment running on Aspen Alkylate Petrol are minimal - improving the working conditions for the operator and significantly reducing the harmful impact your machinery makes on the environment.

The new size options are also matched with new bulk-order pricing, details of which can be found on the Aspen website. For added convenience, bulk orders can be delivered to site in 48 hours or, alternatively, collection is available from Aspen dealerships nationwide.

www.aspenfuel.co.uk



Building on its reputation for developing innovative solutions for customers in the groundcare market, Kubota has announced the launch of its newly updated and popular G-Series range of mowers.

These mowers have been specifically developed to meet the professional groundcare needs of key customer segments such as councils, contractors and large property owners.

There are two models in the new G-Series line-up, G231 and G261, both available with low and high dump grass collectors. These models have eye-catching developments such as a new hydrostatic transmission (HST) designed to increase traction and grip. The mowers are also equipped with powerful Kubota engines offering 23hp and 26hp, as



A range of three low decibel three-point linkage mounted debris blowers and two high capacity collectors, recognised for their safe, efficient and reliable performance for sports, grounds and other turf customers, are now available from Reesink, the agricultural and turfcare distributor, in time for autumn.

There are three leaf and debris blowers available. All are tractor mounted with the BW2500 requiring 25hp at the PTO, BW3500 35hp and BW4500, 45hp respectively. They have an aluminium rather than steel impellor which, because it requires less energy at full throttle, delivers a quieter, smoother and vibration free operation. This will appeal to golf courses and urban sports grounds, for example, where it is important to keep noise pollution to a minimum.

The lightweight construction reduces the sudden loading on the driveline and helps reduce belt wear as the PTO is engaged. The large roller on which the blower rides lets the operator work in the worst conditions without marking or compacting the turf, particularly useful for sports surfaces, especially on turns. This low decibel series of tractor-drawn blowers has been designed for maximum productivity and minimum maintenance and are a worthy addition to any golf course, sports ground, paddock and orchard and the option to fit caster wheels, which allows the machine to switch to hard surface application, makes them a good option for public schools, colleges, universities and large estates for driveway clearing too.

www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk

well as an electromagnetic PTO clutch which replaces the hydraulic PTO, offering a more positive drive for consistent cutting performance.

Additionally, users of these new cutting-edge models will benefit from improved output, increased speed and greater comfort. G-Series mowers have been engineered to run faster and deliver improved mowing performance; saving time, money and effort for customers. The enhanced performance and adaptability of Kubota's new G-Series also enables operators to work more efficiently across various types of terrain which can pose a multitude of challenges.

With a top speed of 19.0km/h, the highest in the industry, G-Series mowers enable users to cut grass at higher speeds and ultimately finish the job quicker. Enhanced driver comfort is also offered by the new tilting steering wheel.

An improved collecting system features a wider and taller chute with a shorter travel distance between the deck and the grass collector enabling impeccable grass flow and reduced clumping. More grass can be handled with ease and efficiency..

www.kubota-eu.com

As part of their continuous product development programme, INFINICUT® have announced the introduction of a new 60Ah battery module. The new power unit joins the line-up, alongside the industry-leading 30Ah option, to offer extended run-time and more power for increased overall flexibility.

Together with a significantly reduced carbon footprint compared to that of a petrol-driven mower, the modular demountable battery configuration of the INFINICUT® has proven to deliver a reduction in noise output and significant improvements to the Hand-Arm Vibration (HAV) levels for the operator.

This new, larger 60Ah battery offers a run-time of up to 390 minutes (dependent on machine, set-up and conditions) and supersedes the current 40Ah module option, giving the operator the opportunity of matching battery capacity with the specification required to deliver desired work patterns. The 30Ah and 60Ah module units are standard and interchangeable across the entire INFINICUT® range - including the floating head and fixed head cylinder mower collection, and SM34 Rotary model - to give reliable, consistent performance with the option of purchasing further interchangeable battery modules as required.

www.cubcadetturf.com



Take a lightweight carbon fibre frame and build in a 79.9cc two-stroke engine producing an air volume of 1818m³/h, airspeed of 94.5m/sec and a blowing force of 44N. Add a cruise-control throttle, ventilated backpack pad, an anti-vibration system and heavy-duty straps and you have the PB-8010, ECHO's largest and most powerful backpack blower.

Delivering an excellent power-to-weight ratio, the PB-8010 weighs just 11.2kg with an output of 4.2kW. Part of ECHO's X Series range of 'best in class' products, the PB-8010 is one of a series of ECHO power blowers designed to make easy the job of clearing stubborn autumn leaves and garden debris.

These blowers and more are part of a complete range of ECHO power blowers designed to meet the needs of the operator. Each comes with a two-year professional or five-year domestic warranty, and a 2-year warranty on batteries, showing ECHO's own confidence in their machines.

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OFFSIDE

The not so serious side of the industry

Team loses 37-0 in socially distanced match

A German football team lost 37-0 to their local rivals, after fielding only seven players who socially distanced throughout the match.

Ripdorf fielded the minimum number of players because their opponents SV Holdenstedt II came into contact in a previous game with someone who tested



positive for Covid-19. Their team tested negative but Ripdorf said the conditions were not safe.

If Ripdorf had not played, they would have faced a €200 (£182) fine. They had asked for the match - in the 11th tier of German football - to be postponed but the local association refused.

At the beginning of the match, one of Ripdorf's players stepped onto the pitch, passed the ball to an opponent and the team then walked to the sidelines.

"There was no reason not to play this game," Holdenstedt coach Florian Schierwater said.

Grumpy greenkeepers?

When James Ferris won Greenkeeper of the Year at the Bowls New Zealand Summerset Awards 2020, he commented that he is trying to buck the stereotype that greenkeepers are grumpy.

He still has pet peeves though: "It's a running joke that the greenkeeper is the reason for everyone's misfortune, from a wayward bowl to the onset of rainy weather."

"It's all in good fun ... I love this job and the people."



Good luck with your mission James!

Alpaca pitch invader

A Carlton Athletic football match was disrupted by an unusual pitch invader when an alpaca bounded on to the field.



Carlton Athletic's tie against Ilkley Town in West Yorkshire on Saturday was halted for 15 minutes when Oscar escaped from a nearby farm and joined the action.

"After 35 minutes it escaped, came through the entrance and proceeded to get on the pitch. The referee stopped the game. People didn't want to go near it in case it kicked," Ilkley manager Simon Armstrong said.

Attempts were made to entice it off the pitch with food, before a farmer managed to shepherd it home.

After the bizarre delay, Ilkley went on to secure a 2-0 away win.

As seen on social media ...



A macaw interrupts Brazil's women's national team's practice at their training ground, landing on the head of defender Bruna Benites.



As if the RCA didn't have enough to deal with 'behind closed doors', registration for racehorses names also falls within their remit.

Here's a few that didn't slip though the net!

Ben Timover
Oil Beef Hooked
Willy Fisterbottom

Neil Anblomee
Anita Hanjaab
Arfur Foulksaycke

If you spot anything you think might give readers a chuckle send it to: kerry.haywood@pitchcare.com

When you've got to go, you've got to go

Jose Mourinho will have chased after many players in his managerial career - but surely never for the reason he sprinted after Eric Dier, in what could be deemed as a st game recently.**

In the 77th minute of Tottenham's Carabao Cup tie against Chelsea, with Spurs 1-0 down, defender Dier suddenly raced off the pitch and headed straight down the tunnel.

Manager Mourinho set off in hot pursuit and TV cameras inside Tottenham Hotspur Stadium showed the manager disappearing into the changing room seconds after the defender.

So what could possibly have prompted Dier to leave the field with just over ten minutes remaining in a cup tie his team were losing?

"Everyone can imagine!" a grinning Dier said after the game.

"I am OK but that was a first for me. There was nothing I could do about it and when you've got to go, you've got to go. Some things you can't stop."



DIARY DATES

NOVEMBER

2nd: Horseracing - Preview Raceday, Plumpton (plumptonracecourse.co.uk)

12th-15th: Golf - Masters, Augusta National (masters.com)

15th: Football - Nations League: Belgium v England; Slovakia v Scotland; Wales v Republic of Ireland; Austria v Northern Ireland (uefa.com)

16th: Horseracing - Start of National Hunt, Leicester (leicester-racecourse.co.uk)

18th: Football - Nations League: England v Iceland; Northern Ireland v Romania; Israel v Scotland; Wales v Finland (uefa.com)

19th-22nd: Women's golf major - LPGA Tour Championship, Tiburon, Florida (lpga.com)

DECEMBER

3rd: Horseracing - County Raceday, Market Rasen (thejockeyclub.co.uk/marketrasen)

10th-13th: Women's golf major - US Open, Champions Golf Club, Houston, Texas (usga.org)

10th-13th: Golf - European Tour: World Tour Championship, Dubai (europeantour.com)

18th: Horseracing - Christmas Raceday, Haydock (ascot.co.uk)

19th: Horseracing - Betway Tommy Whittle Chase, Haydock (thejockeyclub.co.uk/haydock)

20th: Football - Scottish Cup final, Hampden Park (scottishfa.co.uk)

25th: Merry Christmas

26th: Horseracing - King George VI Chase, Kempton (thejockeyclub.co.uk/kempton)

JAN

1st: Happy New Year

18th-31st: Tennis - Australia Open Melbourne, Australia (ausopen.com)

To have your event included in this magazine diary section, please email details to kerry@pitchcare.com

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"If I was to ever lose my job at the BBC, being part of the groundstaff at a Test cricket ground would be high on my list of potential alternate careers. You get to drive the super-sopper and there's currently a guy in the middle at the Ageas using a leaf blower to spray away standing water. Great fun. Does anyone want to make me an offer?" **The BBC reporter Matthew Henry during a rain break at the Ageas Bowl.**

"Maguire's japes are as nothing compared to that of Peter Beagrie, the undisputed champion of excess, who is now a pundit for Sky. In 1991, the then-Everton winger, on a bibulous night out in Spain on a pre-season tour, flagged down a motorcyclist in the early hours who gave him a lift back to his hotel. When he couldn't wake the night porter, Beagrie commandeered the bike, opened the throttle and roared up the hotel steps and through a plate glass window. It was the wrong hotel and he needed 50 stitches." **Ron McKay's Diary, Glasgow Herald.**

"Who wants to lose 7-2? Years ago we told ourselves we wanted to create history. That was history, but obviously the wrong type. We lost balls in the wrong area and did not protect properly. It looked like we lost the plot after it went to 1-0. It is not an excuse. **Jürgen Klopp reacted as Liverpool were thrashed by Aston Villa.**



"If the machine is jumping around like a child on its second tube of smarties, the ground is too hard." **Burden Bros' David Guy, explaining the workings of a verti-drain.**

"@SecPompeo on the @ICC: This is a rogue court with lawyers that are, frankly, corrupt and political, and they are threatening to persecute Americans who engaged in America's fight for freedom in Afghanistan. That's unacceptable. We want nothing to do with it" - **The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo inadvertently picks a fight with the International Cricket Council after the State Department's social media team confused their Twitter handle with one belonging to the International Criminal Court. The Tweet was deleted after the ICC's Anti-Corruption Co-ordinator promised to "let our legal department know".**

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