

PITCHCARE

The turfcare magazine from pitchcare.com

June/July 2021

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DON'T MISS

Open for business - at last!

The postponed Open Golf Championship finally takes place at Royal St George's in Kent. How have preparations gone?

NO GRAY AREAS

After being in the industry for over twenty years, Southampton Football Club veteran Andy Gray was appointed Head of Grounds and Estates at the FA home of football St George's Park in Staffordshire. In this keynote interview, Kerry Haywood chatted to him about his career and how he has settled into the dream job

A full trophy cabinet

Andy Fogarty, Head Groundsman at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, has a trophy cabinet full of accolades including ECB 'Groundsman of the Year' four times; runner-up four times; runner-up six times for his one-day pitches, plus numerous commendations. Lee Williams spoke to him about his twenty-six years at the club and The Hundred concept to be launched this summer



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WELCOME TO

PITCHCARE

Fronting up!

As I write this, we should be getting excited about the imminent trade shows scheduled for July; The Festival of Turf - 21st and 22nd at Warwickshire Event Centre and the first ever Sports and Grounds Expo (SAGE) - 27th-29th at the Three Counties Showground in the Malvern Hills.

However, I can't help but be concerned about the Government's roadmap and, if we don't proceed to step 4 on 21st June, what will that mean moving forward into the summer months planned events?

I think there is still a question of how many visitors will be amenable to attending shows and I guess this comes down to personal choice and whether you have had one or two vaccines. Both shows have advertised a fully secure Covid-19 safe setting so, from my perspective, I will be showing my support and hoping to see many faces for a catch up.

Press events and demo days are beginning to slowly commence (under socially distanced rules) and it is so good to get out in the field again and interact with colleagues who we have not seen for so long... I'm sure many of you are now doing the same and some sense of 'normality' is welcomed.

Those who were doing a rain dance in April might have wished they had danced a little less come early May, where people up and down the country were experiencing more rainfall in one day than the whole of April combined. With temperatures finally rising, this has paved the way for more consistency in growth, which just leaves Anthracnose as the major disease to deal with as we arrive into summer.

I'm sure those sectors of the industry able to use it were delighted that Acelepryn was again awarded an emergency authorisation for chafer grub control. However, that only applies to golf courses, racecourses and airfields,

leaving large sectors within the industry without any control. Additionally, there were many reports of extensive leatherjacket damage this spring and there remains no emergency authorisation for the control of these pests.

The hot topic on social media in recent weeks - apart from the weather, obviously - has been that of pay scales. Whilst we are not alone as an industry in suffering low wages, many feel that the associations are not doing enough to ensure that recommended pay scales are met as an absolute minimum.

There has been talk of rebellion by the noisy few on social media, but how can you ask young greenkeepers and groundsman with mortgages and a young family to down tools by way of objection?

In truth, it is the associations that must make representation to the powers that be and, equally, the club owners need to respect the assets they have working for them. At the end of the day, the grass surface is their *raison d'être*!

Kerry Haywood
Editor



SAY THAT AGAIN!

"One of my biggest achievements was the setting up of The Links Club (TLC) with Rhys Butler, Richard Whyman, Ian Kinley and Craig Boath. We did this to encourage the exchange of ideas and knowledge of links courses in the UK"

Paul Larsen, Royal St George's

"I wasn't academic at school and I didn't enjoy being cooped up inside, so I was determined to find something outdoors"

Andy Gray, St George's Park

"Increasing sickness and absenteeism is the first trigger point that something isn't right. That's when I work with HR support with a view to modify working hours and provide support to the employee"

James Wright, University of Leeds

"There is always pressure and stresses to deal with when preparing pitches, for International cricket especially"

Andy Fogarty, Yorkshire CCC

"We do also have some very environmentally friendly mowers in the car parks, in the form of sheep provided by a local shepherd"

James Sanderson, Thirsk Racecourse

"I listen to the turf. I know that's hard to believe, but it is something I also encourage in my staff. It is great to see what kind of reaction I get personally and what they feel the turf is telling them. It is a way of them gaining more knowledge of what to look out for"

Tony Rimmer, Southport Old Links

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Issue 97 June/July 2021

Andy Gray, St George's Park

COVER STORY: No Gray Areas

After being in the industry for over twenty years, Southampton Football Club veteran Andy Gray was appointed Head of Grounds and Estates at the FA home of football St George's Park in Staffordshire. In this keynote interview, Kerry Haywood chatted to him about his career and how he has settled into the dream job. **P48**

GOLF

Open for business - at last!

On the 15th July, The Open Championship will return to Royal St George's for the first time since 2011. It is an event postponed by a year due to the Covid pandemic and one that has left Course Manager Paul Larsen eagerly anticipating the event. Phil Helmn MG caught up with him for a chat. **P16**

It's a team effort

In recent times, Southport Old Links Golf Club has built a new clubhouse and are currently undertaking major reconstruction work out on the course. Course Manager Tony Rimmer, has been a very busy man since he joined over thirteen months ago, including the planning and managing of a redevelopment project. **P22**

Passion by association!

Bordered by fields and natural woodland on the outskirts of south Birmingham, Shirley Golf Club nestles in the Blythe Valley, enjoying a well-planned blend of parkland with mature, wooded areas. It provides one of the finest parkland courses in the area and long-serving Course Manager Andy Smith is charged with keeping it that way. **P32**

The Suttle approach!

Steve Suttle has trodden a rocky road from early aspirations as an assistant pro golfer to head greenkeeper of challenging Kentish courses. Greg Rhodes hears how he survived and thrived. **P40**

WINTER SPORTS

Divotting is key

Featherstone Rovers Rugby League Club in West Yorkshire boasts a rich and proud history. Their home ground is the 6,954 capacity Millennium Stadium on Post Office Road, constructed in 1904. Lee Williams met with Head Groundsman Chris Drury, who first joined the club in 2016 after a chance meeting with the club's chairman in a pub whilst he was taking a break from the industry. **P58**

Time please

Kidsgrove Athletic FC in Staffordshire currently play in the Northern Premier League Division One West. The club's award-winning groundsman/director is Ian Cooper of Coopers Pitch Care. Taking a well-earned break (at the pub he owns with the Chairman of Kidsgrove FC), Lee Williams met up with Ian to discuss how he juggles his time and how he built up his business, before moving on to look at the ground. **P66**

SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

The Wright Stuff

University grounds programmes are rarely more diverse than those at Leeds, where sustainability issues assume top priority. Greg Rhodes met with Grounds and Gardens Team Leader James Wright to discover just what falls under his remit, and it's an extensive list! **P74**

Contents

SUMMER SPORTS

A full trophy cabinet

Andy Fogarty, Head Groundsman at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, has a trophy cabinet full of accolades including ECB 'Groundsman of the Year' four times; runner-up four times; runner-up six times for his one-day pitches, plus numerous commendations. Lee Williams spoke to him about his twenty-six years at the club. **P84**

Not out!

Situated in the beautiful North Yorkshire market town of Richmond, Richmondshire Cricket Club is at the heart of the local community. The club currently plays in the North Yorkshire South Durham (NYSD) ECB Premier League. Geoff Thorpe, a seventy-two-year-old retired police officer turned full-time groundsman, has served the club for many years. Here, he discusses the challenges he has faced whilst dedicating much of his spare time to the club he loves. **P92**

PUBLIC PLACES

Green light means go!

Sitting in the heart of rural County Antrim is the historic Glenarm Castle with its bulging famous Walled Garden and grounds. Chris McCullough met up with Senior Gardener Jordan McWhirter to discuss preparations for opening up to the public since the easing of Covid-19 regulations. **P100**

EQUESTRIAN

Yorkshire grit delivers the goods

At Thirsk Racecourse, the goal is to offer racehorse trainers a chance to run their horses on a reliably decent racing surface, while providing owners and racegoers with an enjoyable day out. Jane Carley talks to Clerk of the Course James Sanderson and Head Groundsman Steve Kelsey about the ongoing work. **P106**



A tight ship: Thirsk grounds team l-r - groundsman Jonathan Hardcastle, clerk of the course James Sanderson, head groundsman Steve Kelsey, deputy head groundsman Dave Raisebeck and groundsman Steve Scott

CONSERVATION

Restoration Man

Golf courses are often portrayed as ecological green deserts devoid of biodiversity and despoiling the countryside. But, high on the Surrey hills, Effingham Golf Club has turned the clock back to create a genuine ecology asset that befits the natural environment and far surpasses what was there before. **P112**

TECHNICAL

A refresh on safe practice

If you work with petrol powered equipment, you will likely be aware of the many legal requirements and regulations set out to protect you and your employees from the potential risks this can pose. Axel Hildebrand of Anglo American Oil Company Ltd - UK distributors of Aspen Fuel - addresses some key issues when it comes to storage and emissions, along with an update on accessories to further improve the safe usage of petrol for both businesses and the operator. **P118**

The journey to battery-power

For some time now battery-powered equipment has been heralded as the future of the turfcare industry and, while the benefits of this power source have been available in smaller, hand-held equipment for years, it took a little longer for it to be a realistic, affordable option for ride-on mowers and utility vehicles. But that all changed in 2020. **P122**

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Survival and Success

Whether you are a team leader or just someone who wants to make a difference, you will, sooner or later, find yourself having to communicate confidently and clearly at a work meeting. In this article, Trainer and Coach Frank Newberry offers us some useful tips on how to survive and succeed at work meetings. **P126**



Paul Larsen, Royal St George's



Andy Fogarty, Yorkshire CCC



James Wright, University of Leeds



Jon Budd, Effingham Golf Club

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Foreword	1
News	5
Mental Health	14
Recruitment and Diversity	111
Frank Newberry	126
Product News	127
Classifieds	130
Offside	136

Winners announced

Pitchcare & Syngenta Fantasy Football 20/21 - Winners Announced

With the concluding round of the 2020/21 season spectated by a spattering of fans, you will forgive us for extending the celebration beyond the Etihad. To see fans in packed stadiums, experience match day atmosphere and hear true representations from a crowd was something we all hope signifies the end of fifteen testing months where, impacted by pandemic, football has provided entertainment, hope and normality to many.

We would like to go on record to thank the Pitchcare 2020/21 Fantasy Football sponsors Syngenta for their support and the 100+ entrants that competed for their share of £1500.

Daniel Lightfoot, Syngenta Business Manager and sponsors of the Pitchcare Fantasy Football League, highlighted this season's pitches have performed amazingly under the intense TV spotlight of every game live, even under the most challenging management regimes. "Whilst the game's over and the players get to take time off, it never stops for the grounds teams, as renovation kicks off to be ready for next season."

Congratulations to long time challenger Goldwyn Bird, Greenkeeper at Royal West Norfolk, who scooped the top prize of £500 after coming close in recent seasons. Tiverton Golf Course Head Greenkeeper George Stephens finished 20 points behind in second position. Stuart Entwistle of Devon Garden Solutions took third spot. Pitchcare was proud to see representation in the top 10 with the accounts team's Joe Fletcher finishing 7th. Elsewhere Edgbaston's Head Groundsman Gary Barwell finished a respectable 19th, enjoy a pie and a pint at the King Power on us.

Fantasy Football Competition
2020/21

£1500 TOTAL PRIZE FUND

syngenta

GROUNDSMEN & GREENKEEPERS CHALLENGE FREE TO ENTER

Pitchcare & Syngenta Fantasy Football Winners 2020/21 Season (all prize winners must meet terms of entry).

Rank	Team & Manager	GW	TOT
1 - £500	What have I done <i>Goldwyn Bird</i>	66	2512
2 - £250	Multiple Scoregasms <i>George Stephens</i>	57	2492
3 - £150	Expected Toulouse <i>Stuart Entwistle</i>	54	2453
4 - £100	Game of throw ins <i>Mike Sage</i>	68	2413
5 - £75	Ain't Got A Kalou <i>Andy Weeks</i>	60	2405
6 - £60	B.Monchenglassback <i>Jordan Maloney</i>	60	2401
7 - £50	Corner taken quickly <i>Joe Fletcher</i>	60	2401
8 - £40	To much upset <i>Alan Loose</i>	59	2397
9 - £30	Hydraulic Pipes FC <i>Noel Donaghy</i>	68	2377
10 - £25	Grib Dozhdedwick <i>Nikita Nikolayev</i>	70	2373

A full list of the twenty winners and our T&Cs can be found on the Pitchcare website.

Terms of Entry - A private league for Turf Care and Grounds Care Industry professionals and our customers.

All players must have completed the 2020/21 league registration and meet the stipulated conditions of entry.

By entering the league, you agree the terms and conditions of entry.

Pitchcare reserve the right to withdraw entrants to the league at any time.

To be eligible for entry, you must have purchased goods to the minimum value of £50, from Pitchcare or Agrovista Amenity between 01/08/2019 and 01/09/2020, OR you are a UK based professional working within the amenity sector.

The competition is open to UK based professionals only and overseas customers. If you are non UK based, you must have purchased goods to the minimum value of £50 between 01/08/2019 and 01/09/2020. Proof may be requested. If you have any comments or questions regarding these terms and conditions, please contact us.

Details of the 2021/22 Fantasy Football competition will be announced on our website and social media channels in late July.

Pitchcare is a trading division of Agrovista UK

Exemption for Red Diesel

Red Diesel: Sports clubs to be exempt from changes

Golf courses have been exempted from changes to red diesel entitlement following a consultation carried out by Government.

At last year's Budget, it was announced the right to use red diesel would be removed from most sectors from April 2022.

The Government said it was to "ensure businesses pay for the harmful emissions they produce and to incentivise the development and adoption of greener alternatives".

The subsequent consultation "sought views from current users of red diesel and rebated biofuels that will be affected by these tax changes, to make sure the government has not

overlooked any exceptional reasons why other sectors [outside of agriculture, forestry, horticulture and fish farming] should be allowed to use red diesel beyond April 2022".

They received more than 400 responses in a period that ran from last July until the start of October. Amongst those was a submission from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Golf.

A consultation document revealed that responses from the sports sector suggested the "increase in their fuel costs for maintaining grounds and facilities would have to be passed on directly to members of these clubs, materially impacting the prices they pay to participate in the sporting activity, especially

for amateur sports and golf. They suggested these increased costs would potentially lead to fewer people participating in sports".

It concluded that: "In light of the arguments made by representatives from the sports sector that increased costs on their clubs would be passed down to members, the government accepts that removing the entitlement to use red diesel from amateur sports clubs, as well as all golf courses, could affect people's ability to participate in sport and impact on health and well-being".

The Government has decided to grant further entitlement to use red diesel for "amateur sports clubs as well as all golf courses".

Continued growth ...

The online Agrovista Amenity Academy continues to grow

Agrovista Amenity's online Academy has shown significant growth with over 9,000 CPD points awarded so far, and the company believes that it is just the start of something special.

The Agrovista Amenity Academy is an online learning resource with courses and lessons created on a range of areas of turf management and for all products sold by Agrovista Amenity.

"It has grown bigger than we ever expected it to," said Karl Parry, the founder of the education platform. "The amount of CPD points we have awarded really is quite phenomenal."

The portal consists of videos, case studies, MSDS, labels and technical specifications which have been designed so that turf managers can fully understand and get maximum benefits from the products they use. This will, in turn, lead to healthier, better performing turf.

Furthermore, the Academy website boasts a highly sophisticated weather system which helps people make better decisions for the week ahead.

Latest courses



Alphabetical order

Launched in 2017, the Academy was the result of a need to provide a platform which suited both the learner and the employer - according to Neil Pullen, Agrovista Amenity Business Development Manager.

"The thinking behind the Academy was to provide education that was open to everybody," he said. "Not just for those at the top, but more a vehicle for people who were new to the industry or part qualified, to further their education with a desire to become a course manager, or a head groundsperson for example."

"It progressed from there and then, two years ago, we sat down with BIGGA to discuss their education programme. It was apparent that golf clubs were paying for their staff to complete BIGGA courses, but it meant that the staff would need days off to do them. There was also an issue with the employers paying for

their staff to be educated only for the staff to leave once they were qualified."

"So, you had a frustrated employee wanting to further their CPD education with BIGGA but struggling to do it because nobody wanted to pay for it, and nobody wanted to give them the time off. This was where the Academy really progressed because individuals can get the CPD points they need without it having an impact on their employers. Each course can be done at home and there is no cost. Now, a lot of BIGGA members come directly through the Academy."

The Agrovista Amenity Academy, which is free to sign-up to, provides in-depth knowledge on Agrovista Amenity's market leading products (Product Courses), as well as a wide range of areas in turf management such as turf disease, chemical, product application, seed and turf pests (Knowledge Courses).

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Keith Kent,
Head Pitch Advisor
to Rugby
Groundsmen
Connected

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SAGE is all set to go

The Sports & Grounds Expo (SAGE): All new outdoor trade show is this summer

The first ever SAGE is drawing ever closer, and excitement is building for the newest event in the industry.

From 27 - 29 July 2021, the UK's largest outdoor Sports and Grounds Expo will open its doors for the first time, welcoming a huge range of visitors from across the industry including grounds maintenance, landscaping, colleges, universities, local authorities, premiership grounds, green keeping and many more.

Set in the stunning surroundings of the Three Counties Showground at the foot of the Malvern Hills, trades from the sector will be able to demonstrate leading products and showcase new releases, without any limitations on space.

SAGE visitors will hear the latest ideas from within the industry and be given advice on how to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness.

"We're really looking forward to our inaugural event. It will provide a fantastic opportunity to



get outdoors and see what is on offer across the industry. Our motivation is to give visitors a hands-on experience, without compromising on safety, and at The Three Counties Show Ground this is easily achieved," says Event Manager Vicky Panniers.

"Our aim is to provide an environment that will benefit everyone from grass roots to senior management; we are very excited about what is on offer and think it's the perfect way to kick start what is a hopefully a great time for the industry after such a tough 18 months," Vicky continues.

The Sports & Grounds Expo will be the highlight of the industry calendar this summer,

offering a safe and proactive environment for those operating across all sectors of the sports and grounds maintenance industry. SAGE is a free event open to all who are interested in the sports and grounds industry.

For more information, contact the team today by email: team@sportsandgrounds.co.uk, by phone: +44 (0)1684 580101 or visit the website: www.sportsandgrounds.co.uk.



First Master Greenkeepers since 2019

BIGGA announces first batch of Master Greenkeepers since 2019 as five members attain the "grandest of achievements"

The British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association has revealed the identities of the latest members to achieve the Master Greenkeeper Certificate.

Joining some of the leading names within the turf management industry from across the globe are five outstanding BIGGA members who have achieved what is widely perceived to be the highest recognition in greenkeeping.

For the first time since 2019, BIGGA is delighted to reveal the names of those who will be added to the roster of Master Greenkeepers, which began in 1991. They are:

81. Gregory Jones MG CGCS, 40, Golf Course Superintendent, Champions Run, Nebraska

82. Anthony Williams MG CGCS, 57, Director of Golf Course Operations, TPC Four Seasons Las Colinas, Texas

83. Matthew Aplin MG, 40, Course Manager, Goring & Streatley Golf Club, Berkshire

84. Alan FitzGerald MG, 45, Golf Course Superintendent, LedgeRock Golf Club, Pennsylvania

85. Greg Fitzmaurice MG, 42, Course Manager, Hunley Hotel & Golf Club, North Yorkshire

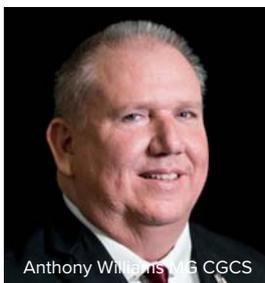
The Master Greenkeeper Certificate is awarded to those members of BIGGA who have reached the highest standards of greenkeeping and golf course management. Examination is rigorous and candidates must pass three stages to achieve the certificate, including an assessment of golf course operation and a

case study and technical examination, on top of 10 years' experience as a greenkeeper with at least three years spent in a course manager, head greenkeeper or superintendent position.

BIGGA CEO Jim Croxton said: "Congratulations to our latest batch of Master Greenkeepers, who join a prestigious list of some of the brightest and best names the industry has ever seen. Achieving the Master Greenkeeper Certificate is no mean feat and for a number of these candidates, the process has been long and has not been without setbacks. For those candidates, the courage and conviction to deal with the knock back and then return and achieve their goals is testament to the commitment and passion they've shown the profession throughout their careers and I'm delighted to welcome all five to the ranks of those we are proud to call Master Greenkeepers."



Gregory Jones MG CGCS



Anthony Williams MG CGCS



Matthew Aplin MG



Alan FitzGerald MG



Greg Fitzmaurice MG

The Festival of Turf ...

New two-day event all set to go

The Festival of Turf is a two-day event that will take place in the predominantly outdoor setting of the Warwickshire Event Centre on 21st and 22nd July 2021 and will bring together golf greenkeepers, groundsmen and many others in a COVID-19 safe setting.

There will be two full exhibition days with a wide range of trade stalls and opportunities to meet with vendors, alongside a couple of entertaining twists that bring to life the 'festival' element of the event and add some much-needed light relief after a difficult year for everyone.

The Festival is the first trade exhibition to be held following the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry has been kept physically-separated for 18 months and so BIGGA has provided this platform for its members, other turf professionals and those within the industry to meet up face-to-face, rekindle old friendships and reflect on what's been a difficult time for everyone.

For more than 30 years BIGGA has been hosting exhibitions that feature the most innovative and exciting product launches. We work closely with the biggest names in the turf



industry to make sure members have access to the latest equipment and machinery.

Education providers and colleagues will be present at the exhibition to talk to you about learning opportunities for yourself and your team. There will also be a BIGGA Stand, where their Learning & Development team will be available to discuss the incredible career-development opportunities that come with being a member of BIGGA.

A fantastic range of exhibitors have already signed up, with more being added every day.

So far, the line-up includes: Advance Grass Solutions; Agrigem; AMS Robotics; Aquarille Consultancy Services; Aquatrols Europe;

Border Sports Services; British Sugar TOPSOIL; Campbell Golf Associates; Campey Turf Care Systems; Consolidate Turf; Delta-T Devices; Ecobunker; Foley Company & True Surface; Germinal; Global BioClean UK; GrenTek; Grillo Agrigarden; Husqvarna; ICL; ISEKI UK & Ireland; Jacobsen; KAR UK/Hunter; KIOTI UK; Landquip; Lister Wilder; Mansfield Sand; Myerscough; Overton UK; Redexim; Reesink UK (Toro); Rigby Taylor; SGL; Soil Scout; Syngenta; and Turfcare.

Head to the BIGGA website for more information on exhibitors and to register today.

The Warwickshire Event Centre is located on The Fosse, Fosse Way, Radford Semele, Royal Leamington Spa CV31 1XN

 An advertisement for Petlenc Alpha Range tools. The background is a photograph of a man in a green shirt, khaki pants, and a safety helmet with a face shield, using a long-handled tool to trim grass in a field. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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PETLENC

Hitting net zero

New major study shows importance of nature in hitting net zero

Researchers from Natural England have developed a picture of the impact that different UK habitats can have in taking carbon out of the atmosphere and helping us hit net zero by 2050, whilst delivering for both biodiversity and conservation.

In the most comprehensive report to date on the impact of the nation's landscape on carbon storage and sequestration, researchers found that peatlands and native woodlands are habitats which have the greatest capacity to store carbon, but that many others, including coastal and marine habitats, such as saltmarsh and sea grass meadows, have a significant role to play in helping the UK hit net zero by 2050.

The report also highlights the importance of protecting traditionally managed habitats such as hedgerows, hay meadows, heathlands and old orchards as a way of preserving carbon stocks and wildlife that may have taken centuries to develop. There are also good opportunities to create new patches of habitat and hedgerows within farmed landscapes for biodiversity and carbon storage.

Future environmental land management schemes for farmers and land managers will reward farmers for the creation and maintenance of habitats, such as native woodlands and peatlands, with the Landscape Recovery scheme being designed to incentivise major land management changes and habitat restoration within our wooded and peatland areas across England.

The study looked at a wide range of the UK's natural habitats, finding that:

- Woodlands have high rates of carbon sequestration - depending on the species, age and location. New native woodlands can support biodiversity at the same time as taking up carbon. Old woodlands can



become substantial carbon stores, with a hectare of native woodland sequestering the equivalent CO₂ each year as flying London to Rome thirteen times.

- Saltmarshes can be highly effective carbon stores, as well as helping coasts adapt to future climate change. Restoration of sea grass meadows also has potential to capture carbon from the atmosphere in its vegetation, and also trap carbon from elsewhere in sediments. One hectare of saltmarsh each year buries the carbon equivalent of an average car's annual carbon emissions.
- Orchards and hedgerows are effective at storing significant amounts of carbon but generally cover a smaller area than other habitats and are cut regularly, limiting the amount of carbon gain. Their sensitive management, however, can increase carbon storage whilst providing benefits for wildlife and the cultural heritage in farmed landscapes.
- Peatlands are the largest carbon stores. When in a healthy condition they soak up carbon slowly but can go on doing so indefinitely. Peatland soils can be over 10 metres deep, holding huge carbon stocks that have developed over many millennia. Carbon held in the deep peat soils of fens and raised bogs hold eight times as much carbon as the equivalent area of tropical rainforest.
- Heathlands and grasslands store more carbon than modern agricultural landscapes but less than peatlands, saltmarsh and old woodlands. Protecting these old, established habitats is important for biodiversity, as well as the carbon stocks they hold, as both may have taken centuries to accumulate.

The research will provide an invaluable resource for government as part of its upcoming action plan for trees and woodlands, alongside a package of measures to promote the restoration of peatlands. It will also help environmental groups, local authorities and land managers as they work together to deliver biodiversity benefits and help the UK achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, while increasing the economic benefits for society through nature, as recently set out in the Dasgupta Review.

ECHA Releases New Rubber Crumb Study

The latest ECHA study on plastic and rubber granules used as infill in artificial sports pitches identifies certain chemicals potentially present in the infill that could pose risks to people or the environment.

The ECHA proposes that any further work to examine whether these substances in rubber infill pose a risk to human health or the environment that is not adequately controlled should be done by preparing a REACH restriction proposal. ECHA notes that recently published studies may provide new information on the risks of substances, which would need to be taken into account in any further work.

The study was requested from the ECHA by the European Commission in 2017 following the restriction proposal by the Dutch authorities on eight polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in rubber granules and mulches. It also links to the restriction proposal

for intentionally-added microplastics, which is currently in the Commission for decision making.

For this report, ECHA (i) gathered information on substances in infill material, (ii) performed a prioritisation exercise to identify, of those substances reported to be present in infill, those that are likely to be of greatest potential concern for human health or the environment and (iii) conducted preliminary human health and environmental risk assessments to identify candidates for potential risk management.

The conclusions of the report are, as follows:

The preliminary human health risk assessment does not exclude a potential for cobalt and zinc to pose risks to human health in infill and that these substances should therefore be considered for risk management.

The preliminary environmental risk assessment does not exclude the potential for cadmium,



cobalt, copper, lead, zinc, 4-tert-octylphenol, 4,4'-isopropylidene diphenol (BPA), bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP), benzyl butyl phthalate (BBP) and benzothiazole-2-thiol to pose risks to the environment and that these substances should therefore be considered for risk management.

ECHA notes that the gathering of the substances in infill material was done after receiving the request from the Commission. In any further work, newly published information needs to be gathered in addition to any updates of the registrations as regards the production of substances in tyres.



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Laurie retires

TNS groundcare stalwart retires after 46 years

After 46 years with Kubota groundcare machinery dealer Thurlow Nunn Standen (TNS), machinery stalwart Laurie Brown has retired.

"I've now decided to practise what I've been preaching, by investing in a walk-behind Kubota W819R-Pro so I can continue to keep my lawn presentable during my retirement," explains Laurie, who stepped down from his role as branch manager of TNS Kennett, near Newmarket, Suffolk, in May 2021.

"I've been fortunate enough to meet some fantastic people along the way, and I'll certainly miss the camaraderie from our suppliers and our customers."

Laurie has worked with Kubota since TNS became a groundcare dealer in the late 1970s supplying products up to 100hp. He says it's been a journey that has also led to developing extremely enjoyable working relationships with customers.

"When you enjoy the job this much, it's not a chore - it's a way of life," he says.



Having joined the business straight from school in June 1975 and worked his way up through the business, Laurie has spent time as regional aftersales manager, and enjoyed being branch manager of several TNS depots including Littleport, Melton and Hinderclay, before moving to Kennett four years ago.

Aside from taking care of his lawn and creating those sought-after green stripes, Laurie is looking forward to spending quality time with his family, and embarking on travelling with his wife, when it's safe to do so.

"We do like cruises, and we're looking forward to doing many more of them," he says. "Though, if I could do it all again, I wouldn't change a thing."

Jamie Carragher's 23 Foundation to build huge community football site

In February this year, Sefton Council approved plans to enclose a large section of Orrell Mount Park in Litherland, known locally as Silcocks, and turn it into a 3G pitch.



The 23 Foundation was successful in a bid to facilitate the development and says the space will provide the local community with high quality, well-managed sports facilities.

Earlier this month, some residents living in the streets surrounding the field raised concerns they will lose one of the few places they can take their children to play or take their dogs for a walk.

The 23 Foundation has said this will not be the case - and that the development will include plenty of green space for these activities to continue.

Plans for the new hub include a new full-sized, fenced, and floodlit 3G rubber crumb pitch, along with a traditionally built single storey changing pavilion.

There will also be new access and car park works.

Jamie Carragher's 23 Foundation says it will provide a management service for the new sports hub through a five-year contract.

United's Grounds Team win Premier League Award

Manchester United's Old Trafford grounds manager Tony Sinclair and his colleagues have won the Premier League's Grounds Team of the Season award for 2020/21.

Having won the accolade in 2019, Tony Sinclair and his colleagues have been rewarded once again for their dedication to providing a pristine playing surface for the players throughout the entire 2020/2021 season.

The Premier League's Grounds Team of the Season award is judged by referees and matches delegates awarding marks throughout the season based on factors including the usage of the pitch and the environmental conditions.



Tony thanked his dedicated staff for their teamwork and round the clock dedication. "I'm made up. We are so, so proud and honoured to win this prestigious award, when the level of football pitches is so high. The key point I want to get across is that we have got the most incredibly gifted, passionate team, who all have a will to have the best pitches for this club.

John Deere to open new apprentice training centre

John Deere and training provider ProVQ have announced plans to open a brand new Apprentice Training Centre this autumn, at a farm site in Upper Saxondale near Bingham in Nottinghamshire. This will mark the 30th anniversary of the company's first Ag Tech apprentice intake, who were enrolled at original partner Brooksby Melton College in 1992.

Designed specifically and solely for John Deere dealer apprentices attending the company's award winning Ag Tech, Turf Tech and Parts Tech training programmes, the first John Deere Apprentice Training Centre was established at Radcliffe-on-Trent five years ago. These premises have now been outgrown, due to the programmes' success and increasing dealer demand.

The Ag, Turf and Parts Tech apprenticeships

focus on developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for dealer personnel of the future. Each year group trains at the centre for up to eight weeks a year in four blocks of two weeks. Some of this time is also spent at John Deere's Langar HQ when working with the largest equipment and the latest technologies.

John Deere appointed ProVQ Limited in summer 2015 as its new business partner to deliver the apprentice training programmes on behalf of its dealers in the UK & Ireland. Since that time, the strength of the partnership has allowed the programmes to develop and grow to meet the needs and expectations of a modern John Deere dealership. The current full-time ProVQ staff will continue to be managed by James Haslam at the new Apprentice Training Centre from the autumn.

ProVQ started its apprentice training programmes in 2005, and went on to develop a full range of national services including apprentice recruitment, training, vocational assessment and qualifications. Today, the company trains over 600 apprentices and many hundreds of adult learners on technical, parts and customer service programmes.



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GMA secures £3.9m

Grounds Management Association secures £3.9m investment to help boost grassroots sport

The Grounds Management Association (GMA) has announced a £3.9M investment from the Premier League, The FA, and Government's Football Foundation with Sport England to deliver the association's third phase of the pitch improvement programme for grassroots sports.

Formerly known as the Grounds and Natural Turf Improvement Programme (GaNTIP), the newly named Pitch Advisory Service (PAS) is part of the GMA's ongoing commitment to help improve natural turf provision across football, cricket, rugby union and rugby league at grassroots level in joint collaboration with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), Rugby Football Union (RFU) and Rugby Football League (RFL).

After a year of disruption to sport, the GMA's Pitch Advisory Service will continue to focus on raising the standards of pitches to increase playability, maximise player experience and decrease the number of cancellations due to declining pitch quality.

The programme provides an enhanced network of GMA turf care specialists available to people and organisations maintaining natural turf pitches within local communities, with the funding boost growing the number of GMA advisers available to them by almost 30 percent.

The Pitch Advisory Service also offers access to dedicated, sport-specific key account managers at the GMA - a team of grounds management specialists bringing years of grassroots and professional knowledge to the programme. Key account managers work collaboratively with each National Governing Body of Sport (NGB), as well as Sport England, to deliver national objectives to sustain high levels of sport and physical activity, now and in future years. During 2019-20, the regional pitch advisers visited more than 4,500 pitches, with the programme improving grounds maintenance practices at 91% of the sites visited.

With lockdown placing sport and physical activity on hold, maintaining playing surfaces remained a vital task for volunteers across the country. New digital applications like the Football Foundation's PitchPower helped clubs facilitate pitch inspections during restrictive periods, which were each reviewed digitally by



the GMA's regional pitch advisers removing the need for a face-to-face site visits. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, PitchPower allowed the PAS to carry out three times as many pitch assessments as before it was launched and it will remain an important tool now restrictions ease.

During this time, the GMA also supported the ECB in getting recreational cricket played by providing COVID-specific grounds management advice and working with the ECB Facilities Team to engage with local authorities to maximise the number of facilities available in a challenging 2020 season. New online webinars and training courses helped volunteers expand their learning and network with regional pitch advisers.

In addition, the Football Foundation Groundskeeping Community app, managed with support from the GMA, saw a 43% rise in users during lockdown and now has 2,670 engaged members, with numbers continuing to grow.

Innovative and collaborative practices, like online services and applications, will be at the centre of the Pitch Advisory Service, with the GMA providing high-quality recommendations and advice to best support clubs of all shapes and sizes, as well as local authorities, both online and offline.

Through its partnerships, the GMA also aims to increase the number of volunteers, improve skills and knowledge through its training, and provide leading guidance and information for those involved in, or connected to, grounds maintenance at clubs. The programme will also look at ways to encourage women, as well as individuals from diverse backgrounds and walks of life to get involved, with the aim to

build a strong future workforce.

Next year, the GMA aims to launch an industry-leading Pitch Grading Framework that will provide a benchmark for pitch standards, alongside a simple, affordable education pathway for all grounds staff and volunteers to gain the right level of understanding for each type of pitch.

Jason Booth, COO at the GMA, said: "We're grateful for the investment in our Pitch Advisory Service that supports local communities and players. Since 2014, our partnerships with the NGBs and Sport England have grown stronger with each phase of delivery. Now, six years later, we're seeing huge progress through enhanced education and training of volunteer and professional grounds managers. We want to see millions more enjoying the benefits of playing surfaces - whether it's to develop sporting talent or just for fun."

"We hope that this programme signals a change in fortune, particularly at a time when restrictions ease and a sense of normality begins."

For more information on the Pitch Advisory Service, visit <https://thegma.org.uk/pitch-advisory-service>



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Speaking Out

Pitchcare reader speaks out about mental health

After reading the article in issue 91, *The monster on my back - dealing with mental health with Graeme Farmer, one of our readers felt compelled to speak about his situation as it is something he has not been able to do because of a confidentiality agreement he was forced to sign.*

"I've hidden any details and no one would know, from my story, who I am or who my former club is, but my story is as follows. I worked in the greenkeeping industry for getting on 30 years. After leaving school, I had one or two jobs but came across a greenkeeping job I loved. I quickly gained my levels 1, 2 & 3 in sportsturf science and slowly rose through the ranks at my golf club.

The club was very prestigious and, when my boss at the time relocated to another course, I was given a chance to look after the course I had grown to love. Anyone who does the job knows that it's a labour of love; it's your baby! My team and I strived every inch to improve the course and, along with myself, it was highly regarded and always thought of as one of the best courses in the area, which was no mean feat.

I personally could have moved on, but I was in love with my job and the place I worked. I had no reason to leave. Until, after ten years at the top, we had a change of greens chairman. I must admit I was excited to work with him initially, but it turned into a nightmare very quickly. He was power-mad, making changes on the course that were not in keeping with the nature of the course. He took over my budget, scrutinising everything we did, texts and phone calls demanding things late at night and at weekends. I spoke to my secretary, who knew of the greens chairman's character and what he was like. I informed him I was being harassed.

Before I knew it, I was told that the club was looking to move me out and that, if I didn't go, they would manage me out! I hit rock bottom,



and I struggled through 12 months of his abusive reign. The club denied I had put in a harassment claim and said that it wouldn't stand for bullying. I was left out to hang! My course was immaculate, and industry greats complimented us on our highest of high standards. I had the pleasure of working with people like John Handley and the late great Dave Harvey. They always said how the course was a class above anywhere else they went. I was forced into a settlement deal and also a confidentiality agreement.

The greens chairman told members I had fallen out with my staff, and I had to leave. Personally, my stock had fallen from being at the top of the industry to no one wanting to touch me due to the nature of my leaving. Rumours spread!

To this day, now I'm no longer involved with the industry, it eats away at me. I thought of ending my life. I planned how and when I wrote my goodbye note. All because one individual with no knowledge of our industry, or how it operated, took personal issue to my complaint of how I was treated. It's shocking how this can happen and is allowed to happen!

I won't ever get over what happened to me. It still hurts to this day and always will! The golf

club showed no loyalty to me and no care of duty towards a hard-working, loyal employee. The greens chairman destroyed me personally. Something I wouldn't have allowed to happen in everyday life, but I felt I couldn't fight back in the context of work. That annoys me! He bullied me, and I allowed him to! I had counselling, and I'm happy to say I've good family, friends and ex-colleagues around me that allowed me to get over the dark period, but I could quite easily have not been here now. How would they have felt then?

I see many jobs being advertised as well as hearing of many good people walking away from this great industry, as I did! Good, loyal staff are hard to come by and should be treasured. I hope no one else goes through what I did. I also hate that the job we are paid to do as professionals is undermined by someone with no knowledge at all in greenkeeping. Mental health and staffs' wellbeing should be something that a club ensures is always looked after and isn't just a tick box exercise when it suits them, or to cover their backsides when something goes wrong!

Thank you for listening to my story."

Advice from the Mental Health Foundation

If you are concerned that you are developing a mental health problem, you should seek the advice and support of your GP as a matter of priority. If you are in distress and need immediate help and are unable to see a GP, you should visit your local A&E.

The Mental Health Foundation is a charity specialising in research and policy development, with a focus on preventing mental health problems. They are not able to advise people directly on their personal circumstances.

Here are details on services and organisations that offer help and support directly to people with mental health problems:

- Talk to the Samaritans
- Shout Crisis Text Line
- Rethink Mental Illness

- Mind
- Talk to your GP

Talking about your feelings and asking for help is part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy.

Family and friends can be a vital source of support when things are difficult. You may already have some people you know that you can speak to if you are feeling unwell. Reaching out to the people in your lives is a key element of regaining and maintaining good mental health.

Opening up to someone you trust - sometimes relationships with friends - and with family in particular - aren't so straightforward.

If you've not spoken to friends or family about your mental health before, it's worth giving some thought to which person you might

approach. You will likely have a sense of who has more capacity to offer support, and who will be able best understand and empathise with what you are experiencing.

If you do not have someone you can talk to - there are other ways to gain support, such as through an online community or peer support.

Engaging with an online community can be a great source of connection. You may find like-minded people who are experiencing mental ill-health too. This may help to reduce feelings of loneliness and help you to feel understood.

Mind's Elefriends is a supportive online community where you can be yourself. We all know what it's like to struggle sometimes, but now there's a safe place to listen, share and be heard. Whether you're feeling good right now, or low, it's a safe place to share experiences and listen to others.

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Royal St George's

Open for business - at last!

On the 15th July, The Open Championship will return to Royal St George's for the first time since 2011, when an emotional Darren Clarke fulfilled his boyhood dream of becoming Champion Golfer of the Year. It is an event postponed by a year due to the Covid pandemic and one that has left Course Manager **Paul Larsen** eagerly anticipating the event. Phil Helmn MG caught up with him for a chat

The Royal St George's Golf Club was founded by the surgeon Laidlaw Purves in 1887 in a setting of wild duneland. Many holes feature blind or partially blind shots, although the unfairness element has been reduced so that a good shot hit in the right place means you see the green after several 20th century modifications.

As you can imagine, the club is steeped in history as the club's Challenge Cup testifies, dating back to 1888, and is classed as one of the oldest amateur events in golf. It has been contested annually over 36 holes since then, except during the war years. A 19-year-old Jack Nicklaus won the tournament in 1959, shortly before going on to win the first of his two U.S. Amateur titles.

The Royal St George's Golf Club, as it is

officially called, is located in Sandwich, Kent, and is one of the courses on The Open Championship rotation. It is the only Open rota golf course to be located in Southern England and has hosted fourteen Open championships since 1894, when it became the first club outside Scotland to host the event. Past champions include Darren Clarke, Ben Curtis, Greg Norman, Sandy Lyle, Bill Rogers, Bobby Locke, Reg Whitcombe, Henry Cotton, Walter Hagen (on two occasions), Harry Vardon (on two occasions), Jack White and John Henry Taylor. It has also hosted The Amateur Championship on thirteen occasions.

Paul Larsen, the course manager, has been custodian of the 18-hole, 7,224-yard (off the champ tees) links course since 2012. If anyone knows Paul, they will appreciate he is definitely 'one of a kind' (I mean this as

a friend in a nice way) and his rise to his current position, as the busiest course manager in the country at the moment, has been varied to say the least!

When Paul left college after completing his A-levels, he began working for Redbridge council as a general groundsman. The work involved mowing and caring for football and hockey pitches, sports tracks and everything in between. Whilst there, he began an apprenticeship, studying for his City & Guilds level 2 Amenity Horticulture at Capel Manor College; all pretty standard you might muse, but then things took a career twist!

Disillusioned with poor wages in the industry (a hot topic now), he decided to earn more money and become a postie working in the West One area of London, a job which he admitted he thoroughly enjoyed. After





I did various jobs from building a roller coaster ride, admin, landscaping, growing grapes and even speed planting trees before returning to London to work in a solicitor's firm! I always knew working outdoors was my true vocation, so I left London and moved back home to Folkestone where I got a job as a greenkeeper

five 'happy' years of treading the pavements of London, he decided to hang up his post bag and replace it with a backpack and embarked on backpacking around Europe which eventually morphed into working his way around the world! Paul explained, "I did various jobs from building a roller coaster ride, admin, landscaping, growing grapes and even speed planting trees before returning to London to work in a solicitor's firm! I always knew working outdoors was my true vocation, so I left London and moved back home to Folkestone where I got a job as a greenkeeper in 2000 at Sene Valley Golf Club".

Paul then got his lucky break, a move to Royal St George's in 2005 as an assistant greenkeeper, but then another twist saw him leave to work in Holland as Head Greenkeeper at Westerpark Golf Course. Four years later he returned to Royal St George's just in time for the 2011 Open and, in 2012, was appointed Course Manager!

Many head greenkeepers will be able to appreciate, with having to prepare their own club championship competitions, the considerable pressure that Paul and his team must be under at the moment to produce perfect surfaces for this year's Open competition.

Paul explained preparations began back in the 2013/14 when we went on a conversion of grasses from predominantly rye grass, Yorkshire fog and poa to fine leaved fescue. In conjunction with the sward transformation programme, Paul and his team embarked on a burning management



Course Manager Paul Larsen

programme for their dune and natural areas, with the support of Dr Graham Earl, to revert in a positive way the golf courses SSSI status, in an unprecedented three-year period.

Paul remarked, the success of it was astounding! "It was amazingly quick, so saved the team months of cutting and collecting. The whole process is incredible to witness as you see everything burn out apart from little strands of marram. It looks devastating and completely black and

desolate for about six weeks, but then you see it come back to life - amazing. You lose that lush thickness but regain the marram plus we have never seen so many wildflowers on the course with a massive increase in Lizard Orchids. The land is now in keeping with the dune lands."

"We also had a bunker review which identified the need to create new, more natural shapes and more strategic bunkering across the course. The fourth 'Himalayas' bunker was a good example of



New bunker being installed



Hand mowing is preferred



We also took the opportunity to create a few natural bunkers on holes 4, 6 and 7 and replaced a few more with grassy swales. I think the bunkers are now more in keeping and frame the course within the dune surroundings

changing the style of bunkers to a more sustainable natural look.”

“Up to the Amateur championship, we built forty-three bunkers with the plan to complete all 104 bunkers a year before the Open in 2020. The bunkers look very rustic now and I am confident that they will look great for the Open! We also took the opportunity to create a few natural bunkers on holes 4, 6 and 7 and replaced a few more

with grassy swales. I think the bunkers are now more in keeping and frame the course within the dune surroundings.”

Whilst discussing the lead up preparations to the Open, we touched on the effects of the devastating summer of 2018. A summer which affected every golf course and greenkeeper up and down the country, but in the lead up to the Open on such a sandy, coastal environment must have taken its toll

on not only Royal St. George’s but on Paul and his team.

Paul, confessed, “It was heartbreaking for us all. Leading up to that moment the course was in the best shape it had ever been. The course held up really well, however, by late summer, the lack of rainfall and heat got worse. This was compounded by our abstraction issues and running seriously low on our water supply. I’m pleased to say

+





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Since early 2019, we have been overseeding with fescue and topdressing everything by hand. This has been a time-consuming job, but I felt it was the best policy to get the fescue back gently

we've now built our own reservoir so as to reduce the risk, but we still need to be mindful of usage."

"We lost so much fescue from our fairways and semi rough that it was upsetting. We had a terrible autumn for the area with unseasonal, damaging high temperatures lasting for weeks. By the time we received any significant rainfall it was late into November, by which time we lost growing conditions to help us with recovery. Since early 2019, we have been overseeding with fescue and topdressing everything by hand. This has been a time-consuming job, but I felt it was the best policy to get the fescue back gently. In fact, we have just been doing this continually and will continue to do so for the next couple of weeks, which hopefully, will provide complete coverage. I'm delighted to say, the fairways have recovered amazingly well and the semi



Topdressing by hand

rough is almost there. All other major playing surfaces are ready and look great, and dare I say, look even better than before the drought. It's a testimony to the team's hard work and commitment."

"I have fifteen greenkeepers including two mechanics and a gardener who all help on the course. We do a lot of hand mowing which, as you can appreciate, takes a lot of time. We try to hand cut greens daily but also hand cut all our tees. This can be a challenge as we are one of the largest courses (in square metreage) on the Open circuit. So, fifteen may sound a lot, but it really can be a push to get everything cut that is required as well as daily hand raking the 100 bunkers!"

"All the staff have separate areas of the course that they specialise in. I encourage the team to come up with any ideas for making improvements for the course. By

doing this, I feel the team have ownership of the course thereby making it a team effort. I want them to be proud of their work as it's all down to them how good the course is."

"All my staff are encouraged to do training courses. We have put four apprentices through since I have been here with them getting distinction. We have had quite a few do their NVQ Level 3 as well. We have always sent our staff to Harrogate over the years. One of the biggest ways to learn, in my mind, is to visit other courses as you can learn way more this way. I am incredibly lucky that the team are very dynamic and always suggesting new ideas. In doing this, the team feel that the course is theirs and have ownership."

Paul and I discussed the ever-growing issue for more 'intelligent use of water'. Paul explained; "After the drought of 2018, we really had to rethink our water supply and



The Royal St George's greenkeeping team



Topdressing

moisture management. We started using wetting agents monthly, which really helped, plus the use of different fescue cultivars like sheeps fescue. We built our own reservoir with a water holding capacity of 32,000 cubic metres and owned a 21,000 cubic metre abstraction licence, but later reduced this for a lesser 13,000 licence which helped the Environment Agency. I constantly measure water moisture and check levels every day. I have a pogo and this has

become a big weapon in our arsenal. The course is very exposed, and I always must consider ET rates lost during the day, but always try to keep a rootzone moisture level of between 16% to 20%. Any mistakes can lead to drying out of surfaces which, in turn, will lead to fairy rings appearing. I am lucky my irrigation technician does an amazing job. We will never, knowingly, waste water as it really is an unbelievably valuable commodity."

//

I am lucky my irrigation technician does an amazing job. We will never, knowingly, waste water as it really is an unbelievably valuable commodity

"Royal St. George's has also just installed a full Toro Lynx central controlled irrigation system with over 1,000 heads to all greens, tees, approaches and fairways. Paul is very particular about his water and is focused on only targeting areas which are needed. We don't water the rough as they need to remain natural and 'wispy', by maintaining low water levels on these areas they have a better chance of retaining fescue, sweet vernal, crested dogs-tail, bedstraw, broom



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Getting Personal

Paul Larsen - The Robert Smith of the greenkeeping world!

Who are you? Paul Larsen, Course Manager Royal St. George's Golf Club.

Family status? Single dad with one son Elliot.

Who's your hero and why? Robert Smith from the Cure (he's just a legend)! Seve, as he got me into golf.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Well, more life highlights really ... taking time out to travel the World.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? How the heck did you keep your hair!

Which famous people wind you up? Simon Cowell.

What job would you love, other than your own? Head groundsman at the mighty West Ham Utd (watch out Dougie Robertson)!

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? My old car breaking down in the central lane of the M25 in the middle of a traffic jam. I had to wait for a police officer to escort me to the hard shoulder.

What is your favourite film? Reservoir Dogs.

What scares you? Other than no rain ... it's got to be snakes!

What would your autobiography be called ... and who would play you in the film? We're on a road to nowhere and Hugh Grant (a member at Royal St. George's).

What is your favourite sport? Football and golf.

What would you cast into Room 101? What's Room 101? After being told ... Definitely COVID!

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? The very gothic Vienna in the 13th century.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To author a book about my escapades!

What's your favourite smell? Santal 33 Eau de Parfum



Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Robert Smith (The Cure lead singer), Hugh Grant and David Bowie.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Never give up!

What's your favourite piece of trivia? The highest score Jack Nicklaus ever scored during his professional career (not as a senior) was 83 at Royal St. George's back in 1981 - and Tiger Woods lost his first ball as a professional here in 2003!

What's your favourite piece of kit? The Wiedenmann Terra Float Air overseeder.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Disintegration - The Cure, Doolittle - Pixies and Bauhaus - In the Flat Field.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? Why don't you pump boiling water through the irrigation system to thaw out the greens when it's frosty?

What three words best describes yourself? Different, sincere and maverick.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper? Do your work with passion!

What talent would you like to have? I'd love to be able to sing (unfortunately I'm tone deaf)!



The in-house bunker building has been very successful

rape and lizard orchid."

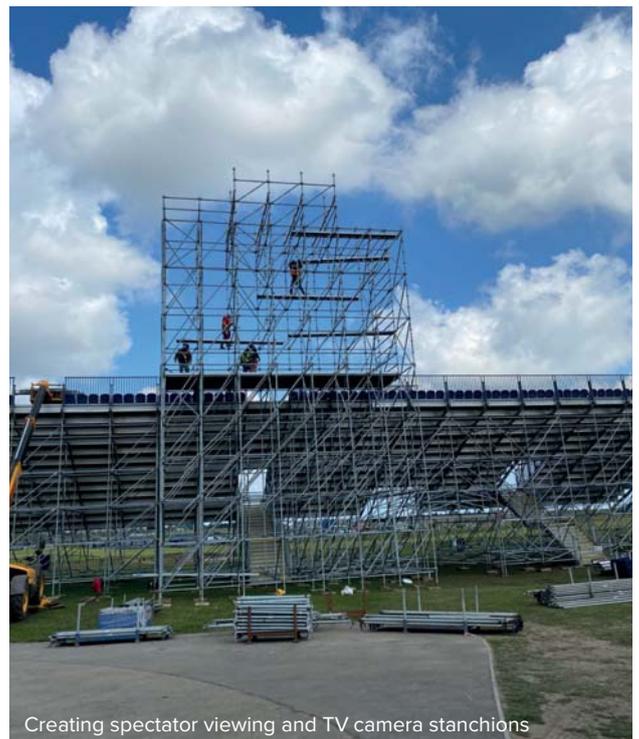
Paul runs a predominantly Toro fleet with all his grass mowers being red. However, he explained his philosophy that he chooses machines which are deemed best for the specific role on his course regardless of colour. "We buy the best machine for the best job, Toro, Wiedenmann, Vredo, Reco, Turf Tidy, Baroness, John Deere and Kubota - a mixture of colours really!"

"I am really proud of what the team have achieved and, to be honest, they are just a great bunch to work with. Their sense of humour keeps me laughing most of the day. Work must be fun,

and I love the banter we have, even if it's been in our smaller bubbles this year. I guess that has been one of the worse things as, for me, it's much better when we were all in the mess room together."

"Our biggest achievements so far must be the change of grasses on the course, especially the greens. Our in-house bunker building has been fantastic and I'm proud to say the team have taken them to another level."

"I'm particularly pleased with achieving our SSSI status and hope we can carry on improving our ecological diversity on the course. We feel there's still



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so much more to achieve but pleased with our achievements to date. I guess, like most greenkeeping teams, we're our own biggest critics!"

"On a personal level, one of my biggest achievements was the setting up of The Links Club (TLC) with Rhys Butler, Richard Whyman, Ian Kinley and Craig Boath. We did this to encourage the exchange of ideas and knowledge of links courses in the UK. We meet up regularly, have a game of golf during the day, then an evening dinner to chat, followed by some education on a course walk the next day. As well as the invaluable education it provides, it's also an important support network for us all. It was actually The Irish Links Initiative that really inspired us. So, I have to say a huge thank you to those guys as the TLC has gone from strength to strength."

With the spotlight on Royal St George's for the Open I asked Paul how he was preparing himself personally for the event and what

did he want to achieve from the Open and the experience? Paul replied; "As long as we have prepared everything in advance, I think I will be quite relaxed. I have a great team behind me and they all know what they have to do. They know the expectation level required so we hope to showcase their skills."

"As for me, I hope I can enjoy the experience of seeing the world's best golfers at first hand and the excitement of a British winner or perhaps even a Spieth win! Deep down, my goal is to hope the players and fans just enjoy the course for its beauty. I love the course and hope that the sun comes out so they can enjoy it at its best. I know I have been praying for rain these last few years, but I really hope we can enjoy four days of beautiful sunny weather!"



On a personal level, one of my biggest achievements was the setting up of The Links Club (TLC) with Rhys Butler, Richard Whyman, Ian Kinley and Craig Boath. We did this to encourage the exchange of ideas and knowledge of links courses in the UK

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- Baroness LM56 hand mowers x 3
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- Toro Reelmaster 3555 x 2
- Toro Groundsmaster 4700
- Toro Groundsmaster 3500
- Toro Sidewinder 3100 x 3
- Toro 5800 sprayer
- John Deere ProGator with HD200 sprayer
- John Deere Gator TX turf x 12
- John Deere 4720 tractor with loader and forks
- John Deere 3720 tractor with loader and forks
- Kubota M5111 tractor with loader and forks
- Kubota L5040 tractor
- Kubota L2501 tractor
- John Deere 4520 tractors x 2
- Vredo super compact disc seeder
- Wiedenmann Terra Air seeder
- Wiedenmann Terra Spike GX6
- Wiedenmann GXI 8
- Toro ProCore 648
- Toro Workman with ProPass dresser
- Turf Tidy 3000 flail mower
- Fabricated water bowser
- Tractor mounted Reco rotavator



Southport Old Links Golf Club

It's a team effort

In recent times, Southport Old Links Golf Club has built a new clubhouse and are currently undertaking major reconstruction work out on the course. This investment will help improve the aesthetics of the course and attract a broader range of golfers. Lee Williams met with Course Manager **Tony Rimmer**, who has been a very busy man since he joined over thirteen months ago, including the planning and managing of a redevelopment project

The club is a nine-hole course situated in Churchtown, just ten minutes from the famous Royal Birkdale Golf Club. It is not the biggest, or indeed the best-known golf course, but it is among the oldest. Golf was first played here in the late 1800s, well before many of the area's bigger and more famous golf clubs got underway.

When it came to accepting the job, a pulling point for Tony was the club's army of volunteers and, over the last few months, he has really seen the value of those members that give up their valuable time to help. "You hear about people that say they love their golf club, well these guys go beyond that and show it in a big way. We have a small hardcore team of members who have

worked with us throughout the pandemic, obviously socially distancing. With the major project we have been working on, we had up to thirty volunteers; both men and women, working on a rota basis. I take my hat off to one gentleman in particular, 'the Boss' (aka Will Baxter) who has grafted many hours every week helping the team out. To be fair though, they're all legends and we couldn't have achieved everything we have done without them."

I asked Tony what kind of jobs the volunteer members had been getting involved with. "They are currently painting car park fence panels, which is a light task compared to some heavy-duty work they have completed throughout the project. They've helped re-turf the new green and

new tees in terrible weather conditions, which was hard work for any seasoned greenkeeper, never mind a volunteer. But, all credit to them; not one of them complained and they all just got on with it. I've affectionately nicknamed them 'Dads Army' as most of these guys are over sixty. Keeping the men fuelled up, volunteer members from the Ladies section would bring over cups of tea and coffee to keep us going. I want to say a big thank you to each and every one of the volunteers."

Prior to joining Southport Old Links, Tony was made aware of an ongoing nuisance issue with a neighbouring household close to the line of play to the ninth and eighteenth closing hole. In his first few weeks at the club, he was tasked with helping to solve



“
I listen to the turf. I know that's hard to believe, but it is something I also encourage in my staff. It is great to see what kind of reaction I get personally and what they feel the turf is telling them. It is a way of them gaining more knowledge of what to look out for and I will then ask them for their feedback



the issue and to put a plan in place. “Firstly I got in touch with Marc Westenberg, a golf course architect who I had previously worked with at Southport and Ainsdale Golf Club and with whom I had developed a very good working relationship. Designs were drawn up and presented to the greens committee and the Council, the question we got back was “When can we start?”

“I was fortunate to be able to bring in the highly skilled DAR Golf Construction, who I’ve also successfully worked with in the past alongside Marc, and it was great to get all three of us back together again. Following periods of torrential rainfall, we started the project in October 2020. The aim was to move the green approximately fifty yards down the fairway.

At the same time DAR were moving the green, local contractor Ian Rylands was tasked with progressing the second part of the project. “Their remit was to work on the fairway bunkers, plus the 1st, 10th, 9th and 18th tees. Alongside this work, the volunteers lifted and removed two and half thousand square metres of turf, which had to be laid out down the first and ninth holes

before being lifted again and laid back down as part of the project.”

For most courses, it has been a harsh winter up and down the country with heavy rain, frost and snow, and it was no different in the seaside town of Southport. Tony talks me through the difficulties such weather conditions have caused to the project. “We did not have the best conditions to work in, but it was a matter of just getting on with it. Luckily, amidst all the poor weather, we got a window to get the gravel bed down, ring the green with drainage pipe and then build up the rootzone layer supplied by Whitemoss Eco. By mid November, the race was on to get the turf back down as it had been lying around for two to three weeks. Again, the volunteers were called in to help and, once the green was completed, we started expanding out to the surrounds and the fairway approach; all this was carried out before Christmas.”

“We then moved on to the ninth and eighteenth tees. A combination of problems had arisen whilst trying to move the project forward; the main one being weather, which was impacting our progress. Unfortunately,

the maintenance track the heavy plant had been using for transporting material had started to disintegrate due to the influence of heavy rainfall, plus the local contractor had other commitments meaning the project ground to a halt before Christmas. Work commenced again at the end of January and we’ve been able to make steady progress, we’re nigh on completion now.”

“All the tees have now been shaped, irrigation installed and turfed. Again, top work as always from Anthony at Arden Lea Irrigation and Andrew Church at Lancashire Turf Supplies. Previously, we had a watercourse running in front of the first and tenth tees which has now been culverted. This has given us extra teeing ground with the addition of two stone headwalls making a feature either end of the pipe.”

The clock was ticking for Tony and his team to complete as much of the outstanding work as possible before the course reopened at the end of March, which they did with success.

Southport Old Links is not your typical links course as it is situated two and a half miles from the coast, but it has many



We have a hardcore team of seven members who have worked with us throughout the pandemic. In my eyes, they are all legends and we couldn’t have achieved everything we have without them



Hardcore team of volunteers



The fairways and greens I have managed in the past are not a million miles away from what I have to work with here

resembling features. “One thing that did stand out to me when I came to look at the course was the amount of fescue in the fairways - it’s as good as any course you will see around here. The course is constructed on old farmland, which is relatively flat with a shallow sandy layer of rootzone and then a deep layer of peat.” I asked Tony does the peat layer cause issues with drainage. “Yes, the course does have problems with drainage, but it also offers a slight advantage

in summer as it seems to keep hold of the moisture, but I must admit I’m still trying to get my head around this whole peat thing.”

Tony has worked on a few true links courses in his past and I was interested in getting his views on whether you can really class this course as a links, as the club’s name suggests. “The fairways and greens I have managed in the past are not a million miles away from what I have to work with here. We get plenty of run on the ball

and challenging bump and run shots into firm greens, hallmarks of links golf. We do not have the dunes unfortunately, which is a pity, as I love the nature of the dune landscape and what it brings to a links golf course. Instead, we have a large number of willow and silver birch and, needless to say, when we get some strong winds they shed branches and leave a lot of debris around - which adds to the workload!

The greens are predominantly push ups,

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Getting Personal

Tony Rimmer - another one not in the Piers Morgan fan club.



Who are you? Tony Rimmer, Course Manager at Southport Old Links Golf Club.

Family status. Married with three children.

Who's your hero and why? I don't have a hero, but I do have many inspirations... too many of those to mention.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? You could do with losing a few pounds.

Which famous people wind you up? Piers Morgan.

What job would you love, other than your own? Working on a links course in Ireland.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Appearing on an STRI ecological video put together by Bob Taylor back in the day.

What is your favourite film? The Italian Job.

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

What scares you? Chafer grubs and leatherjackets.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? I can barely remember what I did yesterday...It doesn't bode well for a life story.

What is your favourite sport? Can't beat watching quality no matter the sport.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? Yes, but it's changed numerous times.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Bill Shankly, Muhammad Ali and Pep Guardiola.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? I take snippets from all advisory conversations and make them work for me.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? The Luxury Gap - Heaven 17, Songs to Learn and Sing - Echo and the Bunnymen and The Best of Kasabian

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Passionate, determined and grumpy.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper? Go to the gym and work on those shoulders.

What talent would you like to have? The same one that Bill Shankly, Muhammad Ali and Pep Guardiola had/have.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? That all common sense is not left at the entrance of a golf club car park.



again with a layer of sandy rootzone, with what Tony describes, as a darker material down below! "Some of the greens have drainage, which the lads have installed in recent years, this is something we will have to continue to address moving forward. The greens are primarily made up of bents, poa and a small amount of fescue. They have made a name for themselves for being in top form throughout the playing season (as they do on other courses along the line) and I have to keep that trend going. This did add extra pressure when I was interviewed for the job, but that's all good with me as I'm used to working with these types of greens."

When maintaining the greens through summer and winter, Tony likes to rely on the techniques and skills he has learned in his many years as a greenkeeper. "I have taken my

philosophy into Southport Old Links, but I also base a lot of the work on the feedback the team give me with their greens' experience here at SOL. I have combined the two and last year, as we went through testing times, I found that I didn't have to push the greens too hard to get a standard I was happy with"

"Cutting heights vary depending what is required; I am pretty happy to go down to 3mm, but I mainly work around a height of 4mm whilst using groomers and verti-cutting techniques along the way. I'll recognise what the turf needs, what resources I have, how I can get the best out of everything available to me including the weather and basically run my decisions on that."

Talking with Tony and walking the course, I can clearly see his passion for the job and it shows with the



Left to right: Chris Sperrin, Darren Rimmer and Tony Rimmer



We have issues with leatherjackets, and a new one for me personally is chafer grubs; we have had a lot of pecking on the greens, mainly from the many pheasants on the course

quality of the greens I saw on my visit; he even 'listens' to the turf. "I know that's hard to believe, but it is something I encourage my staff to do. It is great to see what kind of reaction I get personally from the lads and what they feel the turf is telling them. it's a way of them gaining more knowledge in turf management, because I will then ask them for feedback. I like to be proactive as well as reactive in my approach."

Tony relies on the same philosophy

he has in his approach to maintenance regarding the greens' feeding and aeration programmes. "This may go against the grain with many people, but I'm not a programme type of guy. Yes, you have an idea of what you want to do and where you want the turf to be at certain times of the year, but I thrive on knowing what the plant wants.... and what I want! Generally, we fit aeration in when we can; most of the verti-draining and hollow coring is carried

out at the end of the season so as not to disturb the busy summer play. Last year was a bit different though, for an example at the end of March we solid tined the greens at a depth of 3 inches and undertook some remedial verti-draining on the fifth, eighth and practice putting green; they had been problematic with ponding over the winter. This was followed up with a topdressing of sand at around a tonne per green."

"I base my feeding and wetting agent

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 John Deere 8700 fairway mower
 John Deere Aercore 800
 John Deere Aercore 1500
 Toro Workman
 Toro Greensmaster 3250-D
 Iseki TH4335 tractor
 Iseki 5470 tractor with front loader
 Wiedenmann Terra Spike
 GreenTek greens groomer brush
 Lloyds Paladin hand mowers x 2
 Charterhouse Rapidcore 1600 aerator
 SISIS MultiSlit
 SISIS Variseeder 1300
 Dakota Turf Tender topdresser
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 STIHL MS181 C-BE petrol chainsaw
 STIHL MS231 petrol chainsaw
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 STIHL FS360 C-EM petrol brushcutters x 2

applications on what I have done in the past. My go-to guy is Dave Weir from Rigby Taylor, who I have worked with for many years and who has become a trusted friend. At the start of the season, I always like to apply a base granular and then I will have a selection of liquids at my disposal to use throughout the playing season.”

Like many clubs in the area, the course suffers with a variety of pests and diseases. “We have issues with leatherjackets, and a new one for me personally is chafer grubs. Unfortunately, we have had a lot of pecking on the greens and are now waiting to see how much damage we will actually get from the pests. Damage on the fairways has been minimal so far.”

Ecology is an essential part of Tony's course maintenance and, using his experience, he aims to put a plan together to further enhance what is already in place. “Whilst at Southport and Ainsdale, I worked with Bob Taylor from the STRI who put an ecology plan in place. We spent many hours together and I gained a lot of knowledge from him and I hope to bring that experience

to the Old Links.”

“Prior to my arrival, the club had a woodland management plan drawn up, which is an excellent document. With the help of the volunteers, we have made a start on the plan and have been able to clear out scrub and open the place out a little bit. Further to this work, we dug out what we called a ‘borrow pit’, as we needed material for the shaping of the new green, bunkers and tees. We plan to keep the pit and it will now become a water feature that will attract a variety of wildlife onto the course.”

“In this article, I have named a few people who have been instrumental to the ongoing work here at Southport Old Links this past thirteen months or so. But, it would not have been possible at all without the dedication and support of the staff and the Council at SOL. Paula, Daz, Chris, Andy, Jade, Paul R, Peter C, Dave R, Dave B and finance director Mr John Hall have gone all out to make ideas work. It's a team effort, so huge gratitude goes out to all these guys in what has been a truly eventful year.”





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Shirley Golf Club

Passion by association!

Bordered by fields and natural woodland on the outskirts of south Birmingham, Shirley Golf Club nestles in the Blythe Valley, enjoying a well-planned blend of parkland with mature, wooded areas. It provides one of the finest parkland courses in the area and long-serving Course Manager **Andy Smith** is charged with keeping it that way. Lee Williams reports

Shirley Golf Club was founded in 1955 by a group of Jewish businessmen, lawyers and other gentlemen who decided to bid for what was Shirley Racecourse in order to transform it into a golf course. Set in 140 acres, the course measures some 6,537 yards and comprises four par 3s and four par 5s, with the remainder being par 4s, one of which would appear to be driveable if the scorecard is to be believed!

Course Manager Andy Smith has dedicated over twenty-two years of his life in helping to develop and improve every aspect of the course he loves and took time out met to discuss his career so far and his plans to further enhance the course.

After sitting down with Andy for ten minutes, I could tell he was a man who does not rest on his laurels and believes we never stop learning. He has a real passion for the club and the industry as a whole. "In forty-two years of greenkeeping, I can honestly say I have never once woken up on a morning and not wanted to come into work. I still like to get involved with as many seminars as possible at BTME, and I am always interested in seeing new technologies. In this industry, you never stop learning. I'm actively involved with BIGGA and, when I first joined, I became the education coordinator of the Midlands section committee."

I asked Andy why he got involved with

BIGGA and what he hoped to achieve when he first signed up. "Basically, I'm not one who just moans for the sake of moaning. I believe it is better to ask questions, find out what is going on and try and do things to make it better and, by joining BIGGA, I could help answer those questions. I first joined the Midlands section in 1996, and I am now the Chairman."

Andy has been a member of BIGGA for twenty-five years. So, does he feel the association, and himself, has helped improve the education, working conditions, salaries and profile of greenkeepers? "I believe BIGGA is a fantastic association in that anybody from a sixteen-year-old apprentice to a course manager has a communication



line through the sections and regions right up to the Board. For me, this is unique and what the association is all about, and we need to be proud of what we do.”

“When I first started my career, working conditions were not the best, and the respect we got from golfers was not great either; in some places it still isn’t! When BIGGA formed in 1987, they started to help raise the profile of greenkeeping. This was achieved through education which, to this day, is still second to none. In turn, this helped expand the skills and knowledge of greenkeepers, so naturally, conditions improved. For me, the next step was to get the profile of greenkeeping raised within the industry, as in having influence at their

club. Jim Croxton has done an excellent job of getting greenkeeping onto the top table, which is an achievement in itself.”

“For me, the Covid-19 pandemic has helped highlight the importance of having an association. We were a major influence in getting golf back open and ensuring the safe working conditions of staff and how they should perform their course maintenance. I think Jim Croxton, alongside his team and the association, did a great job of fighting our corner and providing all greenkeepers up and down the UK with the latest information and guidance.”

The one-hundred-and-forty-acre parkland course is clay-based which can cause Andy a few problems, and the River Blythe that



The greens now drain and play exceptionally well, and it is something I am rather pleased with considering what they were like all of those years ago



To help encourage and protect the vast amount of wildlife, we have large areas around the course we do not mow. We have created five new additional water features which are great for wildlife

runs through the bottom section of the course is on a one-hundred-year old flood plain. "All our drainage runs down to the river so, in the winter when we get the heavy rain, we have four holes that will be closed as we cannot get down there. The River Blythe rises and subsides quickly, leaving behind silt and debris and causes damage to the paths and bridges. Whilst the clean-up operation is ongoing, we are fortunate enough to have four tees with different starting points around the clubhouse, so it is not a significant problem if the holes are closed for a short time."

"One of the biggest problems we have, like most clay courses is that the trees can suffer if we have a really wet winter

or a particularly dry summer, as you get problems with the ground around trees."

Since Andy joined the club, he has built and developed a short game area from a piece of wasteland next to the clubhouse, which is put to good use. "The club uses the short game area to bring in disadvantaged and disabled children from schools around the local community; They are provided with free golf lessons, which is a brilliant initiative they have been running for many years now."

"We have an old Watermation Irrigation system that was installed in 1996, and it is starting to fail in some areas now. Fortunately, I have my own mechanic who is skilled in anything and everything, so he maintains the system. We have irrigation to tees, greens and approaches, and we can extract 20 cubic metres of water a day from the river, but we had to supplement this from the mains, which could only be used between midnight and six in the morning, so we did not affect local businesses and households."

"This meant we never had enough water, so we decided to build our own reservoir from a crater in the ground that was full of scrub and a 'nothing area'. We looked at some old maps, and it showed that, a few hundred years ago, it had been an old marl pit where they used to dig the clay



Course Manager Andy Smith



The river Blythe after bursting its banks



out for agricultural fertilisers. Observing drains around the course, that were still constantly running even though the course was dry, we suspected that natural springs were running through the course. With the help of a chap who knew about these things, we had a survey undertaken and we managed to take advantage of these natural springs to fill up the reservoir. It holds up to eight hundred thousand gallons of water and, in 2018 when we had the drought, it really paid dividends. We were able to water the greens, tees and approaches every night, plus we would be out in the morning watering hotspots. The water level never dropped once. Another significant advantage is that we are now totally self-sufficient, and we have no charges for water. In fact, we have that much water come from the springs, we now overflow into the river! It was the biggest project we have ever carried out and the one I am the proudest of."

When Andy walked onto the course for the first time twenty-two years ago, the worst part was the push up greens that would close the course regularly. "Over the years, I have significantly managed to improve the quality of the greens rootzone and drainage. So much so, it is now other areas around the course that will close it! All the drainage work on the greens was carried out in-house, by doing a third of the course each year. The greens now drain and play exceptionally well, and it is something I am rather pleased with considering what they were like all of those years ago."

Andy believes one of the most detrimental things to happen to greenkeeping over the years has been the need to chase speed on the greens. "To achieve that, we have been cutting Poa greens down to 3mm in the summer, and this puts a lot of stress on the plant. It is too low. Last year, we invested in a turf iron, the



I believe BIGGA is a fantastic association in that anybody from a sixteen-year-old apprentice to a course manager has a communication line

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Getting Personal

Andy Smith - You must make life happen, know what you want, have a plan and be kind on the way!

Who are you? Andy Smith. Course Manager at Shirley Golf Club.

Family status. Married for thirty-five years to Melanie. With a son Aaron, daughter Alexandra and granddaughters Scarlett and Annabelle.

Who's your hero and why? Muhammad Ali; 'The Greatest' boxer ever and Trevor Francis; the greatest Birmingham footballer ever.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? My first position as Head Greenkeeper at Lutterworth Golf Club in 1988. They had good members and it was a proud moment.

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

Which famous people would you up? C list celebrities' who think they are famous!

What job would you love, other than your own? A zookeeper.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Too many ... just as well I don't care.

What is your favourite film? Quadrophenia.

What's your favourite smell? Babies and night scented stock.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? It could have all been so different. Played by Sid James.

What is your favourite sport? Boxing and football.

What would you cast into Room 101? Cruelty to animals.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? 25th October 1415, Agincourt.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To be World Welter Weight Champion, score the winner for Birmingham in the FA Cup Final and Climb Everest. However, nowadays, it is just to sleep in.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Muhammad Ali, David Bowie and Marilyn Monroe.



What's the best advice you have ever been given? Keep your guard up and win over your enemies - harder said than done, but worth it.

What scares you? The Labour party.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Best of Bowie, Best of Elvis and Best of The Who.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? After forty-two years of greenkeeping, I still get asked if I'm doing basic set up jobs for competitions!

What's your favourite piece of kit? Komatsu PC 20R - I love construction.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Loyal, determined and a family man.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old greenkeeper? Ask questions - it shows you are interested and people like to impart knowledge. You must make life happen, know what you want, have a plan and be kind on the way.

What talent would you like to have? To be able to sing.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? I would make it illegal to judge and preach on subjects you know nothing about. Fortunately, I am always right.



first one we have had, and this has allowed us to raise the height of the cut up to 4mm, which has made a big difference already."

"If you look back to when I first started in greenkeeping forty-two years ago, our summer heights then are winter heights now at around 5mm. No one really spoke about green speeds, whereas now it has become the holy grail."

Following on from this conversation, we got on to how Andy maintains the greens throughout the season. "The greens in summer are generally mown every day using the old Toro Greenmasters and the new Jacobsen Eclipse.

But, now we have the turf iron, we have been experimenting a little bit and, in recent weeks, we have been alternating between cutting and rolling. I do pencil tine quite a lot to keep the surface open, but I think this year we are on a learning curve, but so far, so good."

"I believe aeration is the key to maintaining healthy greens. There is not a month that goes by where we do not do something. I will run the pencil tines over the greens every three weeks using our twenty-year-old Soil Reliever, and then, every few months, swap the tines over depending on what depths I want to achieve. We are now pretty





One of the biggest problems we have is that the trees can suffer if we have a really wet winter or a particularly dry summer

fortunate that organic matter in the greens is textbook when you look at all the test results. So, we have done away with hollow-coring and the Graden in the last few years. I suppose if you have been at a golf club for the last twenty-two years, you should be on top of that by now; if not, I have failed!”

“We carry out a light verti-cut with the GreenTek units on one of our old Toro greens mowers every two to three weeks, depending on play and the weather. A light dusting of sand follows this with a quick brush in. We aim to get one hundred and forty tonnes of sand on a year.”

Overseeding has not been part of Andy’s maintenance programme, but he plans to change this after carrying out some of his own trials. “It’s a route I would like to go

down. Two years ago, we built a green just outside the clubhouse, so it could be used as a social green while the members were having a drink on the patio. We sowed it with a straight dwarf ryegrass to see how it coped with disease, chemicals, fertilisers and heights of cut. We found that ryegrass does not like being cut below 4mm, so we keep it above that; it is a great surface. We have not put a single application of fungicide on in the two years it has been established. So, if we decide to overseed the greens, we will be looking at going with the dwarf rye; the results suggest this is the way forward.”

It has been a tough winter for Andy and his team, but they have taken full advantage of the course being closed due to COVID and have managed to get on with various

projects, and he is already looking forward to next year’s projects. “We have reshaped and replaced the sand in all of the bunkers. We have had Pugh-Lewis in to carry out drainage work on two of the fairways and they have done an excellent job. I would thoroughly recommend them. This coming winter, with us only being a few months off now, I have put in plans to the club to build two new tees; on the eighth and the eighteenth. The work will involve raising the tees to improve the views and the line of sight. All the work will be carried out in-house as I love construction. Once finished, we will move our attention to draining the fairway on the par-three 12th hole ourselves with the trencher. We will have Pugh-Lewis back in to drain three more fairways.”





I believe aeration is the key to maintaining healthy greens. There is not a month that goes by where we do not do something



There are four badger setts on the course and they can cause some real damage at times, Andy tells me. Alongside this, like a lot of golf courses up and down the country, he has started to see leatherjackets and worms really take over in recent years with the ban on chemical control. “We used to go around repairing the badger damage, only to find that, the next day, it’s been dug out again. We soon learnt that they tend to dig up the same banks around the tees and greens, so now we leave it and wait until they have finished in the spring, when they are only young, and repair for the season. It’s a big job, as they can cause a hell of a lot of damage.”

I told Andy I had seen many Twitter posts recently of greenkeepers covering their greens in black sheeting to try and reduce the number of leatherjackets, and if this was something he would consider carrying out? “Years ago, when I started, we used to put hessian sacking down to get them to come up to the surface. Now, everyone is putting the silage sheets down but, in my opinion, you can put anything down as

long as you are blocking out the light and sweating them to the surface; that is the best way to describe it. Last year, we used Acelepryn, but we have been discussing going down the sheeting route ourselves; we have to try something!”

Shirley Golf Club is home to many endangered species, so ecology is fundamental to the way Andy and the club manage the course. “We have Great Crested Newts and we have spotted Goshawks and Polecats too. To help encourage and protect the vast amount of wildlife, we have large areas around the course we do not mow. We have created five new additional water features which are great for wildlife. We have also put up bird and barn owl boxes, and we have also tried to establish some wildflower areas, but with varying degrees of success.”

What’s in the shed

- Jacobsen Eclipse 322 hybrid greens mower
- Toro Greensmaster 3250-D x 3
- Toro Groundsmaster 4300-D x 4
- Toro Groundsmaster 3500-D
- Toro Workman 3300-D utility vehicle
- Toro Reelmaster 6700-D
- Toro Reelmaster 3100-D
- Toro Sand Pro 3040 Bunker Rake
- Smithco Tournament XL 7000 Ultra-wide greens roller
- New Holland TN75SA tractor
- Iseki TG6370 compact tractor
- Komatsu PC 20R mini excavator
- Gambetti 600L tractor mounted sprayer
- Lewis trencher





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Whitstable Golf Club

The Suttle approach!



The course's proximity to the sea causes salt issues

Steve Suttle has trodden a rocky road from early aspirations as an assistant pro golfer to head greenkeeper of challenging Kentish courses. Greg Rhodes hears how he survived and thrived

From his early teens, golf was Steve Suttle's first love. "I must have had some ability," he states, "as, despite having had no tuition, I managed to get down to a 4 handicap at 15 (and won the under-16 Surrey Championship in 1974), moving to East Kent in 1975 following a family relocation."

"Then, in early 1978, I was horrified to view a video recording of my swing and, after some soul searching, decided that the years of practice that it would need to remedy my rather unconventional action wouldn't be a viable option, as I love playing but not practising."

Therefore, after a few days' consideration, he resigned his position. By chance, there happened to be a vacancy on the greens staff at North Foreland which he took up.

Now heading a greens team of just two at 9-hole Whitstable & Seasalter Golf Club,

Steve recalls his journey of transformation.

He had been an assistant professional at various clubs in East Kent, including North Foreland Golf Club in Broadstairs for two and a half years. "North Foreland is a prestigious course, he explains, "hosting the final qualifying rounds for the Open Championships on four occasions, when it was held at Royal St George's."

"I knew nothing about greenkeeping then, of course, but soon developed a keen interest in how the golf course was maintained."

"I read many articles by R&A agronomist Jim Arthur and realised we were not doing what he advocated." Steve held a few lively discussions with head greenkeeper Peter Wisbey; "a very knowledgeable guy".

"He had the humility and courage to change the way he managed the course and that's when I learnt the art and skill of proper







Steve Suttle with his 'team' Seth Divine (left)



I was on medication but that didn't do the trick so, in spite of North Foreland's best efforts, I could see no way out at that point, so I resigned and started tending private gardens. That was the road to recovery I needed

greenkeeping."

The team stopped fertilising the fairways and started deep-slitting the greens. "We soon saw the benefits - healthier turf," Steve recalls. Eventually, he rose to deputy head greenkeeper and Peter started encouraging him to seek head posts elsewhere.

"In 1984, I decided to leave North Foreland having secured the position of head greenkeeper at picturesque Sene Valley."

"I'd gone from a free-draining clifftop chalk downland at North Foreland to drainage issues at Sene Valley, where the lowest of its three levels was often waterlogged during the winter months. When I cut the holes, I unearthed five different types of construction in the greens!"

Steve had to adapt the irrigation to allow for the different types of construction, which meant a lot of hand watering in the summer months.

After introducing proper greenkeeping practices at Sene Valley, Steve left after five and a half years. "It was a difficult course to manage but excellent experience. During my time there, I had the pleasure of an advisory visit from Jim Arthur who assured me I was on the right lines."

In 1989, Steve returned to North Foreland as head greenkeeper. "Peter had left in 1987 to manage San Lorenzo course in Portugal, prior to a spell at the English Golf Union's two courses at their Woodhall Spa complex. Peter gave me the opportunity to learn proper greenkeeping and I will always be grateful to him for that."

"Jim Arthur's principles of greenkeeping are based on good practice and sustainability, and these principles will always hold true."

"Greenkeeping is all about encouraging the right grasses," Steve states, "the bents and fescues - and ridding the course of poa annua where possible, to develop an infertile, well-structured and drained soil."

Steve manages courses to favour fine grasses because these will improve the course over time and that's the strategy at Whitstable. "It's an austere regime but is working, and that means more quality golf for more of the year here."

Steve spent sixteen and a half years as head at North Foreland, overseeing the Open final qualifying rounds held there in 1993 and 2003.

He left in April 2005 "for non-greenkeeping reasons" at a stressful point in his career. "I was on medication but that didn't do the trick so, in spite of North Foreland's best efforts, I could see no way out at that point, so I resigned and started tending private gardens. That was the road to recovery I needed."

After two years out, Steve began to miss greenkeeping but then had a chance conversation with a member of North Foreland who knew the secretary at Whitstable.

"One thing led to another, resulting in my acquiring the position when the incumbent greenkeeper reached retirement age. This is a modest, unpretentious and friendly private members golf club. There's been no resident professional here since the 1970s."

Whitstable's ground is diametrically opposed to North Foreland, Steve reports, "from clifftop, free-draining chalk to low-lying London clay."

Positioned just yards from the seafront, Whitstable serves as a link from the promenade to the town via a causeway running across the course, skirting the old sea defences.

In his early days, after vandals had damaged one of the greens sited near the London main rail link that runs along the perimeter, Steve was using a 9in turf renovator to repair the putting surface when "to my horror, I saw that blue clay - the kind used to make pottery - lay underneath."

The causeway remains a cause for concern for Steve. "Kids pinch tee markers, and flags are thrown in the dykes lining the course. That's why we don't have expensive flags and tee markers."

Steve lives fifteen miles from the course with wife Christine, his two daughters Jennifer and Abigail having now flown the nest. His work is paying off though. "I've been amazed how much the greens have



Aerial View of the course



I don't believe in gimmicks - you don't need to if you manage the greens in the right ecological manner. It's all about creating the right conditions to give the fine grasses a competitive advantage

improved, bearing in mind they are push-up clay, mostly with poor natural drainage.”

And the club can rightly claim that it is part of a national resurgence in 9-hole courses, as demand grows for fast-track golf squeezed into busy schedules.

Steve's austere regime is one of choice. “I have never oversown the greens at Whitstable,” he states. “I find it doesn't work long term. I don't believe in gimmicks - you

don't need to if you manage the greens in the right ecological manner. It's all about creating the right conditions to give the fine grasses a competitive advantage.”

When an STRI agronomist assessed the course in 2014, her verdict brought good news. “The greens turf was predominantly agrostis with fescue on all greens with diminishing poa annua and deemed very healthy. That was music to my ears.”

When we spoke, Steve had just suffered “the three wettest months I've ever known here”. As many as five of the greens become unplayable for short periods when they become saturated in winter. “We have pre-prepared temporary greens for these occasions. We use winter mats as the ground is too wet between December and the end of February. Some golfers want to play year-round, but it's just not practical

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You hear about clubs cutting to 2mm. That's not healthy for sure and there is probably only Poa Annua as a result. That's not proper greenkeeping to me

when the course is waterlogged.”

“Saltings existed here, when the land was farmed - mainly potatoes. The ground is original ridge and furrow. Across the fairways, when the ground reaches field capacity in the winter, these furrows collect water when it rains hard.”

Weather extremes only serve to aggravate matters. “Last year, we had an incredibly dry March,” says Steve. “In the summer, the clay baked and split. Areas where we had slit started to gape.”

The greens are kept very firm and dry due to the minimal watering regime during the season, and making a pitchmark is difficult unless substantial rain falls!

“When artificial irrigation is being used, if a ball breaks the surface it is a sure sign that it is being overwatered. Overwatering is the cardinal sin of greenkeeping.”

The Stimpmeter Steve bought in the 1980s is still in its box. “I’ve never used it,” he admits, “because it would be a rod for my back if I did! We never cut lower than 4.5mm in season and I go up to 6mm in winter.”

“You hear about clubs cutting to 2mm. That’s not healthy for sure and there is probably only Poa Annua as a result. That’s not proper greenkeeping to me.”

The greens are cut daily in the season and verticut weekly; “just deep enough so marks show for a week”, says Steve. “A fair amount of ryegrass is present, which shouldn’t be there I know. I manage it as best I can. From April to September, we apply monthly applications of Seamac ProTurf, Revolution wetting agent and PrimoMaxx growth retardant to encourage a denser sward. It works for me.”

A fan of Fendress - one of Jim Arthur’s old faithfuls - Steve has used it since 1984. “The best, in my view,” he states. “Mixing in a little 8.0.0 fertiliser gives me the perfect mix for spring and summer application, but I don’t apply fertiliser in the autumn.”

“We slit when we can during the autumn and winter,” Steve explains, “deep slitting with the Huxley multi-depth aerator, with 9in



The new clubhouse opened in February 2020 - just in time for lockdown!

tines. Maintenance week is mid-September, when a contractor vertidrain all the main playing areas - 10-12 inches on greens, tees and surrounds, less depth on fairways.” His preferred divot mix is a Banks sandy loam with fescues, bent and smoothstalk meadowgrass seed.

Then there’s the fairy rings he has to contend with. “Marasmius oreades - grade one rings produce bare patches and lush growth on the edges, luckily appear mostly in the rough. We had small ones on greens and surrounds. We dug out the infected soil and replaced with fresh soil and returfed the areas. Fungicides didn’t really work, even before they were banned.”

“We knuckle down to the task every autumn/winter, digging out the affected soil. We dump the infected soil on an unused corner of the course,” Steve explains.

The rings are much more apparent in dry than wet weather, rain disguises them to some degree, he continues, adding: “We

even had to reshape some fairways to avoid them.”

Drainage issues strike at the heart of Whitstable’s upkeep. The course lies on 95% London clay, and 5% shingle at the furthest point, under the 5th and 6th double green, featuring a ridge. “That end of the course drains extremely well,” notes Steve, “but we’ve had to add drainage across the course, including the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th and 9th fairways, with more planned in the future.”

There are plentiful dykes and channels on and around the course. “A great boon to drain into”, declares Steve. Golf maintenance week includes the vertidrain and additional drainage installation in the worst-hit areas.

In the past, the course would have been closed for weeks on end after heavy rain in the winter, but that is no longer the case.

“This is a flat site around about sea level and, because of the lie of the land, we can



Whitstable Bay showing the railway line that dissects the course



Beach huts fringe parts of the course



We dug out the infected soil and replaced with fresh soil and returfed the areas. Fungicides didn't really work, even before they were banned

only lay drains [usually 100mm diameter] in the furrows present when the course was seeded over one hundred years ago.”

As Steve's priority is good husbandry, the course policy document emphasizes leaving more long rough areas; “better for wildlife,” he states.

“We spray only once or twice a year for disease on the greens, with Instrata Elite, or Dualitis fungicide to tackle the annual outbreaks of fusarium. Any Red Thread - a

sign of infertility - I put less emphasis on.”

Around the shed, car park and perimeter fences, the team applies total herbicide with a Cooper Pegler CP15 knapsack sprayer twice a year to control weeds and vegetation

Trees generally fail to thrive, “but eucalyptus certainly does”. White poplars, planted in 1980, predominate but they do have one drawback. “Their white leaves can hide the ball. We've planted gorse between

the first and second holes in the deep rough. It took ages to establish itself but has finally done so.”

Wear management is a priority in the winter months. “It's one of my most important tasks and there's a real need for it here, and anywhere with high wear,” he notes. “Prevention is better than cure as they say. Every course suffers wear but you have to search it out on the better ones. As soon as we spot wear, we tackle it, putting

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Seth knows exactly what we do, and why, and can carry on the greenkeeping practices that are slowly but surely transforming course playability

out white lines, hoops, stakes and ropes for traffic management in that order.”

He also runs a tier system for buggy use. “When the ground’s too wet, we initially ban the large buggys then the smaller ride-ons and the electric trolleys, then finally the pull trolleys which mean, as a last resort, the golfers have to carry. This is not a popular policy and my popularity tends to wane at these times!”

He accepts that daily decisions on whether to impose course restrictions “can be stressful and can rebound on you from members.”

“We leave a message on the club answerphone in winter. Someone will pick it up and they can then contact members via

social media. Some may say it’s an unwieldy system, but it works.”

Whitstable’s greens ‘team’ is Steve and his assistant Seth Divine, in his mid-40s. “He’s been here almost as long as I have and had very little greenkeeping experience on arrival, just a local cricket club in Canterbury and a short work experience at the local Chestfield Golf Club.”

“We both have PA1, 2 & 6 spraying qualifications. We make a very good team together and, in all these years, we’ve barely had a cross word which I think is a pretty good record. Seth is reliable and hardworking, I hope he gets the opportunity when I retire to replace me should he so wish. He knows exactly what we do, and why, and can carry on the greenkeeping practices that are slowly but surely transforming course playability.”

“I do love my job but it can prove very difficult in winter. When the course is wet, sometimes you can only take a wheelbarrow out. I have changed the holes using that very tool!”

“We were both furloughed alternately on a weekly basis from last November to the middle of March, with little impact on the course condition, despite the long record breaking wet winter.”

Wildlife diversity is uplifting, says Steve, but can bite back. “Plenty of foxes and rabbits, moorhens in the dykes and green woodpeckers returning every year. Seagulls persist in attacking the 2nd green, near the clubhouse. Only that one - peck, peck - takes hours to repair. The crows like to pull up any freshly laid turf too. We’ve bought hawks on poles for £50 a go and stick them on the green, which I can recommend as being 95% effective.”

“The 1953 exceptionally high tides and bad weather left the course flooded to 8ft deep, leaving a residue of salt and, because of that, we have less of an issue with worm casts, which is just as well since Carbendazim was banned.”



Seth Divine atop the Jacobsen TR3 - bought for a snip!

What’s in the shed?

Toro 3250D Triplex greens mowers x 3

Toro 2300D fairways and semi-rough mowers x 3

Jacobsen TR3 diesel fairways mower - “bought for a snip from a private homeowner

Toro 223D outfront rotary for cutting rough at 100mm or semi rough at 50mm cut

Cushman Turf Truckster x 3 of varying sizes. One is an original 3-wheeler

Kubota L3250 tractor

Ford 1710 tractor

Huxley multi-depth aerator (fitted on the Cushman)

Hardi Boss 300L boom sprayer

All housed in a purpose-built shed erected next to the clubhouse in the 1990s



I’m in my 41st consecutive year of competing as a long distance runner and still manage 30 to 50 miles weekly - it used to be 60 to 70 miles. I like to compete. As long as my joints are still sound, I’ll carry on

All Steve's turfcare machinery is second hand. "Virtually all my machinery is Toro as they stay on cut and their durability is incredible. However, last year, the club were able to purchase a Jacobsen fairway mower for a knock down price from a private sale," he states. "Lister Wilder service and repair the machinery. They do an excellent job keeping us up and running and will always help us out with any breakdowns."

A mere stripling at 63, Steve stays fit and health conscious. Living a walk away from North Foreland, where he is an honorary member and occasional player, Steve plays off 12 handicap. Steve also took up bowls a few years ago and now concentrates more on bowling than golf in the summer months. He runs year-round, partaking in races, usually throughout Kent.

"I'm in my 41st consecutive year of competing as a long distance runner," he says, "and still manage 30 to 50 miles weekly - it used to be 60 to 70 miles. I like to compete. As long as my joints are still sound, I'll carry on. I don't buy confectionery or snacks anymore and feel fantastic all the time." Surely testimony to the feel good factor that raised endorphin levels foster.

Steve returns to his favourite theme of Jim Arthur as we end our conversation. "I try to tweak maintenance in line with his methods and, to that end, I'm always learning and seeking to know more."

The course is still work in progress, Steve concludes, "but we like to think we provide the best possible playing conditions for as much of the year as possible". You cannot say fairer than that.



Steve has been running competitively for forty-one years

Fact file



Official opening of the new clubhouse

Whitstable lies on the north-east coast of Kent, just along from Reculver village, where the Barnes Wallis 'Bouncing Bomb' was tested before 617 Squadron dropped it on Germany's Ruhr reservoir dams in the WW11 Dambusters raid.

The town's renowned native oysters, collected since Roman times from beds lying beyond tidal low water mark, graced many a fine restaurant, whilst the Saxons produced salt here.

Once a manor owned by the church, Seasalter suburb lies at the west end of the town, lending its name to the golf club, which opened in 1911 after creation from salt marsh and quickly drew local attraction.

Many a golfer may believe low scoring looks easy at Whitstable & Seasalter, which plays to 5,300 yards over 18 holes. However, this well-bunkered links course proves as tricky a prospect as many longer, more closely sand-trapped ones, thanks to blustery winds and the accuracy required to shoot the flags.

Lack of greens hazards makes it extremely difficult to judge the strength required for any approach shot, the club declares, while the springiness of the fairways makes the course play far longer than the card would indicate.

"There is little run on the drive except in the driest weather during summer," the club website states, adding: "accuracy is of far greater importance at Seasalter than mere strength."

Signature hole is the Par 4 fifth - at 446 yards, it's long for a nine-hole course and Whitstable's hardest. It shares its green with the 6th, shortest, hole, and the double green is the most contoured on the course, with a large hogsback spine, splitting it into the two separate sides featuring humps and hollows.

This is a busy, friendly private members club, currently running some 400 members, who can enjoy a spread of golfing activity.

Ladies play on Tuesday mornings, with social golf on Thursdays. There's an active Mid-Weekers schedule, Sunday competitions and plenty of opportunity for

the burgeoning juniors section on summer Monday evenings, social golf on Tuesday evenings during BST, club matches and captains' charities. Over-60s members qualify for the Old Salts, who play on Thursday mornings and compete in the Kent Veterans League

After a four-year project, begun following sale of a small parcel of land to facilitate planning permission to complete the initiative, Whitstable & Seasalter's impressive clubhouse opened February 2020 to wide acclaim for its architectural merit, before Covid lockdown cruelly slammed the doors shut.

However, Steve states that Covid-19 has played a "minimal" part in the course maintenance side of things.

After extending the old clubhouse - originally a small bungalow - over the years, the club decided it needed to start again from the ground up.

Clever, stylish, spacious design features a large glazed frontage facing west and overlooking the course to heighten natural light levels, even in winter.

Club rules forbid use of mobile phone calls inside, on the patio facing the 1st/10th tee and 9th green, and out on course.

"Silent browsing of texts and emails is permitted within the clubhouse," the rules state, however those with the urge to tech talk can seek the haven of the changing rooms, where they can indulge their habit.

Modernising Whitstable & Seasalter is timely indeed, taking advantage of the transformation of this stretch of Kent coastline to attract a varied demographic, who can pit their golfing wits against a compact though challenging course overlooking the sea.

The club attracts members from some distance away, while closure of a local course also helped swell numbers.



Seth and Steve outside the clubhouse

Keynote interview

No Gray areas

After being in the industry for over twenty years, Southampton Football Club veteran **Andy Gray** was appointed Head of Grounds and Estates at the FA home of football St George's Park in Staffordshire. In this keynote interview, Kerry Haywood chatted to him about his career and how he has settled into the dream job

You were at Southampton Football Club for over twenty years, what was the pull to come to St George's Park?

I had been at Southampton since I was seventeen and had been in my current position as Grounds Manager for ten of those. In that time, we had rebuilt both St Mary's pitch and every training pitch, some twice - the training ground and the team had doubled in size. I would by no means say that I was bored, however, I was ready for a new challenge. I saw the position advertised at St. George's Park and I consider this to be one of the most prestigious jobs available in our industry, so I didn't want to miss the opportunity.

How difficult was it starting a new position during Covid-19 and lockdown?

It hasn't been easy! Full teams were back on site when I started in September 2020 and the lads had renovated certain pitches, to varying levels, during the summer; some were fully renovated, some half renovated and others not at all. My first day coincided with the first day of International Camp - which meant the England Senior men and Under 21's were both here and, needless to say, I was in at the deep end. The following couple of months were also busy and then, December to February are historically a little quieter, which gave me time to reflect and plan.

//

To be where I am today and do what I'm doing, there is nothing I would say I should/could have done differently. I have never had any regrets about anything and I have taken every opportunity that has come my way





As a native of Southampton, was it a wrench to move away?

I reached a point where I was ready to leave and take on a new challenge, but that doesn't take away from what we achieved there. My family is still based half a mile down the road from Staplewood, so I make the commute every Monday morning and then back home on Thursday evenings. It has actually improved my home life and time with my family though, as I now get weekends with them.

Were you given a specific remit when you were offered the position?

The FA have incredible high expectations and the remit is to ensure the grounds and pitches are the best condition they can be at all times. I would like to think that I got the job on the back of my vast experience and what I had achieved at Southampton, but it's not just a case of replicating what I did there, because you have to work and

think differently here, but working practices and my management style will obviously be implemented and make a difference. Not only that, but my experience of pitch renovations, reconstructions, project work etc. means I'm in a good position moving forward to deal with everything that needs to be achieved.

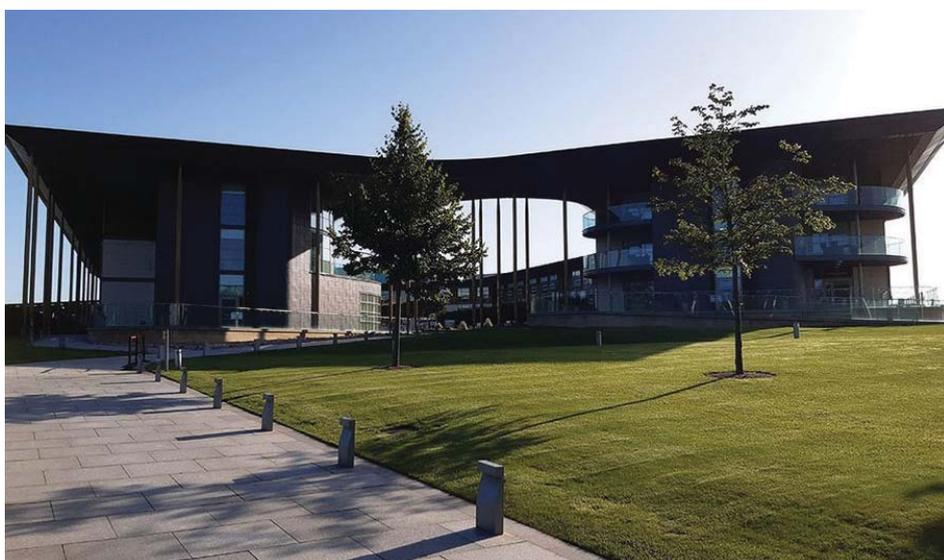
It must be different looking after such a big site and so many pitches

Football is my main interest and I have worked in a football environment my whole career. It's not club football here though and that's why this is so different. In club football there is an International break from games and that break is when we are most busy.

It's not just the seniors that come here, we have a lot of development teams here too. And it's not just the England teams' home; Burton Albion FC are residents and we host a lot of training camps, as well as quite a bit of rugby this past year. The variants of all the different teams



If a manager doesn't make a correct or timely substitution everyone is on his back and, likewise, if the surface doesn't quite look its best, everyone is a groundsman and can do better





One of the two Desso pitches



It is literally a job for anybody; someone who may not be academic, might be great with their hands but, if you are, you can get into the technical and science side of things

and requirements really provide an interesting set up and that's different to what I'm used to.

How many different surfaces are there?

There are ten grass pitches and five artificial (two full size and three smaller). Two of the grass pitches are fibre-sand and three are hybrid; one SIS pitch and two Desso, then the other five pitches are natural soil. They are all fully drained and on a gravel raft,

but the soil and sand profile on top of that means it slows the drainage rates down considerably. I worked with the same set up of artificial pitches at Southampton, so I am used to the maintenance of those.

When the Senior squad is on site, is maintenance, and how your teams work, affected?

We are home to many England teams and FA Education. When the senior squads are

here, all our focus and efforts are always on those teams and their requirements. So, we prepare the training pitch for when they arrive, repair it that afternoon and then prepare it again the next morning (if required), ahead of their next session. The training pitch isn't used when they aren't on site, so it is just maintained as part of the rest of the site. It's nice when they are here because, essentially, that's what we are here for!



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In a stadium environment, I would have to say the biggest improvement has been the introduction of grow lights

How often do the England teams visit?

Men's seniors are here five times a year; with camps in September, October, November, March and June, with the women's teams following two weeks later. This summer, with it being the Euros, we will host the base camp for England and then, next year, will be the same for the women's team ahead of their Euros 2022.

You were very much your own man at Southampton. Is that still the case

here and how are your team sizes different?

The team is actually the same size; the difference is that we cover one site here, whereas there were three sites at Southampton. Here, we have a team of ten groundstaff, with a further four on the estates and landscaping team. The pitches are obviously maintained in intricate detail, but it can't be ignored that the site is 330 acres and the pitches only roughly make up 20 acres of that, so the estates team do a fantastic job of maintaining the estate to offer visitors the 'wow' factor.

Are the FA strict custodians?

Not as a rule. We clegg every pitch each week, so that we have a record of the levels, and our aeration programme is derived from those results. I'm just getting to know the medical performance team here, ahead of base camp for the summer and take everything they say on board. Every player wants the grass short and wet, so that's what we give them! Each pitch is cut at 25mm and, unless it's raining, they're watered before each session and we would tend to have someone available in case they require more water during training.



Standing on the pitches at Santiago Bernabeu and San Siro was very special. My first tournament memory is Italia 90 and the San Siro is iconic to that, so it took me back to being a young lad



What sports were you involved with in your younger days?

I played football until I was around twenty-four. However, I was worried that if I got hurt or injured on a Sunday morning (which was very likely given the teams we used to play), I wouldn't be able to do my job.

What inspired you to become a groundsman?

The most important factor for me was to

work outside and do something practical. I wasn't academic at school and I didn't enjoy being cooped up inside, so I was determined to find something outdoors. There was a golf course a couple of miles down the road from where I lived, and I found myself asking them what it involved to maintain the surfaces and how I could work on the course. I was in Year 11 at school at the time and they allowed me to work two weeks work experience in the

Easter holidays. I really should have been revising for my exams but, instead, I was raking bunkers and paving the way for my future career!

I loved it and enrolled in a college course where I studied Sportsturf and Horticulture. Everyone on my course worked on a golf course and, similarly, they played it and loved the sport, but my passion was football. Out of sheer luck, my tutor knew David Roberts who was head groundsman

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In a stadium environment, I would have to say the biggest improvement has been the introduction of grow lights. As long as you have the budget and finances, they allow you to have a pitch in January the same as it would be in August, and the surfaces can be consistent all year round; regardless of what you did before grow lights, you could never achieve that before! Going back twenty years, it was commonly accepted if a pitch was returfed during the season.

Also, hybrid pitches have made a huge difference, giving extra stability throughout the year and achieving that consistency. When I first started my career, it would definitely be a challenge to keep goalmouths green throughout the season, and now it's very uncommon in the Premier League (and also the Championship and below, for the most part) to see anything bad.

Expectation levels for both the pitches and the game have risen massively over the years - which covers much more than just sportsturf. Nutrition and the medical side of sport has vastly improved and everything has moved on. *(At this point, we joked about*



We are home to twenty-seven England teams. When the senior squad is here, all our focus and efforts are always on those teams and their requirements

at Southampton FC at the time (1998) so I asked for some work experience, which then turned into an apprenticeship at the club. I couldn't believe my luck!

Did Dave Roberts mentor you through your early career?

Absolutely. I was on release from college for the first two years of my apprenticeship and then was lucky enough to be offered an assistant groundsperson role. Dave was my boss for the first nine years in the industry and I couldn't have asked for a better mentor and tutor.

You have been in the industry for over twenty years. You must have seen some changes in that time?



Recent renovations



players from twenty/thirty years ago having a pint at half time - which would certainly not be allowed today.)

Do the TV pundits and press folk talk common sense when it comes to pitches?

I feel like everyone on TV is a referee, linesman, manager and a groundsperson. If a manager doesn't make a correct or timely substitution everyone is on his back and, likewise, if the surface doesn't quite look its best, everyone is a groundsperson and can do better! This season, there have been a few pitches not looking quite as good as normal because of last year's circumstances; non-renovations due to Covid, smaller teams and money etc. However, the commentators don't take any of these factors into consideration when they are passing judgement on the pitch.

We have often thought about how we could educate pundits. Do you have any ideas?

My deputy at Southampton, John Wright (who has now taken over my role), once had a very interesting chat with Gary Neville after he cut the corner of the pitch. John asked



It's not just a case of replicating what I did there, because you have to work and think differently here, but working practices and my management style will obviously be implemented

him not to do that in future, which led to a natural conversation about what goes into pitch maintenance and I think if more people were challenged over their actions or words, the more they could be educated.

Do you feel you are out of the media spotlight now?

Industry wise, I feel like I might be in it more at St. George's - not that I feel pressure as I don't tend to get excited about much (*he laughs*). I have always been a big believer that you can control the controllables and don't worry about anything that you can't control. St Mary's is obviously on television every time Saints play, so that was available for all the world to see and, ultimately, what you are judged on. But, since I started here last September, this position has definitely



I wasn't academic at school and I didn't enjoy being cooped up inside, so I was determined to find something outdoors

had more exposure; companies want you to use their products, their machinery and want to be affiliated with the FA and the prestige of it being the England training facility.

What would you consider has been the highlight of your career so far?

It would be very difficult to pick out one particular moment but, in 2014, Southampton won the Premier League Grounds Team of the Year (jointly with Arsenal). I have always said that if we were ever going to share an award, it would be with Arsenal - as I consider they have been the front-runners of pitch maintenance for the past twenty-five years. We also won the Championship award in 2008 and League One in 2010 - which have all been highlights.

I also have to mention though, that





I would by no means say that I was bored, however, I was ready for a new challenge. I saw the position advertised at St. George's Park and I consider this to be one of the most prestigious jobs available in our industry

one of my biggest achievements was the development and transformation of the training ground; we rebuilt every pitch and doubled the size of the site. Although it's quite small compared to some, it's a beautiful place and something I'm very proud of.

In addition, I am a huge football fan and love to visit other stadiums such as Anfield, Old Trafford, Wembley etc. and I'm lucky to have been abroad to a fair few clubs, including Juventus and Milan. Standing on the pitches at Santiago Bernabeu and San Siro was very special. My first tournament memory is Italia 90 and the San Siro is iconic to that, so it took me back to being a young lad. I don't take it for granted that Joe Bloggs would ever be able to pay for that experience, so it's unbelievable that this is my job.

Is there anything you would have done differently, professionally and personally?

To be where I am today and do what I'm doing, there is nothing I would say I should/could have done differently. I have never had any regrets about anything and I have

taken every opportunity that has come my way to gain more experience. In 2005, Southampton took on the pitch maintenance at AFC Bournemouth and I worked there for two and half years - which was my first position as head groundsman. This paved the way for when Dave left Southampton and I was primed and ready to take on his role. From 2008, I worked as a casual at Hampshire Cricket Ground for the following three summers to gain experience of cricket pitch maintenance and expand my knowledge to a different sport ... it only took those three summers for me to decide that I wanted to stick with football and I take my hat off to cricket groundsmen - it's intense!

Personally, I have been with my wife for twenty-one years (married for fifteen of those) with two beautiful daughters. She has seen me develop throughout my career, knows everything about what I do and has been amazingly supportive over the years. My youngest daughter (10) is also taking a keen interest in it and regularly comments on the state of pitches - good and bad. The other day, we were watching TV; Watford were playing at home and she





Expectation levels for both the pitches and the game have risen massively over the years - which covers much more than just sportsturf

passed comment on how great the pitch looked ... I immediately messaged Scott Tingley to say he had the seal of approval and he was very grateful.

How would you raise the profile of groundsmanship?

I think we have to get into the school and college age groups. It would be great if industry bodies such as the GMA could be attending career evenings and educating

pupils about what a career in the industry can offer. It's as simple as a stand with an image of Manchester United or Wembley etc. and kids would be over there to see what it is. Once you have their attention, you can explain what we do and hopefully get their interest. It is literally a job for anybody; someone who may not be academic, might be great with their hands and, if you are, you can get into the technical and science side of things.

Thank you for your time Andy.





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Featherstone Rovers

Divoting is key

Formed in 1902 and turned professional in 1921 (making this year their centenary one), Featherstone Rovers Rugby League Club in West Yorkshire boasts a rich and proud history. Their home ground is the 6,954 capacity Millennium Stadium on Post Office Road, constructed in 1904. Lee Williams met with Head Groundsman **Chris Drury**, who first joined the club in 2016 after a chance meeting with the club's chairman in a pub whilst he was taking a break from the industry





Technology across the board has vastly helped groundsmen achieve levels of perfection that you would have only dreamed of years ago; it is a different world. I would hope that people are starting to realise we are not just grass cutters and a lot of science, skill and hard work goes into producing a quality surface



Chris Drury would work the scoreboard at Headingley for Leeds Cricket Club, at thirteen years old to earn some pocket money, where the legendary Keith Boyce was the groundsman. Then, one day, it started to rain heavily during a match and everyone ran indoors, leaving Keith to put the covers on by himself. Not wanting to see him struggle, Chris went and gave him a hand. “He thanked me for helping him out, and then we started talking. He told me that, at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, they have cover staff and would I fancy doing it for the odd day. I snapped his hand off for the opportunity.”

After leaving school, Chris got a job packing shelves at a supermarket, but this was not

the career path he saw himself going down. Then, in 1984, Keith allowed him to work for him for a few months at Headingley, initially covering for another staff member. “I was in the right place at the right time as the staff member never came back, and I was handed the assistant groundsman’s job full-time.”

When Keith brought in Norman Southernwood to look after the rugby field, so he could concentrate on the cricket, Chris found himself floating between both sites. “I found myself pushed more towards the rugby, which I did not mind being a Leeds Rhinos fan. I gained a lot of experience working under Keith and Norman.”

“In 1996, the opportunity arose for me to take a position as assistant groundsman working under John Reynolds at Leeds United’s new training ground at Thorpe Arch. Understanding that John would retire, giving me the chance to become head groundsman, I joined the club. But

John never really retired as it was more than a job for him after serving the club for fifty years. In the meantime, Norman moved to Elland Road, so we ended up working together again.”

Chris worked at Thorpe Arch for eighteen years and, in the end, he did get his chance to become head groundsman of the site for a short time, before leaving in 2014 after struggling with an ankle injury. For twelve months, Chris worked for his wife, a practice manager at a doctor’s surgery, delivering prescriptions and carrying out maintenance work. Then, in 2016, a chance meeting in a pub gave him the opportunity to get back into the sportsturf industry. “I love rugby, so I went to the Midlands pub one Thursday night to watch Leeds Rhinos first away game of the season. The pub was empty but, in the corner, was a guy I know called Ron Hill, who was sat with two of his friends Alan Agar and Mark Campbell, the Chairman of Featherstone Rovers. We got talking about what we do, and when I mentioned I was a groundsman and where I had worked, Marks’s eyes lit up. He then asked me if

I would go and have a look at his pitch, and here I am.”



Head Groundsman Chris Drury



enabling them to erect a 70m all-seater stand behind the goal and a 30m all-seater stand at the side. Also, they extended the pitch length by 20m, so now, from post to post, it measures 100m. The pitch had a steep slope, so what they did was take the top off from the halfway line using the spoil to level out the pitch the best they could with the budgets they had to work with.”

Chris tells me ninety-five percent of the pitch drains well, except for in one corner. Even so, it is scarce a game will be called off for rain. “Unfortunately, the area we are having trouble with is where we enter the pitch with machinery, so it can cause us some problems in the winter. We do have a plan in place to address the issue in the autumn, if not before. We will dig down to find the drains, make sure they are flowing, replace them if required and then sand slit across the area. Since 2016, I have only had one game called off, against Halifax and to be honest, we have played in worse conditions in the past. This pitch takes one hundred plus games a season plus training three times a week, so it doesn’t do too bad considering.”



I mark out every week using a transfer wheel marker. I like a nice crisp straight line; you will rarely catch me marking free hand

Since joining the club, Chris has been amazed by the volunteers’ dedication and work around the ground. Whilst I was at the stadium, what stood out for me is the fact they managed to transport and build two new stands and extend the pitch. Chris explains, “The stands at Scarborough FC were available, so what they did was travel over to Scarborough every day - a 146-mile round trip. Once they got there, they would dismantle the stands and bring them back, ready to be erected. We are not short of land here, so they extended the ground,





I was in the right place at the right time as the staff member never came back, and I was handed the assistant groundsman's job full-time

Two mains water taps at either end of the ground provide the irrigation for the pitch, but this is about to change with the help of the volunteers. "Currently, we can run two hosepipes with Perrot Rollcart travelling sprinklers, and we are fortunate that we have certain people who are prepared to come in and turn it on and off when we have dry spells to keep the pitch going. The volunteers are currently building a tank and pump house under the stand, which

will hopefully give us more water, pressure and ultimately flexibility. I have to give full credit to them; they do like to get their teeth stuck into a project, and they do not want to be beaten."

The club does not own their own frost covers but, with Featherstone and Leeds Rhinos having close links, they have been able to borrow covers when required. "Ryan Golding, as most people know around this area, is always willing to help

local clubs if he can. He has brought us sheets over in the past and even sent his lads over to help. For me, Ryan is the go-to groundsman around here."

In September 2020, the newly formed Wakefield Football Club signed a two-year agreement with Featherstone to play their home games at the Millennium Stadium. I thought Chris would not have been too happy about hosting even more games, but he was completely the opposite, to my



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surprise. “The club has big plans, and they are paying some decent money to play here. They played some league games throughout last autumn and seemed to be happy with the surface, then suddenly, the league was ended due to the coronavirus. They are back in training now and, recently, they played in a Yorkshire Trophy Tournament against Brighouse and attracted a crowd of 691, which was fantastic.”

Chris talks me through his pitch maintenance, but he first points out that he believes divoting the pitch is one of the most essential practices you can carry out after a game to ensure you keep your levels, and I could not agree more. “I cut three times a week using the Dennis G860 with the box on, which was the first piece of equipment I bought when I first arrived. The cutting height for rugby is 32mm, but now, with having the football, I have dropped it down

to 28mm; I feel they may push for me to go lower this season. Once a month, I like to tickle the surface with the verti-cut unit in the G860 to remove any debris that has built up, keeping the surface fresh. In autumn, I will go over the pitch with the Aero-Quick slitter, and I get a contractor in to verti-drain or shockwave twice a year; once in November and again in February or March, depending on usage.”

“I mark out every week using a transfer wheel marker and Grassline Ultra line-marking paint. I like a nice crisp straight line, so I will always use the strings; you will rarely catch me marking free hand. At the minute out there, it looks like noughts and crosses with both the rugby and football markings now on the pitch. I am hopeful the football lines will fade before the next rugby match; otherwise, we will have to invest in some green paint.”



I tend to spend a lot of time walking behind a machine. If I could nip over the pitch with a triple now and again, this would give me more time to carry out other jobs



Winton finishing mower



Recently purchased Solis 26 compact tractor



Tom Wood, Amenity Specialist from Agrovista Amenity, provides Chris with a fertiliser programme at the start of each season which is specific to the club's pitch and is kept within the budget available. "He has been superb from the first time I met him, and we work great together. If I have an issue with the pitch or if I am unsure about a particular product, I can pick the phone up and have a chat with him, and he is happy to help. Our fertiliser budget is not the best, but one advantage, with the pitch being built on

clay, is that it seems to hold on to nutrients a lot longer than most, which helps reduce our costs."

In recent years, Chris has been unable to bring in contractors to carry out renovation works at the end of the season due to budget restraints, but is hopeful this will not be the case this year. "I would like to get the pitch scarified with the Amazone Groundkeeper and take as much dead matter as possible out of the surface, topdress with eighty tonnes of sand and

overseed with a ryegrass mix using a disc seeder. Finally, instead of using the verti-drain, we will Earthquake as I have found, in clay conditions in summer, it does a great job of fracturing the subsurface enabling more water to reach the drains."

When Chris first arrived at the club, he was shocked at the club's lack of machinery to maintain the pitch and what they did have had seen better days. The Chairman told Chris, if you stick with us once we have the finances, we will invest in better machinery.







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I found myself pushed more towards the rugby, which I did not mind being a Leeds Rhinos fan. I gained a lot of experience working under Keith and Norman

"I have to say he has backed me all the way and stuck to his word. The first purchases I made was the Dennis G860 with the verti-cut cassette and a Kubota rotary mower for clean-up after a game. This was soon followed up with a new roller to replace the large old one we had that was falling to bits and a ride on Warrior mower, which does a great job on the training pitch."

"When the football club came in, one of the first questions the club asked me was did I need anything for the pitch. I told them, with the extra wear and compaction the games will cause, I could really do with a slitter to keep the surface open, and I cannot be waiting for people to come in and do it for me. So, with the help of Wakefield FC and the club, we bought a Solis 26 compact tractor, GreenTek Aero Quick slitter and a Winton finishing mower."

Chris is grateful for all the new pieces of machinery, but one piece of kit he would really like to get his hands on is a triple mower with grass boxes. "I tend to spend a lot of time walking behind a machine. If I could nip over the pitch with a triple now and again, this would give me more time to carry out other jobs."

Throughout the many years Chris has been in the sportsturf industry, he has witnessed significant changes in all aspects of the job. "We are in a lot better place than when I first started my career. I can remember standing on scaffold planks in February/March, hand forking, and that is all you could do. Technology across the board has vastly helped groundsmen achieve levels of perfection that you would have only dreamed of years ago; it is a different world. Lots of clubs around the country, at this moment in time, will be Koroing off their pitches and starting from scratch; this piece of machinery has helped transform the way we carry out renovations if you have the budget available. The advancements in fertiliser technology, grass seed, hybrid pitches and lighting rigs have helped the industry shine in recent years. I would hope that people are starting to realise we are not just grass cutters and a lot of science, skill and hard work goes into producing a quality surface."



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Kidsgrove Athletic FC

Time please

Kidsgrove Athletic FC in Staffordshire currently play in the Northern Premier League Division One West. The club's award-winning groundsman/director is **Ian Cooper** of Coopers Pitch Care. Taking a well-earned break (at the pub he owns with the Chairman of Kidsgrove FC), Lee Williams met up with Ian to discuss how he juggles his time and how he built up his business, before moving on to look at the ground



Ian Cooper still likes to describe himself as a groundsman first and foremost, even though much of his time can be taken up working on many other projects with the contracts side of the business. His love for the sportsturf industry started at the age of seven when he would follow his dad around with a child's mower at Hanley Town FC - where his dad was a volunteer groundsman and on the committee. "My dad would cut the pitch with a Ransomes hand crank mower. I got a real buzz when I followed him and I would also help put the divots back; more than likely, I was probably doing his head in, as it would take him twice as long to do the job."

For over twenty years, Ian carried out voluntary work at Hanley Town FC. He subsequently became a player, the manager and even the secretary, whilst still tending to the pitch in his spare time and putting endless hours in. When his dad was made redundant from Michelin Tyres, they saw the perfect opportunity to set up a groundcare business together. "My dad got another job at first working in a warehouse which he hated and I was fed up with working for NTL (now Virgin Media), so I suggested going into business together, which we did in 2004. We started out doing gardens and nursing homes and then a pitch maintenance contract became available



at Northwood Stadium, where my best mate was the manager. The groundsman who worked for the council let him down before a big event, so he asked me to come in and carry out the work. When the manager came in, he said the council had done a great job this week and that is how we got our first contract."

"We had no actual budget to work with at Northwood and the pitch we inherited was shocking. So, there was no money for renovations, topdressing or fertiliser applications. If I'm being honest, we made our own feed from nettles we brewed in the boiler house, which sent an unpleasant smell throughout the building. Once we



were happy, we would drain it using a filter and spray it onto the pitch; it worked a treat. The colour we got was unbelievable, but I wouldn't recommend doing it as it stung badly."

Word started to get around about how good the pitch was playing and looking; it went from the worst pitch in the city to having Port Vale Academy play their games there (which they still do today). "Other clubs started to contact me; one of them being Mick Fitzjohn, the Chairman of Kidsgrove Athletic FC. He kept badgering me to go up to Kidsgrove, but I told him I wasn't really bothered about being associated with a club on a volunteer basis, as I had just given up

Hanley Town; it had become a job rather than a hobby. As part of my work, I also had the maintenance contract at Abbey United's pitch and Kidsgrove played them in a friendly. Whilst at the club, I bumped into the Kidsgrove manager Pete Ward (who I knew from my young Hanley Town days) and their chairman and long term friend, Mick Fitzjohn who told me they had a big FA Cup match against Boston at home and they would be grateful if I prepare the pitch for them."

"I thought to myself that they had no chance of winning that game, so I told Mick and Wardy that I would do the pitch for free until they got knocked out of the competition; the deal was done and I fully

//

Unfortunately, with not knowing what was going on with the pandemic and the budget, it will be the first year we are unable to carry out a decent renovation



expected to be there for one match. They got through and made it to the fourth qualifying round, so I ended up there for a few months and then I decided to see the season out.”

At the end of that season, Mick stepped down as Chairman to focus on business and Wardy moved to Leek Town FC, where again he was asked to work miracles on their pitch. “The pitch was shocking - a good summer pitch, but come October it was horrendous, with no drainage sitting below the water table. It was so bad that, even though they were the best side, they probably should have been kicked out of the league for the state of it. After every game, myself and my dad (who was semi-retired by then) would apply five tonnes of sand in some areas of the pitch that were just mud. We tried all kinds of aeration equipment to help the drainage but, literally, nothing helped. I will never forget when we hosted both Scarborough and Market Drayton over Christmas (within the space of two days); how we managed to play those games I will

never know? Just as I left to come back to Kidsgrove (with Mick and I as Director and part owner), they got a grant and replaced the pitch.”

Ian admits it can be difficult juggling his time between the club, which is his passion, the maintenance contracts and the pub - which him and his wife Janet opened in April with Mick Fitzjohn and his wife Donna. He also tells me it has become much more difficult around the area of Stoke on Trent to make the business work, as there is very little money around and you are constantly being undercut. “In the past, we could charge about £400 to Verti-Drain or Shockwave a pitch, but now people are doing it for around £200. The cost of the machinery and tines are not cheap and it’s hard to cover expenses at those prices. Within an hour, these companies have undertaken the cheap equivalent of deep aeration - where it will take me over four hours to do it properly, reaching depths of ten inches.”

Ian enlisted the help of Chris Peat two



We have never asked the council for anything and it would be great if we could replace it or at least Koro it off and install a proper drainage system





Our efforts paid off as, two years ago, we got to the final of the Pitch of the Year for the Northern Premier Division. It was an outstanding achievement

years ago, who is a life long fan of Kidsgrove Athletic and would often volunteer to work on the pitch on matchdays. "Since working with me on the pitch, he has become obsessed with groundsmanship, which I told him would happen."

We turned our attention to Kidsgrove, which was formed in December 1952. The team, nicknamed "The Grove", play their home games at Hollinwood Road, Clough Hall. Ian has tended to the pitch for the last

seven years and dedicates a lot of his time and own money. I started by asking him how the pitch is constructed? "At the back of one goal is an old pit face, so basically, it is all pit waste underneath the pitch. It is absolutely awful and there are no visible drains underneath, although we did find a drain last summer when we were working on a bad area. Previously, someone had put in an excellent significant drain, but then covered it up with debris so it wouldn't work. Having

discovered it, we knew we had to make the most of it, so we dug out the debris, replaced it with pea gravel and topped it off with sand. The pitch is on a natural slope which helps it dry out after heavy rainfall."

"In 2015, I brought in Greener Grounds from Liverpool with their Air2G2 to help alleviate some of the compaction deep in the profile. It did a fantastic job and allowed the water to pass through the pitch much quicker. Since then, I have gone over with



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Getting Personal

Ian Cooper - he loves football and boxing ... but not Liverpool FC!

Who are you? Ian Cooper, forty-seven from Stoke on Trent. Vice Chairman and groundsman at Kidsgrove Athletic FC ... and pub owner.

Family status. Married to Janet for seven years.

Who's your hero and why?

When he was alive, my dad was hard-working and straight talking, even though I would cringe at what he said sometimes.

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

Getting to the Nationals at St. George's Park for work on a council-run pitch - with zero budget.

If your younger self saw you now, what would he think? OMG ... when did you eat yourself?

Which famous people wind you up?

Graeme Souness. In fact, any ex Liverpool player who is a pundit.

What job would you love, other than your own?

CEO or owner of a Premier League Football Club.

What is your favourite film? Shawshank Redemption.

What scares you? Snakes fascinate me, but scare me at the same time.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? Non-league Nibbles with Jonny Vegas.

What is your favourite sport? Football, but I love watching boxing.

What would you cast into Room 101? Liverpool FC.

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



Do you have a lifetime ambition? Not really - just be happy and enjoy life. Life is too short, so enjoy it!

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Roy Keane, Alex Ferguson and Mike Tyson.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? Keep trying. If it doesn't happen, make it happen.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Hot Fuss - The Killers, Glory Days - Little Mix and Yours Truly Angry Mob - Kaiser Chiefs.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? At minus 10 with the pitch white over - "what's it like?"

What's your favourite piece of kit? The Dennis Premier ... it's old but gold.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Fat, loyal and fun.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsperson? Get your qualifications and ask questions.

What talent would you like to have? To play either the drums or the guitar.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Shared/ fan ownership of football clubs.



the Verti-Drain and Earthquake machines as much as possible."

Ian tells me all the work he had previously carried out on the pitch had been undone when he went back and the pitch resembled a cabbage patch. "I had worked hard on removing the weeds and I would cut using a cylinder mower as often as possible, to help encourage the ryegrass sward to fill in. I heard the new chairman would cut with a Flymo and never collect the grass, which encouraged the weeds to come back."

"It was a matter of getting back to basics. I sprayed the weeds with a selective to kill them off, applied one hundred tonnes of sand, verti-drained, overseeded and applied a pre-seed fertiliser. Then followed the

most straightforward maintenance requirements, alongside a structured verti-drain programme. Our efforts paid off as, two years ago, we got to the final of the Pitch of the Year for the Northern Premier Division, which Trafford won. It was an outstanding achievement, considering the pitch has no real drainage system to speak of and we certainly don't have all the kit we need; most of it is mine."

This year, Covid-19 has proved to be a challenge for both Ian and the club, especially when it comes to the renovation and maintenance of the pitch. "Unfortunately, with not knowing what was going on with the pandemic and the budget, it will be the first year we are unable to carry out a decent renovation.





It is demanding fitting all the work in that needs to be done. We can have up to four games a week being played on the pitch; the season before last, we had a total of eighty-eight home games

I now have both a groundsman's hat on as well as a director's hat; I want eighty-tonne of sand and everything else that comes with it, but my director's head says we have bills to pay. Therefore, all I can do is concentrate on getting air into the pitch and let nature do the rest."

Ian is hopeful that, throughout the remainder of this year, football will be played

at all levels without any disturbances and he will be able to welcome crowds back into the stadium. He told me he could not wait to get back to the normality of maintaining and preparing the pitch for the players each week, even though it's hard work at times. "We cut the pitch three times a week with an old Dennis Premier, which is on its last legs and we are looking to replace it this

year. During summer, the height of the cut is 25mm and then, in winter, I lift it to 28mm to help protect the turf. Generally, by Friday, I have the pitch all prepped and ready to go for the game on a Saturday; if the weather is nice we may give it a cut in the morning. After the game, if we have the time; we will give it a brush, then use the rotaries to pick up the debris and divot. This brings us back



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Having discovered it, we knew we had to make the most of it, so we dug out the debris, replaced it with pea gravel and topped it off with sand

to square one, ready for the game on a Sunday. It is demanding fitting all the work in that needs to be done on this pitch as well as doing my day job. We can have up to four games a week being played on the pitch; the season before last, we had a total of eighty-eight home games.”

Andy Jackson, the Grounds Manager at Stoke City, will visit the ground once or twice a year to advise Ian on ways to improve the playing surface. “He will recommend what fertilisers we should be using within the budget I have available. We always apply a conventional granular fertiliser in both the winter and summer. Then, I will bring in Pete Jones of P2 Services

to spray a liquid feed alongside ICL’s PrimoMaxx to help tiller out the turf and reduce the amount of growth, which helps reduce the amount of time we need to cut the pitch. Andy has started to use more organic-based fertilisers at Stoke and he has advised that I should consider doing the same, but when I look at the price, it is

not something I can afford to do - as much as I would like to give it a go. Steve Speed from Port Vale is also always only a phone call away and his advice and knowledge is invaluable.”

The local council has just been handed a £16.9m regeneration boost. Amongst other projects, the Kidsgrove’s

Town Deal will be used to refurbish the town’s mothballed sports centre.

Ian hopes to speak to the local councillor soon to see if funds will be available to help the club. “I would hope that, as the local football club and the work we do with the local community, they could help us replace our floodlights and improve the pitch. We have never asked the council for anything and it would be great if we could replace it or at least Koro it off and install a proper drainage system ... fingers crossed.”



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The University of Leeds

The Wright Stuff

University grounds programmes are rarely more diverse than those at Leeds, where sustainability issues assume top priority. Greg Rhodes met with Grounds and Gardens Team Leader **James Wright** to discover just what falls under his remit, and it's an extensive list!



The University of Leeds enjoys expansive sports provision for its 35,000-40,000 student population and the local community. It owns more than 450 hectares, including the 10+ hectare city centre main campus and 40 hectares devoted to sport - on campus and at two sportsgrounds - plus a farm at brewing town Tadcaster.

One of Britain's traditional 'red brick' universities, Leeds is evolving into an educational setting committed to biodiverse, sustainable strategies for its groundcare, gardening and landscaping practices.

Leeds boasts one of the UK's largest single site campuses. A smoking-free zone, it has developed over the last ten years or so to include multi-million pound landscaping schemes that present a welcoming city centre setting for home and overseas students.

Part of a significant investment in sports facilities by the university over the last ten years, the Edge sports centre houses an eight-lane 25m pool, sports hall, climbing wall and squash courts, claiming to run the largest fitness suite of any UK university.

Whilst the campus is home to some outdoor sporting provision, the vast majority sits on two sites. Three miles north is Sports Park Weetwood, where international teams, including Scottish rugby's, train, and the university Gryphons teams, social leagues, and the local community play.

Weetwood's 15-strip cricket square hosts the Leeds/Bradford MCCU cricket team and the Yorkshire Cricket Club Academy junior and 2nd X1 sides. The site is also recognised as a junior regional performance centre for hockey.

The Weetwood facilities comprise: County standard cricket pitches, a FIFA quality and World 22, 3G rubber crumb pitch, Two Lano international standard water-based hockey pitches, a new 3G training area with 3 x 6-a-side pitches, a world class rugby pitch regularly hosting international and professional teams and two high-class football pitches used regularly for professional football team training.

Next door to Weetwood is Bodington Playing Fields ('Bod'), the second main sporting hub and home to the Brownlee Centre, named after Olympic medal-winning triathletes Alistair and Jonny Brownlee, two of the university's most celebrated alumni.

The UK's first purpose-built triathlon training centre, it sits alongside a one-mile cycle circuit, one of the longest in the country.

The university created the high-end facilities to stage student, staff and community football and rugby - not forgetting Ultimate Frisbee competitions. FC Halifax Town train there on what is a premium quality surface.

Wide remit: Grounds and Gardens Team Leader James Wright oversees management and maintenance of the university's green



I was interviewed on BBC Radio York in August, with Jason Booth and Geoff Webb, as well as BBC Look North's Back Into Play report, filmed at Dunnington



estate. His sprawling remit includes sportsground maintenance, managing the university's extensive tree stock, gritting and snow clearing, maintaining campus landscaping and internal floral planters and decorations (also supplying the latter for events), removals and general transport, drains and gully clearing, external building maintenance at University Farms, Cloth Hall Court, Sports Ground and Selside.

He began his 24-year career volunteering at Dunnington Cricket Club before taking an HND in Turfgrass Science and gaining his BASIS certificate in Crop Protection (Amenity Horticulture).

James spent several years working at golf courses in the US and Spain before taking up the Golf Superintendent's post at Galway Bay GC, Ireland, returning to England to "rebuild the journey".

This is his fourth year in the post at Leeds and, as a manager committed to making a difference to the future of grounds care in the UK, he has joined the board of the Grounds

Management Association, after becoming a GMA member nearly ten years ago.

"Being on the board helps my personal development, skills set and allows me to link with top people of the sector such as Neil Stubble and Dave Roberts," he says, "with whom I spent twenty to thirty minutes on the phone just recently, discussing the challenges of the sector. And it can also help develop your team."

James played his part in attracting the Association's AGM to Weetwood two years ago, and he promotes the cause of grass culture as a member of its Natural Turf Improvement Programme.

There's media work too. "I was interviewed on BBC Radio York in August, with Jason Booth and Geoff Webb, as well as BBC Look North's Back Into Play report, filmed at Dunnington," he reports.

Such activity is not about bigging up his own status, he stresses, but helping attract fresh blood. "If ten new recruits enter the sector, the effort has been worth it. We have





a host of ageing volunteers out there and they can only go on for so long.”

High standards: James links with the divisional heads of sport to tune pitch schedules and requirements. “Ultimately, we are a service provider,” he says, “so we need to deliver what students, staff, local leagues and elite teams require.”

He is busy powering forward with the university’s green agenda. All handtools on campus are battery powered except Stihl BR600 blowers, he explains.

“We no longer have any petrol 2-strokes on the sportsgrounds and have just purchased the university’s first electric mower.”

The maintenance van fleet is halfway to becoming all electric. “I’m mindful of the way forward but it may need more money to achieve the goals,” he adds

Drainage issues: The boulder clay native soil delivers “zero infiltration rate”, states James, so drainage and aeration is critical.

“Scarifying, vertidrainage, vertiquaking is undertaken regularly and we apply 25mm to 50mm MM45 medium fine sports sand [supplied by North Lincolnshire Aggregates] above the native substrate, amounting to 500 tonne at Bodington and 220 tonne at Weetwood and a £25,000 outlay.”

“Slightly acidic, it helps fertility uptake,” James explains. “We check particle size annually to ensure it’s compatible with what we’ve planned.”

“By late November through to February or March, we could suffer zero infiltration,” James continues.

“The wet January, then a prolonged dry period, proved a real challenge for the team. Staging the wrong fixture on the wrong day can take a pitch out for up to six weeks. Clearly an untenable position, in normal times. That said, the pitches are in a far better state than ten years ago, but they are hungry,” adds James.

Keeping communication channels open with those running the sporting programme is a key strand of James’s role, he believes. “By keeping the operations manager and their team informed about pitch conditions is one way to help educate them about the impact that playing in adverse conditions can have on the maintenance programme.”

“The operations manager understands it from our perspective, and taking him to Saltex to hear a couple of seminars on winter games training and managing synthetic pitches was a good decision.”

“After the wettest winter on record and a spate of cancelled fixtures - then complaints

from students - he sees things from our position more fully.”

In the wider scheme, James reports to both the head of sport and assistant as well as the operations manager - each with a brief to monitor student health and wellbeing, which the grounds team function feeds into.

“I don’t hesitate to pick up the phone to keep them updated so they can report on customer use to the senior leadership team,” he states.

Rethinking landscape: James’ remit extends to landscaping work on the city centre campus. “I work with the Sustainability Service team to help them reach their 2025 targets. Under their Living Land project, we’re planting more perennials and hedgerows to create wildlife corridors for invertebrates.”

“The university called in landscape architects to discuss the scheme, which involved removing metal fencing and planting hawthorn, yew and hedgerow flowers. The result is a big improvement that helps pollinating insects and boosts biodiversity.”

This is all part of developing biodiversity on campus - and there’s another major benefit. “A good external estate helps

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The university called in landscape architects to discuss the scheme, which involved removing metal fencing and planting hawthorn, yew and hedgerow flowers



student health and wellbeing,” states James, particularly important when student populations across Britain are increasingly confined on site.

“It’s all about joining the dots,” adds James, “and promoting habitat rather than pure amenity.” The traditional lawns and bedding still serve a purpose though for official events such as graduation ceremonies, he says.

The university has conducted research on the balance and benefits of soft and hard landscaping. “Brutal, hard landscapes encourage surface water runoff that can lead to flooding,” James explains, “whereas soft landscaping offers a better environment for pollinators and helps improve carbon capture.”

The 1,300 trees on campus, including specimens with tree preservation orders on them - one, a giant redwood gifted by the Chinese. They are surveyed regularly to help ensure optimal health and preserve a valuable built realm benefit.

Cycle routes through the main campus fall under the university’s programme of

sustainable travel targets and seem particularly relevant in the fallout from Covid-19 public transport strictures. Accordingly, Leeds City Council has provided facilities such as showers, geared to greater green travel.

Team diversity: Diversity issues of another kind can raise barriers for James, whose mission is to build a balanced team, James reports. “Diversity needs to improve across groundcare and the industry doesn’t do itself any favours. You can’t turn people down because you don’t have an appropriate toilet.”

The current team of thirty-two are split into five smaller groups, based across the university estate, working from two sheds at Weetwood and one on campus.

Five section heads report directly to James monthly to deliver their team updates. Head Groundsperson David Thackray is based at Weetwood, running four staff. Head Gardener Edward Hicken manages a team of three off campus, with counterpart Sean Craven running fourteen staff on campus.

Maintenance Co-ordinator Paul Taras and

four staff handle duties such as pressure washing, lifting, shifting and sanitising, with Zonal Maintenance Manager Steve Molloy completing the quintet managing the buildings.

The entire team then meet annually in winter around January or February.

James’ modus operandi is to hand responsibility to those working more on the ground than he does, given his own extremely diverse role overseeing health and safety, human resourcing and infrastructure planning.

“It must be more than a year since I rode on a mower,” he declares. “I’m trying to get my team to specify the machinery and equipment we need, as I did when I was based at Weetwood a few years ago.”

“The team knows what it needs as they use the kit day to day. I believe it’s better for them to decide what they want and take some ownership of that process.”

“We have networks in place regarding staff,” he continues. “I do my best as a good manager to support them and help them progress, using my work contacts when



The team knows what it needs as they use the kit day to day. I believe it’s better for them to decide what they want and take some ownership of that process





Increasing sickness and absenteeism is the first trigger point that something isn't right. That's when I work with HR support with a view to modify working hours and provide support to the employee

possible." To that end, one of the head gardeners met the York Racecourse team to learn ways to develop new skills.

James was seeking to bolster the team when we spoke. A skilled gardener, Level 2 qualified, arboricultural/horticultural groundsperson and two assistant gardeners were on his radar.

Team diversity and inclusivity encourage a strong dynamic and interaction, which also create mutual respect, he adds.

Meanwhile, Sam Robinson arrived three

years ago and has completed his apprenticeship with a Level 2 Horticulture qualification from Myerscough College. "He's now grounds assistant but is keen to develop his knowledge base," James explains.

The career path available at Leeds allows him to aspire to head gardener or groundsperson, then to James's level, which includes additional responsibilities such as health and safety training.

Apprentice Adam Gallagher, who started

on site last year, has completed his first year of a Level 2 in Sports Turf. "He's usually based at Sports Park Weetwood, although I swap team members between sites when necessary - when someone's off sick for example."

Is there an age barrier to working within the team? "Well everyone is different," says James, "but the work is very physical. Increasing sickness and absenteeism is the first trigger point that something isn't right. That's when I work with HR support and

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We were in a good place pre-Covid. Now it's about mitigation budgets and risk adversity to protect the budgets we have

engage with the trade union with a view to modify working hours and provide support to the employee."

"The university is a good employer and looks after its workforce, running occupational health and counselling teams for staff as well as a robust HR policy."

The recruitment process typically takes four to six weeks and attracts up to forty inquiries, James explains - "usually plenty of low-quality response to sift out". Sportsground staff are qualified to Level 2 in Sports Turf or equivalent, while gardeners hold Level 2 in Horticulture.

"Our last grounds/gardens assistant came on board last January after we received thirty applications, reduced to eight for interview," he recalls.

The head of gardens position attracted fewer than ten applicants – "an easier recruitment process with approval from the top given in November 2019."

Maintaining team numbers is crucial to the big picture of provision. "The university understands how vitally important the strategy for its external estate is going forward as people are spending more time outside."

Involved in higher-level estate meetings,



James understands the strategic roadmap for the university. "We are aware of where it wants to go so can plan sporting provision accordingly," he says. "It's about focusing cash in the right areas."

If any issues arise, James knows who to call on. "I don't have a deputy as I go to one of the section heads when needed, so if it's sportsground-related, for example, I speak to the head groundsperson."

Covid and beyond: When we spoke, James was busy preparing signage across the estate, ready for the students' return. The impact of Covid on the university was huge of course, and James had to respond in a host of ways as lockdown came and went.

The pandemic brought one or two blessings in disguise though. Empty sports buildings were put to other uses. "We have NHS property on site. One sports hall functioned as a Covid testing centre and, from March 2020, we stored NHS critical care equipment. Now vaccine research is underway," James explains.

"We were in a good place pre-Covid," he recalls. "Now it's about mitigation budgets and risk adversity to protect the budgets we have."

"Freshers week in late September was

eerily quiet and it's been a strange first eighteen months for head gardener Sean Craven.

"Team members normally would be driving or working in pairs but social distancing meant everyone working on their own, making monitoring that much more difficult, although every team member has a business phone."

"The resource is spread more thinly and there's a bigger area to cover. You could have driven an artichoke through the campus, it was that quiet."

James comes on site three days a week to mostly handle paperwork - reports, updates and the like, he says.

Many in Britain look set to work permanently from home as employers rethink established office-based practices. "Remote homeworking is fine," says James "but most team members cannot do that for obvious reasons, but my meetings are usually done using Microsoft Teams which, because of the format, means you have to really focus on the screen all the time."

His daily zoom time for maintenance meetings is a little less rigorous that way, James adds. "Staring at a screen for twelve hours a day, you need to take a break."



We are living in a totally different world now and it's a challenge. At senior level, the university will be thinking how they can make better use of all the building space created with home working





“We are living in a totally different world now and it’s a challenge. At senior level, the university will be thinking how they can make better use of all the building space created with home working.”

“Hot desking is certainly one way forward. Do academics need an office to themselves any more if they work from home? There’s a conversation to be had about space utilisation - and a big change post-Covid.”

Does he see an adapted future involving less human resourcing on site? “The big push comes from the agri sector. Harper Adams University’s autonomous farming project is fascinating. We have demos planned for GPS-operated linemarking machines and I can see a future involving robotic turf mowing.”

But technology only goes so far, he believes. “We’re looking at a hybrid model. A mixed model of how we deliver services.”

That model will embrace the university’s sustainability values throughout the estate, James says. More tree planting at Weetwood and Bodington, a hedgehog-friendly campus and sustainable gardens are all part of that plan.

Environmentally, big plans are afoot. “The academics are testing natural flood

management schemes and one factor in these is the role trees play. A total of 4,000 of them are set to go in the ground, also part and parcel of carbon sequestration targets involving tree values.”

Arb research at the farm, with its poplar plantations, stretches back twenty years. “We were looking at agriforestry,” says James, “but that has stopped and pig breeding, husbandry and research is underway now. The grounds maintenance is straightforward - it’s the other aspects that need studying.”

White gardens and plans to pull nitrates from the water all figure in the university’s mission to be net carbon neutral by 2030. “The Living Lab work helps inform our operational decisions,” he concludes.

Sporting strategy: His conversations with senior management, like the university’s director of estates, include the vision for ongoing maintenance, which is clearly extensive.

“They know our capabilities,” says James, “and we are well respected for what we do.” - with due cause as they reached the GMA awards’ University/College Team of the Year finals in 2017, and the sustainability awards finals the same year.

The sport played on the surfaces across the estate is varied and demanding. Two hockey and three grass pitches have been resurfaced in the last couple of years. A Lano Sports pitch is due to stage international action later this year, while a rugby pitch is used by England women’s rugby league squad to train on for this year’s World Cup. Originally laid in 1930, the pitch benefits from herringbone drainage.

The team maintains the cricket ground to ECB guidance, says James, receiving controlled release pre-season feed in March.

Outdoor sports provision on the main campus is largely taken up by the 5-a-side 3G pitch. Replacing an existing synthetic surface next to the sports hall, the Desso DMX surface, installed three years ago, matches the specification of its full-size counterpart fitted around the same time at Weetwood.

Small it may be, but the surface is the scene of intense activity. “Open from 9.00am until dark, the pitch is hammered all year round,” says James. “We brush regularly and ‘Verti-Air’ annually in September before rain is due.”

Given the controversy over synthetics, does James see a place for them long term?

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“Yes, they bring key benefits to sports provision. They are playable in pretty much all weathers, fit really well our mix of provision and are great for training. All we can do as an industry is be best-informed as best we can.”

Not everything is managed and maintained in-house. James brings in the same external contractor who tends Leeds Rhinos’ ground to service some of the maintenance needs. PSD Agronomy provides “independent oversight” on soil and pitch condition and quality.

Next phase: The next phase of sporting investment will see three full-size 3G pitches going down, but such facilities are coming under ever greater scrutiny,” James reports. “The university is considering the whole-life costing of projects like these, applying

sustainability tracking to assess the carbon footprint. More and more of this is coming in, with the Sustainability Service challenging the project manager to justify the investment according to their criteria.”

Some building responsibilities fall to James, who is briefed on the university project team’s commitment to renewable sources and construction methods such as Passivhaus, utilising BREEAM top specification materials.

He meets Sean Craven to discuss the main campus realm, and Ed Hicken regarding peripheral grounds such as the Tadcaster farm. “That may take up two or three hours a month, which will include any health and safety updates or issues,” he says.

With so much going on, work/life balance

is critical, James explains. “Last year, we worked flat out with no holiday until July. I enjoy getting away for a break with the family and love sitting on the clifftops at Filey with a cold cider, taking in the view.”

Reflecting on his career to date, he notes. “Looking back, would I have ever dreamt that I’d be studying tender documents for drainage, buildings maintenance and farming practice? Probably not.”



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Andy Fogarty

A full trophy cabinet

Andy Fogarty, Head Groundsman at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, has a trophy cabinet full of accolades including ECB 'Groundsman of the Year' four times; runner-up four times; runner-up six times for his one-day pitches, plus numerous commendations. Lee Williams spoke to him about his twenty-six years at the club and The Hundred concept to be launched this summer

What sports were you involved with in your younger days - did you play cricket?

I have always had an interest in cricket, but only played the game a bit at school in the summertime ... I mostly enjoyed playing football. I like to play five-a-side with some of my friends on Thursday evenings when I can. I have always been reasonably good at sports like athletics, rugby, cricket and football.

How did you become a groundsman?

Whilst at school, I was dating a girl who happened to live next door to Cedric Rhodes - the chairman at Lancashire County Cricket Club at that time and I used to bump into him regularly. Upon leaving school, Cedric mentioned there was a part-time

groundstaff position available at Old Trafford and he wondered if I wanted to apply for it ... which I did. A year later, in 1982, they offered me a full-time position as an assistant groundsman. In 1996, my predecessor Keith Boyce was retiring, so the club advertised his job. I applied and was lucky enough to get the position.

What would you consider has been the highlight of your career so far?

There are too many to mention really, but it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to prepare International Test and One Day International pitches for the best players in the world. I have seen many memorable games played here at Headingley, but the one that stands out for me is the heroics of Ben Stokes against Australia in the 2019 Ashes. Stokes finished unbeaten on 135 as



England recorded their highest successful chase in one of the most remarkable finishes in Test cricket ... keeping the Ashes series alive against all odds. I have been involved with three World Cups, and I'm looking forward to the new competitions coming up, which should provide some highlights.

What are additional pressures put on your work by being in the media spotlight?

There is always pressure and stresses to deal with when preparing pitches for International cricket especially. The cricketing world is focused on your ground and how a wicket is set up, as it can help determine who wins the game. There are many factors to consider when prepping, like the amount of rolling, drying and how much grass is left on the pitch. The two teams have to play on the same surface,



The best part of my job is working on days like today with beautiful sunshine - I get to look out at a cricket ground that looks lovely. I am not a desk jockey; I like to get out there and get on with the job with the lads

but you will always get someone who is disappointed and, perhaps, they may blame the pitch.

What relationship do you have with the players?

I would like to think I have a good relationship with players. I do not get many bad words said about me, or disappointed bowlers and batsman. I believe they enjoy training and playing here and the pitches suit them, with plenty of pace for the bowlers and plenty of runs for the batsmen. I do get feedback from the players, coaching staff and the captains especially. After every game, they have a bit of a debrief and, more often than not, I'm told it was a great surface.

Is there one player that has made an impact on you?

There have been quite a few, but the guy that stands out is Darren Lehmann who played for Yorkshire from 1997 to 2006; he was our overseas player and he was a great character to have around the club.

What is the most difficult problem you have had to deal with at Headingley?

The new stand brings its problems with shade in the wintertime; it practically covers the whole of the cricket square. It has also affected the outfield down that end which tends to be slightly damper than it used to be before the stand was developed. We have started to investigate the option of grow lights to help alleviate the problems with shade. Ryan Golding, Head Groundsman at our neighbours Leeds Rhinos, has said he has a set of lights that we can trial. In winter, it is something I am seriously thinking about doing. Nine or ten years ago, we had the outfield relaid and we had some problems with that, but it has settled down a lot now.

How far ahead do you plan pitch preparations, or is it just part of your normal routine?

Our pitch planning starts in February when we get the fixture schedule for the oncoming season, which begins at the end of March/ start of April. Each fixture is given its own



pitch right the way through the season and the preparation of each pitch can take between two and three weeks. We have thirteen first-class pitches and we have to play International, Championship, Twenty20, Ladies' cricket and The Hundred, so we are playing on each pitch at least twice, even three times a season. It is essential for us, as soon as a game is finished, to get that pitch flooded down and renovated as quick as we can - because we know we will be playing on it again in eight weeks' time. It is an ongoing process, along with the outdoor practice nets and our other outdoor facilities.

Leeds Rhinos are your very immediate neighbours. Do you share equipment with them, or are both autonomous?

Yes, we do. I have a great relationship with Ryan and, on many occasions, we have helped each other out.

Do the groundsmen at each venue pitch in on match days?

No, we don't; obviously, Ryan has his own staff and I have mine. It is different now they

are both summer sports with the Super League and cricket, so it is difficult for us to go over there. It might have been different when the rugby league season was in the winter.

Do the TV pundits and press folk talk common sense?

Yes, of course they do. They will tell you straight if they see a problem with the pitch and praise you if they think it is a great pitch. You have got to listen to what they say; being ex-cricketers, they have been out there and played the sport. They know how the pitch has played, but they do not see how we have prepared them. We keep to a simple system that always seems to work for us, so it is not very often our pitches are criticised by the media.

You'll soon be celebrating twenty-six years as Head Groundsman at one of the world's premier Test cricket grounds. What changes have you seen in that time?

The stadium has changed entirely from when I first started. It was dilapidated



You have to keep everybody informed, including broadcasters and the spectators, so that everyone has a good idea of what to expect



Andy likes to get stuck in with the lads



and needed a lot of work and money spending on it, which we have done. The playing surfaces and the outfield have both changed. Everything has improved about the place, which is a good thing.

Since you became head groundsman, you have witnessed additional fixtures, such as Twenty20. Now 'The Hundred' launches this year in both men's and women's cricket. What additional pressures does that put on you and your team to host

these additional games?

The Hundred is a new competition - which I hope helps promotes cricket and the English game. There are a lot of big names coming in so it will be high profile. It is being screened on the BBC as well as Sky Sports so it will be available to everybody. It was supposed to start last year, but was delayed due to Covid-19 and I really hope we are able to welcome the crowds back for it. Since Twenty20 was introduced in 2003, it

has helped draw in the crowds and families. It has been more entertaining for those who may not be interested in Test cricket and the players love to play it.

Will pitches for this new tournament be prepared differently? For example, more batter friendly to aid the remit for exciting, spectacular cricket?

I think all one-day pitches are prepared the same really; you want it to be as flat as

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I might find something different to do or, if I am lucky, I may get a chance to do something a little bit different with the club. Or, perhaps doing the same sort of thing but not be in charge

possible so the ball is not doing as much. You want the batsman to score plenty of runs - as that is what the spectators want to watch. So, there is no real difference in our approach to preparing the pitch.

As the most northerly ground in the tournament, do you expect the weather to play its part and have you been given any instructions to allow play to continue in inclement weather, more so than the more traditional formats?

Weather-wise, that is down to the umpires to decide if they keep them on the pitch if it starts to rain. As soon as they decide to pull the players off, it is down to us to get the covers on the wicket as fast as possible. Through Twenty20 games, it can be raining lightly and the umpires have kept them out there, but as it gets heavier they will come off. I will give the umpires the weather forecast in the morning and we are constantly looking at the weather radar - so we know when the rain is coming, how much it is going to drop and when it will go. All that information is fed back to the umpires, so they have a good idea of what

to expect on the day of the game. If they must come off for heavy rain, we will look at the forecast and, if it is predicted to continue for another four to five hours, they will stay around and keep an eye on it and decide later on in the day. You have to keep everybody informed, including broadcasters and the spectators, so that everyone has a good idea of what to expect.

How did the Covid-19 restrictions affect you and your team?

I have a team of eight, so four of them were put on furlough, with the other four of us having to look after Headingley, the training ground and another cricket ground in Bradford. We basically just did our best to maintain the pitches and the outfield simultaneously; we had to get the practice facilities ready for when the players came back. Our season was cut short and we managed to play three or four Championship games and a Twenty20 competition. We are now back to full strength and our season (April) has already started; we have had four friendly games and one championship match.



Left to right: Peter Taylor, Vee Veikalas, Andy Fogarty and Gareth Millthorpe



There is always pressure and stresses to deal with when preparing pitches, for International cricket especially

What is the best part of your job?

Working on days like today with beautiful sunshine and I get to look out at a cricket ground that looks lovely. I enjoy working outdoors preparing the wickets. I am not a desk jockey; I like to get out there and get on with the job with the lads.

And the worst?

Sometimes we can get some bad weather which is not very nice. Also, some of the pressure you are put under and the hours of work.

What machinery developments have helped you the most?

Many different things have developed from cutting units, triples, rollers and the blotters that we use to suck up the water. When I first started, we did not have any equipment like that; it has changed leaps and bounds since then. We now have aeration machines we use on the outfield and square. The rollers are now fitted with power steering, which makes our lives a lot easier.

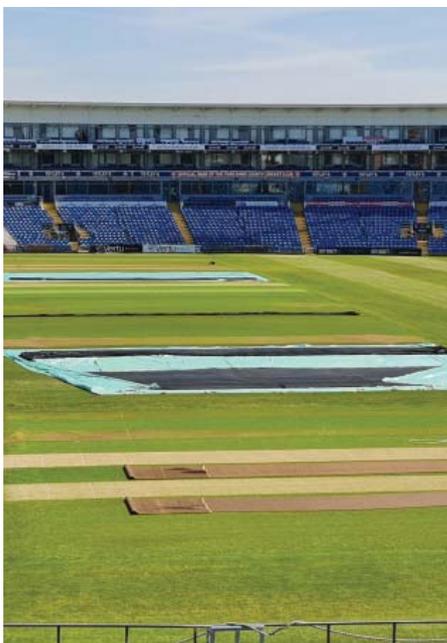
What is your favourite piece of kit?

I would have to say the triple, which has reduced the time it takes to cut the outfield down to one hour and twenty minutes, where it used to take over three hours. Also, the Graden which allows me to scarify pitches without even watering them down, cuts through the pitch easily.

Is there anything you would have done differently, professionally and personally?

In the first five or six years when I first started, I probably thought I would look for something else but, as I got more





experienced, I grew into the job and love what I do.

Any thoughts on retirement? Is there a succession plan in place?

We would probably recruit from within; we have some excellent grounds staff who are experienced and knowledgeable and it would only be fitting to give them a chance. As far as retirement, no one lasts forever and we all have a sell-by date. So, hopefully, in the next few years, I might find something different to do or, if I am lucky, I may get a chance to do something a little bit different with the club. Or, perhaps doing the same sort of thing but not be in charge; I have not really thought about it.

How would you raise the profile of groundsmanship in the media?

I think the profile is pretty high at the moment and we get some excellent coverage from the ex-professional cricketers turned TV pundits. The papers can be a bit

of a different story at times. There is always room for improvement and how you would go about it, but I am just used to cricket. I do not really know about the other sports in our industry; it is a difficult one.

How would you encourage new people into our industry?

Now, more than ever, we are always looking out for new talent. I believe it provides an excellent and rewarding career for school/college leavers and anyone looking for a career change. There are plenty of college courses and apprenticeships out there, so I would encourage everyone to talk about our industry and what it has to offer.



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The Hundred is a new competition - which I hope helps promotes cricket and the English game. It was supposed to start last year, but was delayed due to Covid-19 and I really hope we are able to welcome the crowds back for it



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Richmondshire Cricket Club

Not out!

Situated in the beautiful North Yorkshire market town of Richmond, Richmondshire Cricket Club is at the heart of the local community. Founded in 1837, the club has a long history and currently plays its cricket in the North Yorkshire South Durham (NYSD) ECB Premier League.

On a warm sunny day in April, Lee Williams sat down outside with **Geoff Thorpe**. A seventy-two-year-old retired police officer turned full-time groundsman, he has served the club for many years. He discusses the challenges he has faced whilst dedicating much of his spare time to the club he loves

Back in 1977, Geoff began to play cricket for the club. The following year, a testimonial game against Yorkshire CCC was scheduled to be played; being a policeman, his shift pattern meant he could not help the work party, so he ended up cutting the outfield during the week by himself. "Everything started to progress from there. I found myself getting more involved with the maintenance and preparation of the wickets and would use any spare time I had to help out."

"Up until 1990, I continued to volunteer at the club until circumstances meant I was stationed over in Pickering, sixty miles away, where I am originally from, then three years later, I retired from the police. At that time, Richmondshire, were in the B Division and there was a vote to get into the A Division. In that winter of 1993, they were voted in. Suddenly, they got a panic on and asked if I would come back as the groundsman. They knew I had retired. So, in 1994, I came back for, what I would call, a part-time wage for a full-time job."

In 1998, Geoff became ill and had to take four years out to recover from his illness before he

could even think about getting back to the club and do the job he has grown to love. I asked if his position was kept open for him while he recovered. "It wasn't left open, and I didn't think I would be able to come back, in all honesty. In the four years that passed, they had two groundsmen come and go. Then, one day, I went back down to the club, and I found myself cutting the outfield again. I was then asked if I would like to take back the role of groundsman, which I did."

I was interested to know how Geoff managed to gain his knowledge. Was it all gained through working on the ground or did he also attend any educational courses? "Both. The first courses I attended were at Headingley Stadium, which Keith Boyce, the then Head Groundsman of Yorkshire CCC, used to run. Then basically, I would ask other groundskeepers around Yorkshire for their advice. I got to know Mike Corley, who was the Head Groundsman at Scarborough CC. He used to bring his caravan over here to Richmond, and he would pop in and offer me his advice."







At the end of each season, Geoff will put his budget together, along with a wish list, and present it to the club. He very rarely gets what he wants off the wish list, but he is very active in finding ways for the club to raise funds to help improve the grounds. "Over the years, I have held gentlemen's evenings and other events to raise funds, which have helped us purchase the sightscreens and mobile nets. Colin, who is our handyman, has run football events that allowed us to buy the boundary rope and an extra cover. Everybody thinks the club is wealthy because we have a nice clubhouse and decent facilities, but we are far from that."

Geoff kindly gave me a book called *NOT OUT, the History of Richmondshire Cricket Club*. The book offers no recollection of how the outfield and square were constructed. But what I did find out is the club is built on land that they purchased from the Friary Estate around the turn of the century and was first called the Ronaldshay Recreation Ground. Also, part of the field was originally used to dump the estate's rubbish. "Looking at old pictures and listening to what people

have told me, the cricket square was made from Cumberland sea-washed turf, which is not the right stuff for wickets. After the war, they turned the square around, extended it and just rolled the outfield flat. Strangely enough, that's the best part of the square!"

"The square consists of seventeen wickets in total; two are juniors, and the two end ones are used for practice. When I first started, there was no loam in the square to speak of, so I began to incorporate Mendip loam, which did not work for me. After receiving some advice from Mike Corley, I swapped over to Ongar loam which has been great; we now have an excellent loam base. We have good bounce, and that is showing as we now have Durham CCC seconds play here; we have gone from village cricket to national champions."

"Twenty years ago, when the lottery first started, we got a grant to install drains in the outfield and put an artificial wicket in which we have since taken out and replaced with two new wickets."

As well as the square, they have a four-lane training net that is constantly in use, so they have a booking system to cope with



The first courses I attended were at Headingley Stadium, which Keith Boyce, the then Head Groundsman of Yorkshire CCC, used to run. Then basically, I would ask other groundskeepers around Yorkshire for their advice





Being a groundsman is not just a job for me, it is my hobby and something I really enjoy doing

demand. "It is especially busy in the summer holidays when the children are not in school. We also accommodate six adult teams and a junior section; we have so many teams I lose count, LOL."

Additional equipment at the club includes roll-on covers, three of which they got a grant for through the Co-op's Local Community Foundation alongside their sponsor Irvine's estate agents, whose owner plays cricket for the club. The fourth was

purchased using money the club had raised.

Irrigation is limited and consists of a mains tap with a long hose and sprinkler. "It takes me ages to water as the pressure is low and, if someone uses the toilets in the clubhouse, it stops. When watering, I tend to try and leave it overnight when possible."

Geoff talks me through what he describes as a standard maintenance regime. "I cut the outfield and the square every second day, both at a height of 12mm and, if the

weather is right, I will whizz over it again on Saturday morning. For the outfield, I have a five-unit Toro Reelmaster 6500-D, and for the square, I use the Dennis G860."

"As far as square maintenance is concerned, I will start to prepare a pitch ten to fourteen days beforehand depending on what the weather is like and what the forecast is. In that period, I will slowly cut down to a height of 3mm, although recently I have changed my regime and lifted the cut

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Getting Personal

Geoff Thorpe - how many of you follow the same piece of advice?

Who are you? Geoff Thorpe, Groundsman at Richmondshire Cricket Club.

Family status. Single - my wife passed away three years ago.

Who's your hero and why? My late wife for tolerating me as a groundsman and then through my illness, but also the way she dealt with her own illness.

What's been the highlight of your grounds career so far? Hosting Durham 2nd XI games.

If your younger self saw you now, what would they think? Silly old bugger.

Which famous people wind you up? Reality celebrities.

What job would you love, other than your own? If I was younger and fitter, to work at any County Ground.

What's your favourite smell? First cut of grass in spring.

What is your favourite film? The Great Escape.

What scares you? Claustrophobia - anyone who has had an old-style MRI scan will know what I mean.

What would your autobiography be called... and who would play you in the film? A Long Journey. I know he died recently but Sean Connery.

What is your favourite sport? Cricket and BRISCA F1 stockcars. I used to be involved with a local driver many moons ago.

What would you cast into Room 101? Cancer.

Which historical time and place would you most like to visit? 1930's - it always looks so idyllic.

Do you have a lifetime ambition? To have a comfortable life.

Which three people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party? Peter Kay, Billy Connolly and Parkinson... to keep them in order.



What's the best advice you have ever been given? It came from Keith Boyce at one of the first seminars I attended. When the coach, manager or captain asks you to prepare a certain type of wicket always nod in agreement then go away and do your own thing.

What's your favourite piece of trivia? The longest horserace in the flat season is The Grand National.

What was the most embarrassing moment in your life? Too many to mention.

Which three albums would you take to a desert island? Any by Dire Straits and Simply Red.

What's the daftest work-related question you have ever been asked? After heavy rain and ground stood in water... Why aren't the drains working?

What's your favourite piece of kit? Not really a piece of kit, but my new shed.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Honest, hardworking and grumpy.

What is the single most useful thing you could tell a 16-year-old groundsman? You will never stop learning.

What talent would you like to have? To be musical.

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Not to be introduced, but act on the laws we already have - especially when dealing with vandals and the like.



to 5mm. I can't say I have noticed a difference in play, but it now recovers a lot better because you are not scalping it off."

"Before I start the rolling process, I will give the pitch a light verti-cut using the Dennis FT510 for a few passes until I am happy with it, then I will brush it using the brush reel in the same machine."

"For the first two or three days, I will roll it twice a day for half an hour each time, and I will steadily reduce the time spent rolling until I know, by the feel of the wicket, when to stop. On the day of a match, I may give it a final light roll if I feel it is required."

"Finally, I will mark it out on a Thursday just in case there is a delay on the Friday or Saturday morning. I do not like to leave it too late in case there is bad weather. If time allows, I will tart it back up on a Saturday morning."

I asked Geoff what he does after a game to repair the wicket and what renovations are taken out at the end of the season? "What I have started to do, instead of using the brush straight away, is use a blower first to remove the worst of the debris, then I will follow behind with the brush. I find this gives a better finish. I will repair the foot holes with Ongar loam, bang it down and seed it off. Quite often, I





Twenty years ago, when the lottery first started, we got a grant to install drains in the outfield and put an artificial wicket in which we have since taken out and replaced with two new wickets

will use a wicket until it is absolutely worn out. We have an evening league side, under 17, and under 15 teams that will play on it. I do not like to try and bring a wicket back halfway through the season as I never seem to get as good a wicket the second time around."

"I have a contractor to come in, who is the groundsman at Harrogate, to carry out my

end of season renovations. This will include scarifying the square with a tractor mounted SISIS - two or three passes depending on what is needed, and then Barenbrug Bar Extreme grass seed is broadcast with a spreader which goes into the grooves made by the scarifier. The final stage of the process is to topdress with Ongar loam, which is then brushed in, followed by a pre-

seed fertiliser."

"I do have a small fertiliser programme which I do try to follow as best I can with the limited water supply we have to water the products in. At the start of the season, before I start pre-season rolling, I will apply a granular autumn/winter feed. Then, a fortnight before the season begins, I will put a spring/summer down. Two years ago,

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After the war, they turned the square around, extended it and just rolled the outfield flat. Strangely enough, that's the best part of the square!

I turned to liquid fertilisers through the summer, mainly because of the problems with watering the granular feeds in. They have worked well, but you do have to put them on more often. The guy at Richmond (Yorks) Bowls Club has a small pedestrian sprayer, so he applies the liquids for me every three weeks.”

At one end, on the square nearest to the clubhouse, the outfield has started to sink, causing a low spot where the water sits after it has rained, which was clearly visible from where we sat. Geoff is hoping to address this problem at the end of the season. “The water does eventually dissipate through to the drainage underneath, but I would like to get the area levelled off, so the water has

nowhere to stand. We are in a bowl, so all the water runs towards the square from all sides. I will have to get some prices together to carry out that work, as well as a cost to fill in the trenches at the back of the screen where the water supply was moved over to my new shed. I am hopeful we can get both of these jobs done at the same time.”

Geoff has bought eighty percent of the club's machinery as there is not enough money within the club to purchase the machinery he requires. “Being a groundsman is not just a job for me, it is my hobby and something I really enjoy doing. So, if I see something I like, or a piece of kit that will make the job easier and I do not have to mess around fixing it all the time, I will buy it. I bought the Kubota ST30 tractor many years ago, and the club has paid me so much back a month for it. The same thing happened with the old roller when it broke down, and I bought the new one.”

Richmond (Yorks) Golf Club, a mile up the road, undertake all of Geoff's machinery servicing and maintenance work on his machinery. “I will take the kit up to them or get a contractor to drop it off. They have all the grinders and equipment to carry out the job.”



What's in the shed

- Kubota ST30 compact tractor
- Toro Reelmaster 6500-D
- Dennis G860 with brush cassette
- Dennis FT510 with verti-cut reel and brush
- Dennis Razor
- Lloyds Paladin
- Groundsman 345HD aerator
- TEREX TV1200 tandem roller
- Bowcom Bowdry
- Drag Mat

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Glenarm Castle

Green light means go!

Sitting in the heart of rural County Antrim is the historic Glenarm Castle with its bulging famous Walled Garden and grounds. Chris McCullough met up with Senior Gardener **Jordan McWhirter** to discuss preparations for opening up to the public since the easing of Covid-19 regulations



Senior Gardener Jordan McWhirter



It's one of the most iconic buildings that line the east coast of Northern Ireland and, given the history behind Glenarm Castle, it has done so for a very long time.

Dating back to the 17th century, the present Glenarm Castle was first built by Randal McDonnell, the 1st Earl of Antrim, and remains the ancestral seat of the McDonnell family to this day.

The current Earl is Alexander McDonnell, 14th Earl of Antrim, but it is his son, Randal, Viscount Dunluce, his wife Aurora and their two children who currently reside in the castle.

A number of fires caused great destruction at the castle over the years, including the first one in 1642, just six years after the castle was built, when a Scottish Covenanter army who were attacking the royalist MacDonnells set fire to the building after which it remained a roofless ruin for ninety years.

Until the middle of the 18th century, the Antrim Estate extended all the way up the coast of County Antrim to Dunluce Castle, Ballycastle and beyond. Now, however, it is limited almost entirely to the land that sits within the walls of the Castle Demesne.

Today, the castle estate is a fully



operational business, with an organic farm producing top quality beef and lamb and the castle grounds offering a number of different events and services to the general public to generate an income.

Running through the estate is the Glenarm River which is approximately five miles long, with the Glenarm Angling Club fishing two miles and a private syndicate fishing the remaining three miles.

The castle's famous Walled Garden is normally a hive of activity opened up to the public who come in their droves to witness the rainbow of colours, the smells and the plethora of flowers, plants and shrubs

meticulously maintained by the gardening team.

Other events include a highly popular tulip festival, whilst a number of eateries on site keep the public well fed and watered. There are even places to stay on the estate featuring nine glamping pods overlooking the idyllic east Antrim coastline.

Five of these were first opened in 2019 and instantly became very popular with families and couples alike who enjoyed waking up to take in those superb coastal views.

Sadly, the regulations that came during the past Covid-19 pandemic year forced

Glenarm Castle to close the gates as gatherings of the public were banned.

However, with the recent surge in the vaccination rate in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, the Covid-19 restrictions are slowly being eased which meant Glenarm Castle Estate was able to partially open its gardens and Tea Room in late April and subsequently the glamping pods at the end of April.

All throughout lockdown the team at Glenarm Castle, under the guidance of estate managing director Adrian Morrow, have forged ahead ensuring the grounds were well maintained in preparation for



Aerial view of Glenarm Castle showing the Glenarm River

opening.

The person tasked with the pleasure of looking after the grounds and the Walled Garden is Senior Gardener Jordan McWhirter who has worked for the company for the past seven years.

In the early days, back in the 1820s when the garden was created, it was used to provide the castle household with all of its fresh produce. At its peak during the Victorian era, the Walled Garden would have had between fifteen and twenty staff working there, with additional seasonal staff brought in to help at peak periods.

These temporary staff would have been housed in the little bothies in the frame yard area of the garden. Today only the frame yard, otherwise known now as the Kitchen Garden, is used for growing vegetables whilst soft fruit, such as apricots, grapes, and nectarines, are grown in the long sloping glasshouses in the main part of the garden.

Jordan freely admits his career choice was inspired by Monty Don from *Gardeners World* and, as a result of that, he completed an Apprenticeships Northern Ireland course in Horticulture Parks, Gardens and Green Spaces after leaving school.

He then enrolled at the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise Greenmount Campus and completed Level 2 Diploma in Horticulture and Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma in Horticulture there.

As the gardens can be a very busy space in the main growing seasons, Jordan enlists

the help of three additional part-time members of staff. He also uses outside consultants and brings in contractors for hedge cutting purposes when required.

There is quite a variety of plant and tree species in the gardens and the grounds challenging Jordan's expertise.

Over the past twenty years, the Walled Garden has been carefully restored by Viscount and Viscountess Dunluce, with exciting new features added every year.

It continues to evolve as a centre of horticultural excellence with imaginative herbaceous borders, beautiful water

features, fruit and vegetable gardens, and displays of flowers that burst with colour from spring until autumn.

The herbaceous border is filled with colour, including bright reds, pinks and oranges throughout the season, from tulips and peonies in early summer to bright dahlias and penstemons in the early autumn.

Jordan said: "The soils around the gardens are generally pH neutral loamy soils and we regularly apply mulching of horse manure on the garden areas."

"The Walled Garden extends to four acres in total and has a further seven acres of



Herbaceous borders soon to become a riot of colour



A John Deere X950R is used for grass cutting

parkland. We have a heated glass house in the garden used for bringing on tender plants and seedlings.”

“Lucky for us the Walled Garden has its own microclimate and is generally very sheltered with no prolonged heavy frosts, which results in the huge variety of plants we can grow in there,” he said.

Throughout the year, there are normally a number of events happening. Whilst the team are adhering to the latest easing of regulations they are planning which events can go ahead this year.

Jordan said: “During the late spring early summer period, we have our annual Tulip Festival sponsored by Bloms Bulbs in May. During this time, we have a pretty hectic maintenance programme to follow which includes weeding and edging all the borders, deadheading the plants and pruning the fruit trees.”

“Later on, the tulip bulbs are dug out of the ground and we carry on with a general tidying and maintenance of the Walled Garden and parkland.”

“We use a John Deere X950R ride on

//

The soils around the gardens are generally pH neutral loamy soils and we regularly apply mulching of horse manure on the garden areas

lawn mower to cut the lawns at least once a week with the goal of leaving the grass around one inch in height.”

“Then, in the autumn and winter period, we start to cut back the herbaceous borders. The larger plants are split and divided to keep displays fresh each year.”

“With the tulip festival in mind, we plant around 10,000 tulip bulbs at this time also. Fresh compost is added to the kitchen garden. Then we move back to the lawns, which are spiked in February each year and toppedressed with a sand and soil mixture. The



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We are trialling the ‘no dig’ method in our vegetable garden, which is proving rather successful. The benefits of this is that the soil is not being overworked and we are maintaining the soil structure better



Over 10,000 tulip bulbs are planted



roses are pruned then as well,” said Jordan.

“As the Walled Garden is a show garden open to the paying public, presentation is paramount for us. Generally, it’s all hands to the pump from all the garden staff to get the work completed in the busier times.”

“Also, during the autumn and winter, we remove the summer seats and store them indoors during the winter months. The pond is drained and cleaned and any major work, such as drainage, is completed when required,” he added.

As Glenarm Castle runs events throughout the year, the gardens team is sometimes required to help out in other areas relating to the build and take down of the event structures. Some minor tidying of the lawns and reseeded are required after events.

Jordan agrees his budgets with Adrian ahead of each season, but this can be adjusted to suit the event or requirements of the gardens and grounds.

One downside of having little frost is that the warmer weather in the winter time can create some issues for Jordan and the team.

He said: “The lack of frost is creating more

disease problems for us and the milder winters are contributing to more pest and diseases not being killed off.”

“We regularly take soil samples from the Kitchen Garden and areas which appear to be suffering and remedies are put in place to compensate.”

“We are trialling the ‘no dig’ method in our vegetable garden, which is proving rather successful. The benefits of this is that the soil is not being overworked and we are maintaining the soil structure better. It also means less weeding is required and there is a reduction in weed seeds.”

“In the future, we are aiming to regenerate our Herb Garden which is contained inside a Yew hedge dating back to around 400 years ago,” added Jordan.

In the machinery shed, the team at Glenarm Castle have a small compact tractor, a Toro ATV, John Deere ride on lawn mower and a pedestrian mower to use, most of which are exchanged every five years.

Jordan said: “Pests are normally not a problem in the gardens but occasionally pheasants like to eat the tulip bulbs. We trap them in live traps and release them further up the estate.”

The ecology and environment is of paramount importance to Jordan and the team and they are always looking at methods to enhance this, including the planting of wildflowers every year in a number of areas.

Extra attractions this year at Glenarm Castle include a mini Land Rover driving course for the kids and a woodland walk for the more energetic visitors.



Glamping pods overlook the Antrim coastline



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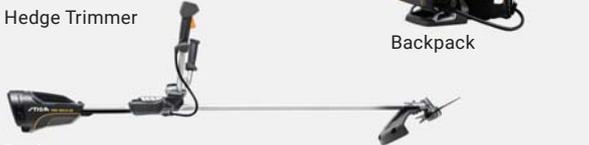
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Thirsk Racecourse

Yorkshire grit delivers the goods



Looking to the winning post at Thirsk Racecourse, which aims to provide consistently good racing surface for horses from the busy Yorkshire racing scene, and beyond



At Thirsk Racecourse, the goal is to offer racehorse trainers a chance to run their horses on a reliably decent racing surface, while providing owners and racegoers with an enjoyable day out. Jane Carley talks to Clerk of the Course **James Sanderson** and Head Groundsman **Steve Kelsey** about the ongoing work

The track at Thirsk Racecourse is a 1.25 mile left-handed circuit with few undulations plus a six furlong chute. It was founded in 1855 by the Bell family, owners of Thirsk Hall Farm, who are still the racecourse's landlords.

"Our programme is mainly class 4, 5 and 6 races, so the lower end of the industry, but we aim to offer the highest possible standards, whatever the class of horse," explains Manager and Clerk of the Course James Sanderson. "We're halfway between the Yorkshire training bases of Malton and Middleham, and draw on that substantial regional pool of horses, so we usually have plenty of runners."

They also come from far and wide - Thirsk's richest race of the season, the £50,000 Cliff Stud Thirsk Hunt Cup, in May, was won by Stortford, a horse from Lambourn trainer Mick Channon's yard.

With gravel subsoil, the track has no need of artificial drainage, and even in the worst of the weather, the surface copes admirably.

"It will take rain all day," James comments. "I've been here ten years and only lost half a day's racing in that time."

That was, he recalls, the first day of a two-day meeting, when jockeys reported horses slipping on the bend into the straight.

"We had a morning drizzle on good-to-firm ground and it got slippery. We abandoned the first day after three races, slit both bends and then watered overnight, after which we were able to race with no problems the following day. We believe that lush grass contributed to the problem, so we're always mindful of grass growth."

Other works have included addressing a reverse camber and levelling the entry and exits of bends.

"Over time, the divot repairs and filling work can change the profile of a track, in a similar way to how take offs and landings get built up on a jumps course, so we have to work to keep it level."

Head groundsman Steve Kelsey has been at Thirsk for 40 years, so has seen a few



A tight ship: Thirsk grounds team l-r - groundsman Jonathan Hardcastle, clerk of the course James Sanderson, head groundsman Steve Kelsey, deputy head groundsman Dave Raisebeck and groundsman Steve Scott

//

We've been lucky not to have issues with Chafer Grubs on the track itself, but they are on the adjacent football field, so we're mindful of the challenge that they pose. Acelypryn is more expensive than Imidacloprid, which we used before it was taken off the market, and the timing has to be just right

changes in his time, including the introduction of pop-up sprinklers, making an important contribution to watering efficiency.

"They are very reliable - you can put water on at night and know it's going to be effective, without burning off as it does in the day. It's much more efficient than booms and tow lines; between 6.00pm and 6.00am we can get at least 6mm on if we need to and be confident to produce decent ground."

A calendar which lasts from April to September makes it easy to get on with post-season renovations early and achieve good recovery, James comments.

"It soon looks very good, although the cold temperatures in the early part of this year put the grass back."

Key to renovations is a thorough grass harrow to pull out debris, followed by a vertidrain carried out by contractor Cleveland Land Services, who also takes care of overseeding.

"We reason that any seasonal work is better done by a contractor rather than investing in specialist machinery," comments Steve, "It's the sort of equipment that

deteriorates quickly if you are not using it regularly."

Contractors are also used for spraying - the end of May is a key time for getting on top of Chafer Grubs with the emergency use authorisation for Acelypryn, followed by a herbicide application.

"We've been lucky not to have issues with Chafer Grubs on the track itself, but they are on the adjacent football field, so we're mindful of the challenge that they pose. Acelypryn is more expensive than Imidacloprid, which we used before it was taken off the market, and the timing has to be just right; we're not confident in the use of nematodes which is the alternative. Racing represents the majority of our income, so we can't risk losing fixtures."

Granular fertiliser is applied in three cycles a year, and after an early spring application this year, a second was needed in May to give a boost due to the cold temperatures.

"We're careful with fertiliser as we want to avoid lush growth which can lead to the surface becoming slippery," says James.

Mowing is carried out with either Lloyds gangs or a Wessex roller mower - which also



Mowing of the track and enclosures currently involves a tractor mounted roller mower or gangs, but a front mount mower or wide area ride-on is also under consideration



Ride-on mowers come in handy for lawns and also for cutting along the rail



Centre course is home to the local athletics club, with facilities for football, rugby and cricket rather than athletics!

comes in for striping larger formal areas such as the family enclosure - cutting to 4in to give a generous sward on the track.

“Even for flat racing, trainers prefer to see plenty of ground cover and it helps maintain genuinely good going in drying winds,” he comments.

And there’s plenty of grass to cut: 5ha of track and another 3-4ha of lawns, parade rings and grass car parks.

“Although we do also have some very environmentally friendly mowers in the car

parks, in the form of sheep provided by a local shepherd,” James points out.

Mowing methods are a talking point between James and Steve. The two tractor drawn mowers are pulled by a 60hp Kubota M6060 which is the track’s all round workhorse.

But two older tractors - including an MF135, much prized by the enthusiasts – are up for replacement soon and local dealer Russells may be called upon to quote for a slightly lower horsepower model to

complement the existing Kubota.

“We’ve talked about using it to mount a front mower so we’re not running over the grass before cutting it, but wide area ride-ons are popular with many racecourses, so it’s up for debate. We’ve been offered extra tax relief as part of Covid recovery schemes so it’s a good opportunity to update machinery.”

With many restricted areas to tackle, small ride-ons are an important part of the armoury. A Kubota GR has replaced an old

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Although we do also have some very environmentally friendly mowers in the car parks, in the form of sheep provided by a local shepherd

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Spectators return

Thirsk welcomed its first spectators back at its meeting on 3rd June and has plans in place to grow the numbers after 21st June, subject to Government rules.

"We would normally have three enclosures but we started with just the one and at 25% capacity," explains James. "Everything is outdoors, although there is protection from the weather with marquees and the grandstand roof. Racegoers can use socially distanced queues to buy drinks and then must take them to a table and sit down to consume them."

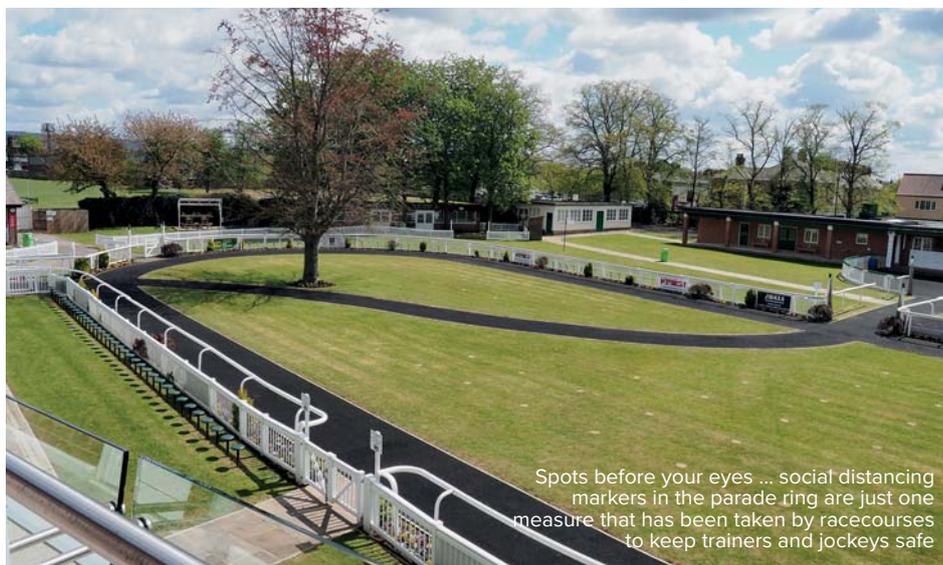
"For indoor areas, such as dining and boxes, we again work at reduced capacity to maintain social distancing."

Owners - who have been unstinting in their support of Thirsk and other racecourses, regardless of how their race day experience has been affected by the regulations - are currently entertained in a pavilion with an adjacent covered lawn, whilst their new £1.8m trackside stand, completed in 2018, is redesignated as a jockeys' changing room.

"Under Covid-19 protocols, the capacity of the main changing room has been reduced to just eight jockeys," explains James, "Pre-Covid, we could accommodate thirty in there quite happily, but social distancing meant we needed more space, so we've had to use the new owners' stand."

Despite all the challenges, he is confident that demand for racing will be as high as ever in the coming months.

"Ticket sales have been strong since we announced the date for spectators to return," he comments. "Restricted room capacities mean people will be outside more and so we've suggested that racegoers always dress for the weather; but, whatever the conditions, we'll still be able to offer owners and racegoers alike a great experience."



Spots before your eyes ... social distancing markers in the parade ring are just one measure that has been taken by racecourses to keep trainers and jockeys safe

Countax and will soon be joined by a second.

A Dakota Turf Tender spreader also comes in for praise.

"Previously, if we identified an area that needed sanding, it was a matter of shovelling it on," comments James. This is much quicker and more efficient."

Steve is handy in the workshop, looking after routine maintenance alongside a local engineer and has modified a Trilo trailed vacuum for a particularly labour-intensive job.

"We have 113 stables which are bedded on shredded paper or wood shavings, and it all has to be removed after every meeting," explains James. "The vacuum's engine was beefed up, then the chute was removed and swapped for a long hose to suck the used bedding straight from the stable into the muck trailer."

The Polaris Ranger UTV is a useful piece of kit for moving people and equipment, especially on race days, he points out.

"I don't want for anything in terms of machinery," comments Steve, "The slitter's next for replacement, but otherwise we're well equipped."

Alongside Steve, deputy head groundsman Dave Raisebeck, and groundsman Steve Scott, plus seasonal groundsman Jonathan Hardcastle and part-time gardener Dave Leach, run a tight ship,

taking on varied tasks as required.

Thirsk usually hosts fifteen meetings a season but James reckons there's capacity for three or four more if fixtures became available.

"We move rail if the ground comes up soft which is a big job for our small team, but we were fortunate that it wasn't necessary this year for our first three meetings as the going was good-to-firm and there was minimal damage."

Rail comes from Watt Fences plus Duralock for paddocks and, although Thirsk has a rolling replacement programme, Steve reckons it's a good investment.

"It deteriorates in the sunlight, but I reckon the rails going out of service are some twenty years old. And then they still get re-used, there's always a trainer or point to point course that wants them!"

It's obvious that Thirsk racecourse is run as an efficient machine, delivering a sterling service to the strong Yorkshire racing scene and beyond, and with a team that prides itself on high standards.



The new owners' pavilion, currently deployed as a jockeys' changing room



The pre-parade ring was realigned in 2018 to accommodate the new owners' pavilion

A female perspective on the sportsturf industry

Recruitment and diversity

The sportsturf industry is facing a recruitment and skills crisis across all sectors. The need to increase recruitment levels has been widely acknowledged as has the severe gender imbalance in the industry where only 3% of the UK sportsturf industry is female. A research project was devised to provide a female perspective on the sportsturf industry and to review issues relating to the recruitment of women. **Amy Sullivan** reports

The low level of recruitment of women compared to men into non-traditional industries such as arboriculture and construction can be linked back to historic gender based occupational segregation where manual industries are predominantly male dominated (He et al., 2019). Research in the arboriculture industry concluded that women enjoy working in the arboriculture industry and that discrimination doesn't drive them away from the industry. Sadly, there has been no research undertaken regarding women in the sportsturf industry beyond a count of how many there are (Kuhns, Blagg and Blahna, 2002).

Three different surveys were circulated through social media; the response groups were anyone who works in the industry, women who work in the industry and managers of women. The surveys generated an impressive response with 526 people.

1st survey. How does recruitment into the sportsturf industry differ for men and women?

Surprisingly, there were no statistically significant differences between male and female responses in a variety of recruitment factors such as the age they entered the industry, how they became involved and how they initially became interested in it. This shows that current recruitment practices are not influenced by gender.

There were two interesting statistics that apply more to recruitment generally; 80.1% of respondents had no prior connection to the industry either through a friend or family member. So, it can be inferred that young people are becoming aware of the industry without a prior personal connection to it. By far the smallest number of respondents,

only 2.1%, said they had become involved in the industry through school or careers guidance with many women and managers commenting that non-traditional industries such as this are either unknown or just not pushed as careers.

2nd survey. What particular challenges do women face in their careers in the sportsturf industry?

The reasons for the gender disparity started becoming apparent in the results of the second survey where women highlighted gender stereotypes and perceptions as strong barriers to young women entering the industry. Whilst some of these attitudes came from the older, more traditional or conservative generation, most of the stereotypes and perceptions about the industry and women working in it came from outside the industry itself.

Nearly all the women stated that the industry being so male dominated could be intimidating and left some feeling lonely or isolated.

3rd survey. What could be done in the future to encourage more female recruitment into the sportsturf industry?

The answer to this question is not quite so simple. The gender perceptions and stereotypes that exist regarding women working in manual or non-traditional industries are founded in societal gender notions. Although these are slowly changing, there is little that the industry could do to affect change in this area. Instead, disproportionately highlighting the women who do work in the industry to encourage female representation and normalise women in the industry was suggested by both women and managers as a feasible action.

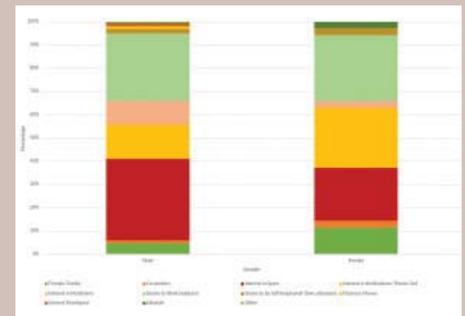


Figure 1: How respondents became interested in the sportsturf industry, percentage levels by gender

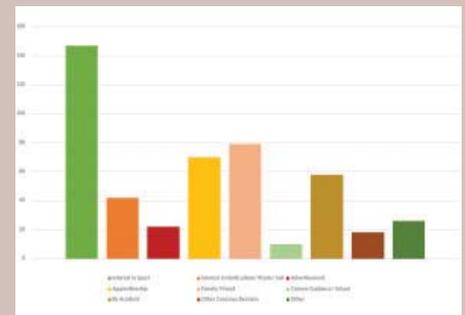


Figure 2: How respondents became involved in the industry

Next Steps

Despite all the revelations relating to gender, it was suggested that it is the perception of the industry by the general public which needs the most improvement in order to increase recruitment. Research into the exact perceptions of the industry would be beneficial before targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns are undertaken. In terms of recruitment campaigns, it was shown that schools and careers guidance is a 'weak' area for recruitment, and this is where industry bodies and organisations could work to increase industry awareness. However, raising the profile of the industry is also important as many participants said that sportsturf is unknown to the general public and needs to step out from 'behind the scenes' in order to be recognised. It is also difficult to present a career in sportsturf as a viable and rewarding career when there is no clear educational pathway from apprenticeships to degree level and few opportunities to undertake study at land-based colleges.

There is a lot of work to be done to raise awareness of the women who work in the sportsturf industry and raise the profile of the industry in general. However, it is essential to make changes to educational pathways and career progression in order to present a career in sportsturf in the best light. The sportsturf industry will struggle to change the lingering societal gender perceptions of 'man's work' and 'women's work' but it does have the ability to change the perception of the industry itself.

Operation Pollinator

Restoration Man

Golf courses are often portrayed as ecological green deserts devoid of biodiversity and despoiling the countryside. But, high on the Surrey hills, **Effingham Golf Club** has turned the clock back to create a genuine ecology asset that befits the natural environment and far surpasses what was there before

What was once intensive monoculture farmland, when the course was built, in the 1920s, is now a haven of native chalk downland. With uninterrupted views to the London skyline, it is a model of how every corner of the course can be used to create a myriad of diverse habitats, yet still offer an acclaimed top golfing experience.

For course manager, Jon Budd, environmental initiatives add another layer of complexity to turf management, but that does bring some highly rewarding benefits for the club and the greenkeeping team. "First and foremost we are a golf club and, unquestionably, my number one priority is to provide the playing surfaces members quite rightly expect every single day."

"But where we can do that alongside the environmental features that don't interfere - and in some cases actually enhance the playing surface management - then it's a real win for all involved."

Effingham's success as the Syngenta Operation Pollinator Award 2021 winner, as part of the international Golf Environment Awards, is testament to the club's commitment to sustainable golf course management, and its members' support for the initiatives.

Jon emphasises that it all starts with insects and pollinators. He argues that targeting these species at the base of the ecological pyramid provides the foundation to support a full spectrum of biodiversity. And it is working.

"It's no good just going straight for the headline stars," he advised. "Start with the habitat features that support insects, and then you get the voles, that are the food sources for the owls and the kites, and then we have a truly sustainable ecosystem. It's not only good for the environment, but makes it a really exciting and enjoyable place to play golf and to work."

Whilst he acknowledges Effingham's 265 acre site does enable the epic scale of



Effingham club manager, Steve Slinger (right), reports the whole club is proud of the ecology work of Jon and the greenkeeping team





If we can recreate any part of that missing habitat around the course, it creates another stepping stone in a species' recovery. That's really exciting and rewarding to be involved with



Effingham's wildflower meadows in summer

habitat creation, Jon believes that every course has some areas that can be beneficially managed for wildlife, however small.

The swathes of meadow are undoubtedly eye catching, but it is some of the small areas around the environs that provide wildlife packed habitats of immense value to the overall picture.

At Effingham, piles of cut wood are stacked into hibernacles - shelters and breeding sites for insects and predators; scalplings from bunkers and reconstructions provide a sand wall for ground nesting fauna and grubbed tree roots form a stumpery that is a haven for many species. The reed bed water filtration and irrigation lagoon, for example, supports a completely different habitat but further adds to the mix - without any implication on play.

But it is the wildflower meadows that define the course layout which has helped to bring back the genuine downland experience for members. Jon pointed out that such is the members' respect for the wildflower meadows that, following a wayward shot into an area, many would drop a ball and play on, rather than disturb

the habitat.

In fact, he highlights that, once established, the fescue dominant wildflower meadows have removed a huge labour burden involved with cutting rough through the season. Standard practice at Effingham is to leave the meadows untouched right through the flowering period and ground nesting bird season, when a local agricultural contractor comes in and cuts and immediately bales up the risings, which are removed to the composting facility.

"Some people do leave the cut grass to dry and knock out the wildflower seeds before removing," he added. "But as we leave it late in the season, there is less opportunity for the grass to dry, and increases the risk of damaging the sward from leaving the cuttings in situ. We prefer to get them cleared, which mimics grazing, and allow the meadow to recover, that provides insects with overwinter shelter," he advised.

The downland course only uses the minimum nutritional programme, tailored by rigorous soil sampling. But, even with this, the team take extra care to ensure applications only target the managed turf and don't spread into the wildflower areas.

Herbicides and other chemicals are used to maintain surfaces where required - applied with the latest sprayer technology and great care to avoid impact on surrounding areas.

"Wildlife surveys have identified we do have a lot of species that start with the term 'Common'," he reported. "Which indeed they were when first named. But sadly, many of those species are now in serious decline with native habitat loss."

"If we can recreate any part of that missing habitat around the course, it creates another stepping stone in a species' recovery. That's really exciting and rewarding to be involved with."

Jon highlights that golf courses should be seen as a real asset in wider landscape-scale conservation initiatives, since they are often not under the same pressures faced by farmers to produce food.

"Most golf courses are fortunate to have out of play areas that can be managed to enhance their environmental value, often at little or no financial cost, or even potentially long-term savings from having to cut less."

One piece of advice that he would urge all clubs and course managers to adopt is to seek professional and specialist advice into



Log piles left and stumperies built that all add extra insect habitats



Wildflower cuttings baled for removal



Effingham's wildflowers with a London backdrop



It's still up to the individual greenkeeper to adopt and implement the options in a way that will be acceptable to the club and can be fitted into existing workloads

the objectives of the planned environmental features. At Effingham, reports and support from STRI, Forestry Commission and Surrey Wildlife Trust have all been instrumental in driving forward initiatives.

"That way you always have the back-up reference to the reports as explanation and justification for what has been undertaken and why," he urged. "But it's still up to the individual greenkeeper to adopt and implement the options in a way that will be

acceptable to the club and can be fitted into existing workloads."

For sure it's not all been perfect and there have been failures along the way, Jon recalls, particularly with challenges of wildflower establishment. "But, as we have gained more experience, it has become more successful, and we are keen to share the knowledge with others. The one thing we have learned is to give nature time and space for its own recovery."

Having scraped back soils and reduced fertility, orchids that had been missing for years have started to appear. Some are very rare and still kept secretively nurtured, but year on year numbers are steadily recovering. Helibore orchids have a unique ecosystem to spread mycelia on the root systems of beach trees, whilst the bee orchid is a beautiful addition to the site's immense resource of flora.

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Year 1 of woodland cleared back to make space for wildflower areas



Year 2 of woodland cleared back to make space for wildflower areas

dense undergrowth has been removed and woodland thinned, or removed, graded bare soil has been sown with a bespoke wildflower mix made up to mimic the existing natural fauna.

“Then, in the first year, we cut and cut again the establishing sward. That really helps to suppress invasive weeds, whilst the perennial wildflowers are happy to get roots established. It doesn’t look like much in the first and second years, when we cut and remove again, but by the third year it really starts to pay dividends.” He reiterates that having the Wildlife Trust management plans gives him and the club confidence that it’s the right route and techniques.

Jon also highlights they have focused initially on areas where the tree removal has also been hugely beneficial to let light and air flow into surfaces. “We even did a short YouTube video on light spectrum and plant requirements, which fascinated members who never considered the science involved.”

Effingham Golf Club’s environmental duty of care starts at the club gates, where verges that were once mown down tightly by the council are now carefully cut by the

greenkeeping team, at a height and around wildflowers that are allowed to bloom.

In fact, Jon is even more enthusiastic that it goes beyond what they are achieving at the club. “More members are looking at what we are doing, and thinking how they can replicate that at home in their own gardens. That really helps to cement what we are doing around the course, but also reinforces that every single area of wildlife habitat, no matter how big or small, is of value.

Whilst, for most greenkeepers, the frequently asked question from members is how can they make their lawn look as good as the golf course, Jon and the team are now more likely to be asked how can they establish wildflowers in their garden. And it’s a question he’s only too happy to help with.

“Awareness of environmental issues is now high on the agenda in every walk of life and the golf course has to reflect that. The number of electric cars in the car park increases by the day. Members are genuinely interested, often led by the ladies section and the younger members, but the movement is only in one direction.”

“I can see a day when the environmental

policy and credentials of the club will be a key deciding factor in where people want to play and where they can say they are proud to be a member. That has real financial weight and value for the club.”

He cited the example of posting a picture of a huge skip of waste disposable cups, generated from the clubhouse and half-way house, that overnight triggered a switch to more golfers bringing their own recyclable cups to use - along with a 20p discount on the cost of a drink! They’re quite used to doing it in Waitrose, but just needs a small shift in mindset to apply it to the golf club too.

Jon believes engaging with members on ecological and environmental issues elevates their understanding and appreciation of the greenkeeping team far above ‘simply managing grass’.

His annual ecology open evening walks now attract in excess of 150 members, friends and village residents. With the knowledge he, deputy Gary Holland, and the rest of the team can deliver it really elevates the members’ perceptions and appreciation of the team. Jon finds the level of interest is getting more and more involved each year,



Members are genuinely interested, often led by the ladies section and the younger members, but the movement is only in one direction



Jon Budd with his deputy Gary Holland



Year 3 of woodland cleared back to make space for wildflower areas



Reed bed

which motivates the team to keep progressing with new ideas, and encouragingly welcome the fact that people have bought into the initiatives.

Communication with members is an ongoing process through conventional newsletters and emails, along with developing information boards for around the course. Jon's YouTube videos have been an extremely effective route to help explain plans and actions with members; primarily

since the environmental features are engaging and an attractive backdrop, but also because they can see directly what the impacts will be on their course.

Jon identifies it has also transformed the club's relationship with the village and neighbours, with a better understanding of the plans and changing perception of the course. Jon is now elected on the Parish Council and actively engaged in developing wildlife and habitat creation initiatives for the

village too. He's also looking to bring the local school children to the course to study and learn from the environmental work.

For Jon is adamant that, after his fourteen years at Effingham, the environmental progress cannot be a passing fashion, but must form an integral part of the club's business and success for the generations to come.



Award Winner

Congratulating Jon and the Club on its success in winning the Syngenta Operation Pollinator Award 2021, the company's project manager, Caroline Carroll, said: "Jon's experience at Effingham has shown that, with such positive action, there is the chance to make transformational gains for the environment. Given commitment and time, habitats and their value to wildlife gets better and better."

"What is also so exciting is that, whilst Jon has achieved this on a vast scale, there is clear recognition that everyone can replicate bits of this on every course. Cumulatively, that can add up to an immense national environmental resource."

"It is a real asset for the industry to have Jon as a champion of Operation Pollinator and so willing to share his experience," she added.

Operation Pollinator provides a framework for golf courses to become involved with environmental initiatives, primarily to promote wildflower habitats, along with wider biodiversity. It enables courses to share experiences and develop best practice, along with learning from extensive STRI research. There is no financial, size or time commitments - simply the desire to enhance ecological



resources and promote the positive actions of the golf industry.

"Throughout the Operation Pollinator project we've found that, if you put the habitat back, the wildlife will find it," highlighted Caroline. "Monitoring of projects has found numerous examples of 'lost' or rare species that reoccur when habitats are restored. That demonstrates the incredible ecological value that golf courses can offer, as well as the publicity value for a club to highlight what it has achieved and what the industry can contribute."



The Golf Environment Awards (GEA) aim to recognise, reward and promote outstanding individuals and golf courses - no matter how big or small - for the time and effort they have put into protecting and preserving their unique surroundings.

STRI Ecologist and Awards Manager, Meg Stone, added: "Golf courses are seeing tangible results from introducing environmentally sustainable management projects across their golf courses."

"These projects are achieving an increase in habitat varieties, improving playing experiences for golfers and providing a positive contribution to wildlife."

"With the ever-increasing spotlight on environmental matters, it is fundamentally important for golf courses to assess what they can do to achieve environmental sustainability, while continuing to maximise the enjoyment of golf."

Meg urges all golf clubs and course managers who believe their club is providing a positive contribution to the environment to enter the awards.

Petrol powered equipment

A refresh on safe practice



If you work with petrol powered equipment, you will likely be aware of the many legal requirements and regulations set out to protect you and your employees from the potential risks this can pose. **Axel Hildebrand** of Anglo American Oil Company Ltd - UK distributors of Aspen Fuel - addresses some key considerations when it comes to storage and emissions, along with an update on accessories to further improve the safe usage of petrol for both businesses and the operator

From the safe storage of fuel under The Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 (DSEAR) to protecting employees from harmful exhaust emissions under The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH), it can be a challenge keeping up with the sheer amount of guidance available.

Petrol is understandably considered a 'dangerous substance' by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and no matter what type of petrol a company is using, they must take the steps necessary to ensure the transportation and storage of fuel is done safely. Storing and dispensing petrol at a workplace is covered by the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 (DSEAR). DSEAR sets the minimum requirements for the protection of workers from fire and explosion risks related to dangerous substances and requires employers to control the risks to the safety of employees

and others from these hazards.

While there is not a limit legally on how much petrol you can store if you're a commercial customer, the amount kept on workplace premises should be 'reasonable' and not exceed expected usage. An accurate risk assessment should also be conducted. There are many different factors that you need to consider and these will differ for each individual premises - guidance around best practice can be sought on the HSE website, as well as from your insurance company and local fire authorities.

A number of options are available for the storage of petrol - from large cabinets suitable for the storage of fuel drums, to containers or boxes for smaller quantities. All cabinets/containers should be properly labelled and, where practical, should be stored in the open and at ground level. Aspen offer the Transbank fuel storage box - custom designed by Armorgard Security Products - for the convenient, safe storage of 54 5L cans of fuel. It is coated in

a durable red epoxy coating on both the inside and the outside and is ventilated to prevent the build-up of fumes. Double padlocked for security, it meets all current legislation for storage of hazardous goods, including the stipulated 30-minute fire resistance requirement.

Grounds maintenance contractors Weedfree Landscapes switched to Aspen Fuel two years ago, also taking delivery of one of the dedicated storage cabinets. Together with the more efficient performance of their 2-stroke machinery, Director Tim Bower notes the added safety and convenience that comes with using Aspen. "Having the fuel safely stored on-site in a dedicated cabinet means it couldn't be quicker or simpler for the team to fuel up for the day ahead. There's no unnecessary trips backwards and forwards to the filling station which results in both time and cost savings."

Also specially designed for the 5L Aspen cans is the Fillpartner Autofiller attachment, designed to make the refuelling of machines even safer and easier. The Autofiller protects you and the surrounding environment from unnecessary contact with the fuel through its unique vapour recovery system. The complete seal created between the can and the tank ensures there is no release of fuel vapours and, when the tank is full, the Autofiller automatically stops refuelling.

Utilising the Fillpartner is one way of reducing spillages and accidental fuel contact with the skin, and all but eliminates exposure to fumes. If you are an employer and your staff work with petrol powered machinery, it is your obligation to make sure that you are taking steps to protect them. The Control of Substances Hazardous

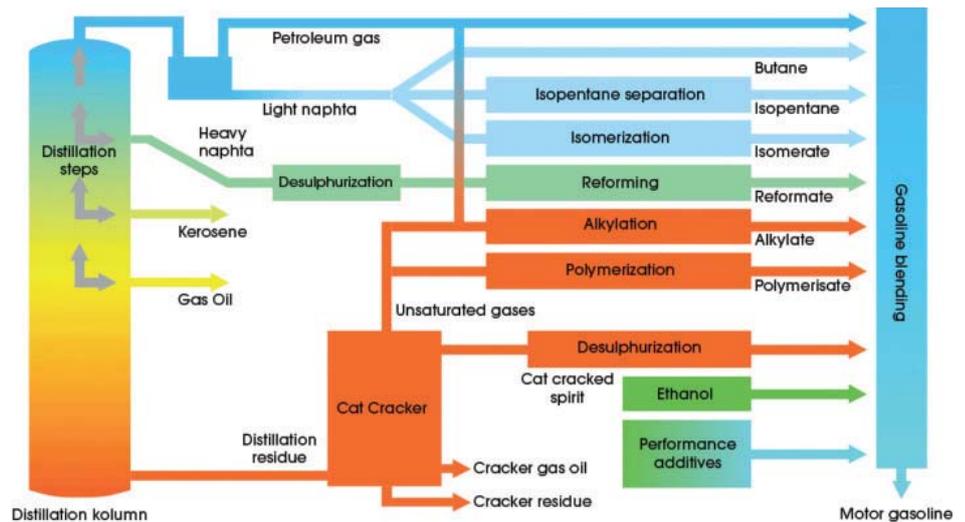


There is much to assess and consider when it comes to commercial petrol usage and regular risk assessments should be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance with current legislation

Diagram shows the regular petrol production process. By only using the cleanest Alkylate components from the refinery stream, Aspen fuel is 99% cleaner than regular petrol in regards to the amount of hazardous hydrocarbons

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It makes for a cleaner working environment which is desirable when we're working in public spaces such as schools for example



to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) recommends thoroughly assessing the risks to your health and that of your employees to identify the precautions needed. One particular topic the COSHH guidelines identify is around exposure to Benzene.

Benzene is just one of the many hydrocarbons found in conventional pump petrol. Human exposure to Benzene has been associated with a range of acute and long-term adverse health effects and diseases, including cancer. The COSHH regulations advise against Benzene exposure completely, but where this cannot reasonably be done, you should be taking steps to adequately control your exposure as far as is reasonably practicable and certainly below the workplace exposure limit (WEL) assigned for Benzene

of part per million (ppm) of air averaged over an 8-hour period.

You may think that Benzene exposure is unavoidable if you're operating petrol powered equipment and that largely 'petrol is petrol', but there are options available - Alkylate petrol being one, which differs vastly from traditional pump fuel. Alkylate petrol is made of gaseous hydrocarbons found in fossil fuels: these are a kind of vapour or gas that occurs when refining oil. This process is called alkylation and involves combining excess gases from the distillation of crude oil and from the cracking plant, resulting in a liquid alkylate. Once some additional components are mixed

in, the result is the finished fuel which is significantly purer than traditional petrol, with content of harmful aromatic hydrocarbons such as Benzene and polyaromatics (PAH) close to zero. In fact, switching to Aspen Fuel can reduce Benzene emissions by up to 108 times!

Aspen Alkylate Petrol is virtually free from Sulphur, Benzene and many other harmful substances - its use improving the health and performance of your equipment, the working conditions for the operator and significantly reducing the harmful impact your machinery makes on the environment. Aspen is also ethanol-free, which improves the reliability of engine performance and preserves the life of component parts which can be susceptible to failure when running on conventional pump fuel, especially if it has been left for any extended period of time in storage.

The health and safety benefits for the operator, equipment and wider environment were evident almost immediately for Tim and the Weedfree Landscapes team. "Straight



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Guidance around best practice can be sought on the HSE website, as well as from your insurance company and local fire authorities



No matter what type of petrol a company is using, they must take the steps necessary to ensure the transportation and storage of fuel is done safely

away we noticed the reduction in noxious fumes” he explains. “This brings fantastic health benefits for the operator, especially during prolonged periods of exposure, but it also makes for a cleaner working environment which is desirable when we’re working in public spaces such as schools for example. We are also definitely seeing a reduction in the number of faults and replacement parts we’re using.”

There are also alkylate petrol pre-

mixes available with a premium quality biodegradable 2-stroke oil, eliminating the hazards and potential damage associated with mixing, again improving safety for the operator and ensuring consistency in engine performance. Tim again, “With Aspen 2 being premixed, you know you’re getting the perfect mix every time which eliminates issues associated with equipment clogging up, reducing downtime and resulting in quite substantial cost savings.”

To summarise, there is much to assess and consider when it comes to commercial petrol usage and regular risk assessments should be conducted to ensure ongoing compliance with current legislation. Switching to an Alkylate Fuel has many benefits, including improvements in health and safety for the operators, customers and wider public, protection for the environment and increased efficiency and reliability of equipment.



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Breakthroughs and benefits

The journey to battery-power

For some time now battery-powered equipment has been heralded the future of the turfcare industry and, while the benefits of this power source have been available in smaller, hand-held equipment for years, it took a little longer for it to be a realistic, affordable option for ride-on mowers and utility vehicles. But that all changed in 2020



Toro's Reelmaster 5010-H is the first fairway mower with a true hybrid drive system

In this article, we talk to Jeff Drake, Global Product Marketing Manager for the Commercial Division at The Toro Company, who gives us an insight into the journey toward electric.

Toro's research and development teams have been working towards making battery powered machinery a reality for the turfcare industry for over twenty years. There have been some major product successes along the way in the form of impressive hybrid machines that have earned their place in some of the most exclusive and high-profile clubs around the world, but 100 percent battery-power remained elusive until last year. We asked Jeff, why was that?

"The foundation for the new eTriFlex products started over twenty years ago and has evolved along the way as technology and the availability of the core components have evolved, become more readily available, and become more durable to meet the expectations of our customers."

What were the major breakthroughs? For example, solving the issue of power-to-weight ratio?

"Technology has been the largest breakthrough for the team. The biggest influence has been the availability of proven lithium-ion batteries to

provide the superb run-time and match our expectations for producing reliable machines."

What were the biggest challenges/obstacles?

"Throughout the development process, there have been challenges and overcoming them along the way has led to the success of the finished product. Designing and qualifying the individual electronic components to replace the hydraulic components has been a significant challenge. Hydraulics are inherently very compact and powerful and replacing the individual hydraulic elements posed unique challenges for the team."

Toro is renowned for its innovation and research with new product development. How did it start and evolve for this technology?

"Toro has always built widely sought-after triplex greens mowers, so anything we did needed to be an improvement and only build on our already strong reputation. The basis for the product started with our research and development group experimenting with first a hybrid drive machine and then taking it to the next level by eliminating all the hydraulics, replacing them with electric power components. The team understood the need to evolve and build on the previous success of the product and looked to only take steps forward."



Toro's Greensmaster eTriFlex 3370 ride-on triple mower utilises all-electric components for traction, steering, lift and cutting unit drive



Without their input along the way, I don't know how you can ensure you are on the right path and making the right decisions to deliver a product that meets the needs of the customer



Jeff Drake, Global Product Marketing Manager for the Commercial Division at The Toro Company

"Along the way, not everything worked as planned, but important lessons were learned. During the journey, the TriFlex line of mowers was released, introducing our patented suspension system and introducing hybrid technology as well on a couple of the models. The TriFlex product line provided a great platform to evolve by replacing the traditional engine and hydraulic pumps with a pack of lithium-ion batteries, electric motors, actuators, sensors and controllers to keep everything communicating and working together."

Getting the cost right - how do you balance the technology and innovation process with getting the end cost right for the customer, plus keeping the Total Cost of Ownership reasonable?

"As a new product, and one that introduces new technology to the market, it often comes with an increased cost. The team was conscious of the need to provide a product that performed, but also did it at a level of value to the customer. Customer input was used to provide features that added value and benefits. The increased product cost is quickly offset by the significant reduction in operating cost and minimal machine maintenance required."

"Elimination of the engine and the regular maintenance it requires, along with operating on about 70p a day for the electricity to mow all the greens for an entire course, really start to show in the saving for an average course. Being able to start earlier and complying with low noise requirements, whilst not disturbing

local residents and golfers, is an added benefit customers can't put a price on."

What determines the next research and development towards a new battery-powered machine?

"Much like we experience in our daily lives, technology, and the development of faster smarter, and more efficient components, this will evolve the products we use on a regular basis. As the industry evolves and customers are striving to 'do more with less', so too will our product evolve to meet customers ever-changing needs. Delivering on performance while reducing the Total Cost of Ownership over the life of a product is an ongoing goal. With battery technology constantly improving, we are always looking for the next application for battery powered products while not sacrificing performance."

The arrival of the all-electric Greensmaster eTriFlex 3370 ride-on triple mower last year was a breakthrough in the world of battery power for the turfcare industry. This machine represented the next big technological advancement to the market. Using this revolutionary machine as an example, could you please tell us how your customers were involved in the process.

"Getting input from our customers is vital to the success of any project. Without their input along the way, I don't know how you can ensure you are on the right path and making the right decisions to deliver a product that meets the needs of the customer. Many times, the customer isn't always sure what



The Workman GTX with lithium-ion battery is a grounds and turf crossover vehicle featuring hundreds of configurable options such as front and rear attachments, a flat bed and four-seat option, to name a few

they want, but they are good at telling you what isn't working. Interpreting what the customer is struggling with and turning that into a solution to address their problems and challenges, is what we do. Frequently checking in with them along the development process is important to ensure you are on the right path."

How has the market responded to the Greensmaster eTriFlex 3370? What has been the feedback so far?

"Market response for the new eTriFlex products has been great. Our customers fall into one of two categories: those that thrive on new technology and those that are content with what they currently have. Fortunately, the society is a close-knit bunch and they communicate regularly and rely on the opinions and feedback of one another. That being said, the product has exceeded the expectations of those customers that were 'early adopters' and word is spreading."

"With the increase in regulations on emissions, both engine and noise, on a global level, the product was an easy choice to help customers address the new requirements they were up against. Even those customers that were content with what they had are making the switch to help comply with emissions and noise restrictions, while reducing their operating and maintenance costs as well."

What can we expect in the future, where do you see the technology going for turfcare machinery?

"With growing sentiment among customers and increasing pressure at various levels of government to provide equipment that lessens the carbon footprint of our customers' operations, hybrid, electric and alternative energy offerings will continue to increase. As with many emerging technologies, capabilities will continue to improve, costs will become more affordable, and we'll be able to introduce these technologies where our customers desire."

"Hybrid and electric technology gives us, as equipment designers and manufacturers, the ability to introduce features that provide greater control for our customers. Radius dependent speeds that govern our cylinder and wheel drive speeds when making turns with our eTriFlex units are an example of this. Radius dependent speeds were not possible with hydraulic cylinder and wheel drives due to the difference in operation as temperature of hydraulic oil increases."

In a relatively short period of time, Toro has created a hybrid range with an environmentally-focused machine for the greens, tees, fairways and maintenance duties. Here we look at the break-through products that prove it's the journey as much as the destination that's important.

- 2010** - Toro Greensmaster eFlex 21, the first lithium-ion battery-driven greensmower
- 2015** - Toro Reelmaster 5010-H, the first fairway mower with a true hybrid drive system
- 2016** - Toro Workman GTXe utility vehicle
- 2019** - Toro Greensmaster eTriFlex 3360,

utilising all-electric components for traction, steering, lift and cutting units to deliver a much quieter performance than traditional engine-powered models

2020 - Toro Greenmaster all-electric eTriFlex 3370, with the charge capacity and performance to make this important technology a practical solution at last

Also ... Toro Workman GTX Lifted Lithium - the largest capacity lithium-ion vehicle in the class

2021 - Toro Greensmaster e1021 and eFlex1021 - Lithium Ion powered versions of the popular 1021 fixed head, and Flex1021 mowers.

To talk to your Toro dealer or representative about electric turfcare machinery, contact Reesink Turfcare, the exclusive distributor for Toro golf and fine turf machinery in the UK and Ireland. Reesink is available to help you decide which machines will work best for your specific requirements and budget. There are always flexible finance deals available with deferred start dates, subsidised rates or that can be aligned to peak income months to help manage cashflow, too. It only takes a conversation. Make contact online via reesinkturfcare.co.uk, by phone on 01480 226800 or by email at info@reesinkturfcare.co.uk.



Frank Newberry

Survival and Success at Work Meetings



Whether you are a team leader or just someone who wants to make a difference, you will, sooner or later, find yourself having to communicate confidently and clearly at a work meeting. In this article, Trainer and Coach **Frank Newberry** offers us some useful tips on how to survive and succeed at work meetings

Part 1: First Impressions, Fears and Preparation

In this multi-part article we will explore in detail how to behave, including:

- 1) What to say at meetings
- 2) What not to say at meetings
- 3) How and when to speak at meetings
- 4) Where to sit at work meetings
- 5) How to deal with difficult people at a work meeting

First Impressions

At work meetings, particularly when it is our first meeting, we are in the business of impression management (for ourselves, our department and our profession).

In the UK - image and first impressions are still important to many people - and these people can still be found in positions of influence and authority at work meetings.

In my experience - no matter the dress code - if we look smart, people seem to think we are smart. Whereas, if we turn up at a meeting looking casual or scruffy - people can think we may also have a casual attitude - that we are not to be taken too seriously.

Overwhelming fear of failing

Although I looked very smart for my first work meeting - I recall being petrified on the day of the meeting and the night before. Although people said to me that I 'would be fine' and that I 'should not worry', their remarks did not help me at all. My overwhelming fear of failing accompanied me right into the meeting - and stayed with me - until the very end.

Four Actions

I learned over time that there were at least four actions that I could have taken that would have

helped relieve my anxiety and prepared me for my first meeting:

1. I could prepare and do research for the meeting by calling or networking with other people attending the meeting. I found people were quite happy to talk to me - whether I was new to the meeting game or I was experienced - but did not know them very well.

I found that people who attended meetings also had interesting opinions about other attendees, including explaining to me which people had real influence over decisions made, those who had some influence and those who had no influence at all - but liked to be seen at work meetings.

2. I could also contact the Chair of the meeting, offer my help and discuss what my department wanted from his or her meeting (our priorities). I found that once I had offered my support and help, I could successfully ask for the Chair's advice and help - on getting what I needed from the meeting.
3. Whilst discussing the other attendees I would make sure to find out what everyone's personal agendas were, why they attended, what was in it for them etc. I would also check what their likely reaction would be to my planned contributions to the meeting.

Well before the meeting, I would seek to show other attendees how my ideas would help them (individually) and their department. This might involve me in adjusting my expectations in the short term - whilst still making some progress towards my goal.

I found it was easier to explain my position to one of my peers in another department and then ask: 'Would you have a problem with

that at the meeting?' The alternative question might be 'Can I rely on your support at the meeting?'

The first question might yield some important concerns that I could deal with on the spot - whereas the latter question seems to be unnecessarily forceful to me.

4. If appropriate, after talking to the Chair, and with permission, I could also contact the Meeting Secretary regarding what the Chair said I could put on the meeting agenda.

Personal Preparation

Finally, after I had done 1 to 4 above, I would be able to do my personal preparation. To be successful, I had to prepare down to a detailed level because (back in the day) I was sometimes prone to getting tongue-tied when I was excited or under stress.

My preparation to prevent this problem was to rehearse phrases and responses that I knew would come across well to others in the meeting (for more on this see Part 2 in the next edition). I needed to come across as confident - making contributions to the meeting that flowed smoothly and were convincing.

So, good luck, be yourself, do all your preparation tasks and you will make the positive impact on people that you want to when attending work meetings.

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If you or your people would benefit from some great team training or a supervisor seminar, Frank's bespoke courses are available through Grounds Training. Visit www.groundstraining.com or call 01865 509 510 for more information.

Machinery and Supplies

Product Update

A round-up of the latest product news announced in recent weeks



Reesink Turfcare have introduced a cost-effective and uncomplicated irrigation solution to its range from SRC - the Grower 6000 D. This capable 2-wire controller provides all the control needed for easy but effective irrigation.

Available as a web-based management system or a stand-alone decoder based unit, the SRC Grower has a scheduling capacity of 1-200 stations, and 10 programmes, and can operate up to 15 stations alongside five pumps simultaneously. It benefits from flow sensor capability including various alarm options, flow management with the stacking of up to 10 simultaneous programmes and a 14-day calendar run of odd or even days. It's also fully ET capable with local and remote weather stations and has built-in lightning protection.

Less cabling means installation is straightforward, but there's the option to expand later if needed giving the product longevity. For customers who need less of the reporting and detailed irrigation and are looking for a relatively simple controller that will get the job done, then this is the one for you.

www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk

Reesink UK has launched a new division dedicated solely to electric utility vehicles. Named Reesink e-Vehicles, it introduces to the UK another award-winning brand – STAR EV and its extensive and compelling range of lithium and sealed battery-powered utility vehicles.

Responding to market demands, associated to environmental concerns, spans all industries and is an area Reesink was very much focused on in 2020 with the launch of the Toro Greensmaster eTriFlex 3370 mower and the industry's first all-electric compact tractor, the Farmtrac FT25G.

David Cole, managing director of Reesink UK,

STIHL has expanded its range of professional high-performance brushcutters with the launch of the new FSA 135 and FSA 135 R.

The new robust and powerful brushcutters build on the popularity of the FSA 130 with new compatibility with STIHL's AP battery system, make it ideal for contractors and grounds management tackling large areas of grass and brush with a variety of cutting attachments.

The FSA 135 bike handle brushcutter comes with the GrassCut 260-2 blade as standard and has an expected working time of 100 minutes when used with the recommended AP 300 S battery. The FSA 135 R loop handle version comes with an AutoCut 26-2 line head and has an expected working time of 45 minutes when used with an AP 300 S battery.

The new cordless tools feature a traditional brushcutter layout from the petrol models, with engine, drive-shaft and gearbox, meaning that the FSA 135 can fit metal cutting attachments designed for brush and wood.

Both models feature ergonomic control handles with three-level speed pre-selection with LED display, as well as infinitely variable trigger speed control for energy-efficient working and longer running times depending on the cutting attachment or conditions.



Like all of the STIHL AP range, the FSA 135 and FSA 135 R can work in all weather conditions with waterproof components. The motor also requires little-to-no servicing, whilst the easy to clean air filter ensures a long service life and optimum engine cooling.

Both brushcutters feature a sturdy battery housing with a new design, enabling users to easily slot in a battery from STIHL's high-performance 36V AP range, ideal for professional use. A range of accessories are available for both models, including Advanced Plus Harness, Advanced X-TREEm Harness and a wide range of line and metal cutting heads.

www.stihl.co.uk

Etesia UK has launched the ET Lander - a new fully electric utility vehicle built specifically for use on roads and all types of paths in both the town and countryside.

This unique vehicle has been developed to meet the future needs of their customers and has been designed and manufactured at the Etesia factory in France.

Spacious, well-equipped and user-friendly, the ET Lander is built on a robust chassis and has an array of options including a three-way tipper bed with dual control from the fully-fitted two-seater cab or by remote control when outside the vehicle.

With a length of just 3.72 metres, the ET Lander is very compact. Thanks to the power steering, the short turning radius of 4.40 metres and 360° visibility, it goes anywhere. Fitted with lead acid batteries (72V 220 Ah - producing 15.8Kw), the autonomy of the vehicles lasts for a full working day - without noise pollution. A Lithium battery option will also be available in the future.



The ET Lander can transport loads of up to 940kgs and can also tow up to 750kgs. With its all-road tyres and powerful transmission, it is a real all-terrain vehicle.

The ET Lander also allows the charging of portable battery-powered tools and the use of wired 230v electrical devices such as hedge trimmers.

www.etlander.co.uk

says: "We're focused on introducing battery-powered machinery options to the UK turfcare market. Such products have been extremely well-received and this is the direction of travel for environmentally friendly technology at the moment, one we recognise will only gain more traction."

"The globe is focused on reducing fuel consumption and heading towards electric transportation as the next transitional step. There simply has to be the choice to buy electric and we identified a gap in our offering for a comprehensive range of electric utility vehicles to complement the Toro Workman GTXe we have just rolled out here in the UK."

Perfect for golf clubs, sports stadiums and training grounds, leisure resorts and landscapers, the STAR EV range of 28 lithium and sealed battery-powered utility vehicles includes golf buggies and small, medium and large capacity electric UTVs for carrying materials, and people carriers for 4–22 people.

There will be a new team developed around the new division, plus a new website and branding, but for now further information can be requested by contacting Reesink e-Vehicles on 01480 226800 or via your usual Reesink contact with demonstrations available now.

www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk





EGO has added the Power Line Trimmer ST1400E-ST to its market leading range of cordless equipment. With a 35cm cutting width, two speed adjustments and automatic line replacement, the new Line Trimmer offers speed as well as ease of use.

- New 35cm Line Trimmer with EGO's award-winning Powerload™ technology
- Excellent run times, powered by industry leading 56V Arc Lithium technology
- Cleaner, Quieter, Safer - New mower is zero emission, quieter than petrol and low vibration

EGO's Powerload™ technology removes the fuss and frustration of line replacement. Replacing the line is as easy as pressing a button. With no manual rewinding, the line is fully reloaded and ready to use in seconds.

Easy to use and comfortable, this new model comes with an adjustable telescopic shaft and loop-handle, making it easy to adjust to fit any user or working style and reducing the need for awkward bending or twisting. The addition of a flexible, ergonomic trigger makes the trimmer simple, comfortable and safe to use.

EGO Power+ products come with extended warranties up to five years when registered within 30 days of purchase.

www.egopowerplus.co.uk

Pellenc has continued to develop its product range with the launch of two new additions to the Green & City Technology catalogue for green space maintenance professionals.



Excelion 2 Brushcutter

The new Excelion 2 battery-powered professional brushcutter has a rotational speed of 6,600rpm and a cutting diameter of 420mm for professional intensive landscaping and forestry work.

Weighing 30% less than petrol-powered brushcutters, it also has a newly designed smart handle that enables agile manoeuvring and displays digital information in real-time including current speed, battery life (as a percentage and in minutes) and power indicator.

The new brushcutter will be available in two versions - loop handle and cow handle. Each come standard with the new 'smart' control allowing the user to select the 'head' while in use. This then allows the brushcutter to adjust the power for different types of work, enabling users to complete brush clearing, weeding, mulching, sawing or mowing thick vegetation.

The Excelion 2 comes with IP54 water-proof rating, which means it can be used in wet weather and its battery life lasts up to three hours of continual use - depending on the cutting head and battery - making it suitable for professional use.

Airion Backpack Blower

The Airion Backpack blower is the most powerful battery-powered backpack blower on the market. With an airflow of 1,280m³/h and a thrust of 24N, its performance is suitable for day-to-day green space maintenance work in all seasons.

With its wide, thick shoulder straps and integrated adjustable belt, the Airion Backpack blower offers great comfort during prolonged working sessions.

Its inclined pivot gives full freedom of movement with the nozzle, allowing manoeuvrability reminiscent of a hand-held blower. Its handle can also be adjusted to the user's height, with all controls always within easy reach.

The large backlit display on the smart handle provides the user with real-time information including current speed, battery life (as a



percentage and in minutes), option currently selected (boost and cruise control) and time worked on the current work site.

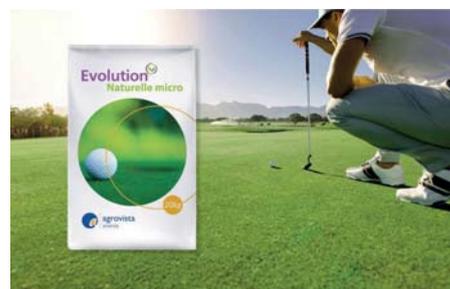
Its design optimises its aerodynamic efficiency by 15% compared to competing tools and its battery life has been extended up to three hours – depending on the battery used.

Three different nozzles are available, depending on usage – angled, angled-flat or flat.

www.pellencuk.com

Agrovista Amenity has announced the launch of Evolution Naturelle - a unique range of fertilisers which replaces the popular Marathon portfolio of products.

Evolution Naturelle is a premium range of organo-mineral fertilisers designed with a unique mode of action. Poultry based Evolution Naturelle contains essential nutritional elements



such as phosphorus (P), potassium (K), magnesium oxide (MgO), sulphur (S) and iron (Fe) which are compounded to the advanced granulation making them available for plant uptake.

Key features

- Low carbon to nitrogen ratio
- Provides healthy balanced growth due to phased release of nutrients
- Complexed potassium for slow release
- Promotes stimulation of bacterial soil life helping reduce thatch build
- Hardens turf due to cell division and cell extension as a result of ammonium take up
- No scorch risk due to low salt index when applied at the correct rates
- Increased tillering for a denser sward
- Ammonium produces large volumes of root hairs which ensure active uptake of micronutrients

No matter what the time of year, or the requirement, the Evolution Naturelle range offers a solution, and below is just a snapshot of what customers can expect.

The Evolution Naturelle Micro range consists of Spring - to optimise consistent grass plant response at the start of the growing season; NK - which produces a consistent plant response during the growing season; Summer - for phased release and a steady growth response throughout the core of the growing season;

Renovate - to support sports turf surfaces post renovation with the aim of promoting rapid recovery back to expected playing conditions; and Autumn - for steady resilient growth at the end of the growing season.

The Evolution Naturelle Sport range: Spring - which contains three nitrogen sources blended to optimise consistent grass plant response; Summer - a zero-phosphate analysis for phased release; Autumn - for consistent growth and healthy natural colour; and Allsport - designed for application throughout the growing season with a balanced formulation of plant essential elements.

The Evolution Naturelle Base range: 4-3-2 - designed to be used across a range of horticultural applications including turf surfaces, landscape constructions, amenity and ornamental plant borders; 7-6-14 which contains slow release, organic components to provide consistent nutrition for reliable growth; and Preseed 8-12-8 - a balanced analysis of primary and secondary macronutrients designed to support strong and consistent rooting.

The result of following an Evolution Naturelle fertiliser programme is a sward with firm, shorter leaf blades brought about by the increase in tillering and improvement in leaf cell structure.

The new Evolution Naturelle range of fertilisers are available with immediate effect. Contact your local technical advisor for more information on setting up your programme.

www.agrovista.co.uk/amenity



Toro's genuine rotary blades are designed for success. The brand's advanced research and development into this essential part means that, when a Toro deck is paired with Toro blades, a superior clipping dispersal and after-cut appearance is the result.

Not just that though, rigorous testing means they're proven to be safer too and optimal grass dispersion for side or rear discharge and recycling movement for mulching decks is guaranteed.

So, what about choosing the right blade? Toro's precisely engineered blades fit the cutting deck perfectly, but each is carefully crafted to specific turf needs. For example, the 'High Sail' is best for spring when the grass is still thin and wispy or prone to falling over a lot, or if you're missing grass leaves with other rotary blades.

The 'No Sail' (flat) blade is a good choice, working well in very dry and dusty conditions and across areas that are not mowed as regularly, plus these blades make quick work of cutting down weeds.

Genuine Toro parts are delivered within 24 hours of ordering, where stock is available. Contact Reesink at info@reesinkturfcare.co.uk or call their Spare Parts team on 01480 226854.

www.reesinkturfcare.co.uk



Baroness UK have announced they are the new sole importer and distributor for AgriMetal rollers for the UK.

Adam Butler, sales director for Baroness UK, said, "We are extremely pleased and excited to be working with such a well-made and respected brand."

"We already produce market leading cutting technology for a wide range of mowing equipment but now we have added to our portfolio, in my opinion, one of the most affordable and well-made rollers on the market."

"To add the icing on the cake, they will be rolling off the production line sprayed in the fantastic Baroness red."

The range available will consist of the GR-400 and GR-660 - pictured above.

"The GR-400 model is the most affordable, high specification roller on the market," added Adam, "with the GR-660 model providing an industry leading 66" width roll."

www.baronessuk.com

Leading groundcare machinery specialist Campey Turf Care Systems has been appointed as the Martin Lishman Micro-Spray worldwide distributor.

The Macclesfield based company has built a strong reputation in the turf care industry for their innovative product range that covers the entire spectrum of maintenance tasks. The new Micro-Spray from Martin Lishman sits well within the Campey ethos of providing customers with high-quality machinery that enhances established practices.

Martin Lishman National Sales Manager, Joel Capper, is confident Campey will increase the profile of the Micro-Spray and take it into new markets and is excited to continue working with the company.

The key aim of the Micro-Spray is bringing versatility to the groundsman's armoury. A narrow footprint allows it to fit through most gateways and passageways to tackle hard to reach spraying areas.

With a 120-litre tank, the option of a 2.5m six nozzle or 3.5m eight nozzle three-section folding boom and the perfect combination of power, control and responsive handling, the Micro-Spray is suited to all types of sports grounds, golf courses and landscaping work. The comprehensive yet easy to use control box



gives the operator more control over the sprayer with changeable motor direction to either walk behind or in front of the sprayer, 12 motor speeds, bout marker selection, a battery level indicator and optional hand lance.

Spray application rates, operating speed, and the pump pressure can be accurately and quickly controlled by the operator, as well as the adjustable boom height and independent shut-off nozzle bodies. All of these features come together to make a versatile sprayer that provides the same exceptional results time and time again regardless of where you're working.

For more information or a demonstration of the Micro Spray, contact your local dealer or visit www.campeyturfcare.com.

Leading European fertiliser producer COMPO EXPERT has introduced the highly-effective Kick® Fairway wetting agent into the Kick® product portfolio - to help turf managers economically and effectively deal with water efficiency issues on sports turf and golf course fairways by keeping the grass sward in excellent condition during drought periods.

Kick® Fairway joins the well-established and highly-effective Kick® family of wetting agents, which includes the Kick® concentrate and Kick® LDS brands for sand-based turf environments. These best-selling European wetting agents are between four and six times more concentrated than other wetting agents on the market - offering superior performance and economy.

Designed to improve water infiltration in hydrophobic situations, the environmentally-friendly Kick® Fairway wetting agent helps turf managers increase their effective water management by improving water penetration and absorption in all natural soil profiles. Kick® products reduce the effects of drought



conditions and stress by promoting root growth into deeper horizons. This NEW product provides a cost-effective answer to large outfield areas across golf and sports turf, while utilising the unique global Kick® technology.

Kick® Fairway application rate is 2 litres per hectare in 600 litres of water. For best results, apply monthly from April to September.

Kick® Fairway is available from Agrovista Amenity. www.amenity.agrovista.co.uk

U.S. based manufacturer, AriensCo, has expanded its presence in Europe with the acquisition of AS-Motor, on 3 May, 2021.

The move is the latest demonstration of AriensCo's commitment to its development within the European market and follows last year's announcement of Europe's first zero-turn production facility at their U.K. plant in Oxford.

This latest acquisition expands the company's European footprint, which also has locations in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia with a 112,000 sq ft manufacturing and distribution facility, over 150 employees, over 750 dealers across the U.K., Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

AS-Motor products are sold through 400 dealers in Germany, over 100 dealers in France and distributors throughout the rest of Europe and the world.

Both AS-Motors and AriensCo are experiencing continued high demand, and the broadened product portfolio complements both companies'



long-range goals. AriensCo and AS-Motor will leverage the combined European sales and marketing infrastructure to expand the reach of both brands.

www.ariens.com/en-gb

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*Offer ends 31st August 2021.

OFFSIDE

The not so serious side
of the industry

Tom Cruise signs Woburn shirts

Two football shirts signed by Tom Cruise have helped a grassroots club meet its fundraising goal ahead of schedule.

Woburn & Wavendon Football Club recently had to vacate its Bedfordshire sports ground to make way for the Mission: Impossible 7 film crew.

The club decided to ask the production company if Cruise could sign some shirts for a crowdfunding campaign. Committee member Wes Williams said it was an "amazing surprise" when they discovered the star had obliged.

The two shirts raised £650 and helped the club reach its target of £12,000.

Chairman Robert Hill said the club had lost about £30,000 due to various tournaments

being cancelled due to coronavirus and said "there were tears" when he realised they had reached the target, and it had made him feel "hugely optimistic" about the future.



Football 'fwend'

This is the most Jamie Vardy story you'll ever hear.

The Leicester City striker is ready to bid for The Inbetweeners' famous 1996 Fiat Cinquecento Hawaii at an auction as he's obsessed with the show.

Vardy regularly uses 'football fwend' when joking around and is keen to own the car as a 'collector's piece'.

You just know he's turning up at the King Power in this!

'Calendar Girls' at Weymouth Golf Club

A group of women have raised more than £5,700 for charity as they posed for a 'Calendar Girls' style calendar.



Women from Weymouth Golf Club posed behind strategically placed golf carts, umbrellas, trees and cakes to preserve their modesty as they created a 2021 calendar, with all the money raised being donated to Weldmar Hospicecare, a specialist end of life care provider supporting people living in Dorset.

Local photographer Penny Piddock took the photographs.

Ladies captain Sharon Rand is thrilled that she and her fellow golfers raised more than £5,700 for the Hospice, which she nominated as the club's charity of the year.

The worst National team in the world score

San Marino, ranked 210 out of 210 in the FIFA Men's rankings, had one of its finest hours recently as it got the sphere in the net - a task that has proven most difficult for San Marino.

Going into a friendly against Kosovo, they had only scored 24 goals in its history. The last time anyone on the team had found the back of the net in a competitive game was in November 2019. The time before that was all the way back in 2017, during a 5-1 loss to Azerbaijan.

The most goals that San Marino has scored in a calendar year is three.



Do we think this dog is called 'Bernhard'?

If you spot anything you think might give readers a chuckle send it to:
kerry.haywood@pitchcare.com

DIARY DATES

JULY

1st, 4th: Cricket - England v Sri Lanka ODIs, The Oval (icc-cricket.com)

3rd: Horseracing - bet365 Old Newton Cup, Haydock Park (thejockeyclub.co.uk/haydock)

8th-20th: Cricket - England v Pakistan ODIs, Cardiff Stadium (icc-cricket.com)

9th-10th: Horseracing - John Smith's Cup, York (yorkracecourse.co.uk)

10th: Tennis - Wimbledon Championships Ladies Final (wimbledon.com)

11th: Football - UEFA Euro 2020 Final, Wembley (uefa.com/uefaeuro-2020)

11th: Golf - Open Championship, Royal St. George's (theopen.com/royal-st-georges-149th-open)

11th: Tennis - Wimbledon Championships Men's Final (wimbledon.com)

16th-20th: Cricket - England v Pakistan T20s (icc-cricket.com)

17th: Rugby League - Challenge Cup final, Wembley (rugby-league.com)

21st-22nd: Trade Show - BIGGA Festival of Turf, Warwickshire Event Centre (bigga.org.uk)

21st-21st Aug: Cricket - The Hundred (thehundred.com)

24th: Horseracing - QIPCO King George Diamond Day, Ascot (ascot.co.uk)

24th-7th Aug: Rugby Union - South Africa v British and Irish Lions Test series, Cape Town (lionstour.com)

27th-29th: Trade Show - SAGE 2021 - The Sports & Grounds Expo, The Three Counties Showground, Malvern (sportsandgrounds.co.uk)

27th-31st: Horseracing - Qatar Goodwood Festival (goodwood.com)

AUGUST

2nd: Horseracing - Rock at the Races, Royal Windsor (windsor-racecourse.co.uk)

4th-8th July: Cricket - England v India, 1st Test, Trent Bridge, Nottingham (icc-cricket.com)

4th-6th: Horseracing - Festival of Racing, Brighton (brighton-racecourse.co.uk)

12th-16th July: Cricket - England v India, 2nd Test, Lords (icc-cricket.com)

18th: Horseracing - Ladies Day, Worcester (worcester-racecourse.co.uk)

19th-22nd: Golf - Women's British Open, Carnoustie (aigwomensopen.com)

25th-29th July: Cricket - England v India, 3rd Test, Lords (icc-cricket.com)

30th: Horseracing - Bank holiday family fun day, Epsom (thejockeyclub.co.uk/epsom)

SEPTEMBER

2nd-6th July: Cricket - England v India, 4th Test, The Oval (icc-cricket.com)

2nd: Horseracing - Racing League Race Day, Newcastle (newcastle-racecourse.co.uk)

4th-6th: Golf - Solheim Cup in Toledo, Ohio (solheimcup.com)

10th-14th July: Cricket - England v India, 5th Test, Old Trafford (icc-cricket.com)

14th-16th: Horseracing - Eastern Festival, Great Yarmouth (greatyarmouth-racecourse.co.uk)

24th-26th: Golf - Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits, Wisconsin (rydercup.com)

27th-1st Oct: Cricket - Bob Willis Trophy final, Lord's (lords.org)

29th: Horseracing - Floodlit racing, Kempton Park (thejockeyclub.co.uk/kempton)

To have your event included in this magazine diary section, please email details to kerry@pitchcare.com

QUOTE ME HAPPY

"We'll see if he'll be a great player. He's not yet. Sometimes he drinks coke, he eats fries and he knows I get mad. He is fast, he dribbles well. But that's not enough. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication. I'm not going to pressure him to be a player. However, I especially want him to be the best, whether he's a footballer or a doctor." **Wise words from Cristiano Ronaldo on his son.**

"Where's the pay-off for getting vaccinated? Why aren't these people rewarded by being allowed to go to Wimbledon? And not even just for Wimbledon, all the events in the summer, concerts, the Euros - let's see Scotland against England with a full house." **Britain's Jamie Murray has criticised coronavirus restrictions around Wimbledon, saying people should be "rewarded" for having had vaccines.**

"I was crying, my mum was crying and my dad. I couldn't really believe it." **Ben White says he cried for an hour after finding out he had been called up to England's provisional squad for Euro 2020. I wonder how he feels now he has made the team?**



"Clearly Jordan's not fit - I don't think he should be involved... I've heard people say they want him around the place - for what? Does he do card tricks? Does he have a sing song? Does he do quizzes in the evenings?" **Roy Keane on Jordan Henderson.**

"I f**ed up... I'm sorry. I probably made the situation worse". **Naomi Osaka's sister attempted to explain her French Open withdrawal and was accused of weaponising mental health.**

"I will give my Champions League medal away to my daughter if I win it, so she can share the experience with someone she loves who has never touched a medal." **Pep Guardiola speaking about his daughter hanging out with Dele Alli.**

"There should be a lot of clubs out there dreaming. Everything is possible if you work hard, have a clear strategy, togetherness, and then everything is achievable in the world. I just wanna get so drunk tonight and think about the Premier League tomorrow." **Brentford manager Thomas Frank after their fairytale promotion to the Premier League.**

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