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**> GREENKEEPERS' ASSOCIATIONS AND GOLF**

# **Greenkeepers' Associations and Golf**

**This document is intended to be a living history of greenkeepers' associations in the United Kingdom. If you have any information or photographs that you would like to add, email [info@bigga.co.uk](mailto:info@bigga.co.uk) and use the subject title History of Greenkeepers' Associations.**



## Greenkeepers' Associations and Golf

Most greenkeepers' associations started because of the will of the founders to get together with their peers to talk about the various topics for discussion of the trade.

Greenkeeping could be a lonely profession, especially in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, where quite often the greenkeeper would only have one or two assistants. Except for areas of links land around our coasts where courses often touch each other or are just a mashie niblick shot from one to the other, many courses could be quite a distance apart and the greenkeeper could not just jump in the car and nip round

to his neighbour for a coffee and a chat on the latest problem on their courses.

Usually, with the help of a friendly company man, such as happened in Scotland with J L Forbes and in England with FG Hawtree, a group of greenkeepers would get together to discuss and possibly share their worries with like-minded men. Most of them would be golfers and so a game of golf at the same time was a way of encouraging others to join in. But of course, like any other group of golfers they would not just play for the fun of it and a little competition would be thrown in. This led to the system we have today, where association sections will host at least two or three competitions per year. There is also the National Tournament held every year at a different course around the country.

Over the years there have also been various events sponsored by companies and organised by the greenkeepers' association. All of these have had varying degrees of success, with most being run for a few years before being superseded by others.

From 1924 onwards, certainly until 1935, Carters (Seedsmen) presented a gold watch to the winner of the Golf Greenkeepers' Association (GGA) national tournament and a silver watch to the runner up each year. I was interested to note that an E Small (Goodwood GC.) won the gold watch in 1934, but as far as I know we are not related.

In the 1930s games were played on more than one occasion between the GGA and both Oxford and Cambridge Universities and the greenkeepers more than held their own in these matches.

Also in the 1930s, two photographs show teams from England and Scotland playing an international match. One was played at Barnton in Edinburgh and the other at Royal Birkdale in 1938, in which my father Bob Small played. No results have been found.

Throughout the years many companies have supported and sponsored greenkeepers' spring and autumn meetings, providing prizes and assistance when required. It would seem the first major sponsored tournaments probably started with Ransomes in 1973, when they held their first of what would be a triennial international tournament with teams from the Americas and Europe. Seven of these were held over an 18-year period in what proved to be a popular tournament, with the last taking place in 1991. This was an extremely successful tournament that brought together greenkeepers and superintendents from all over the world. In addition to the tournament there was usually a conference held on the previous day, attended not just by the players but by anyone who wished to join.

## **Ransomes International**

The Ransomes International was held every three years between 1973 and 1991 and was played for by teams of four players from associations around the world. Scotland won the first one but after the seven events had been played Canada topped the poll with three wins, Scotland had two and USA and Belgium had one each.

The events were held as follows:

*Date; Venue; Participating countries; Winners*

1973; Woodbridge GC; Canada, England, Europe, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, USA, Wales; Scotland

1976; Walton Heath; Belgium, Canada, England, Europe, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, USA, Wales; USA

1979; Walsall GC; Belgium, Canada, England, Europe, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, USA, Wales; Belgium

1982; Ipswich (Purdis Heath); Belgium, Canada, England, Europe, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, USA, Wales; Canada

1985; St Andrews Old Course; Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Germany, Holland, Northern Ireland, Norway; Rep of Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, USA, Wales; Canada

1988; Woodbridge GC; Austria, Canada, England, Holland, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, USA, Wales, West Germany; Scotland

1991; Fulford GC; Austria, Belgium Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Holland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Rep of Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, USA, Wales; Canada

### **Marshalls Concessionaires/Jacobsen Tournament**

In 1983 Marshalls Concessionaires, a machinery company, started a national tournament. Greenkeepers qualified through their section or region events and the finals were played at Hunstanton Golf Club.

In 1985 the tournament came under the auspices of Jacobsen, who continued hosting the event.

*Date; Venue; Winner*

1983; Hunstanton GC; Paul Pearse

1984; Hunstanton GC; Mike Jones, Ingo GC

1985; Hunstanton GC; Peter Shaw, Preston GC

## Kubota Tournament

In 1983 Kubota began a tournament that was to be played annually between teams from the secretaries association, the club stewards and the greenkeepers. The first one initially involved just the members of the British Golf Greenkeepers Association (BGGGA) but members from both England and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (EIGGA) and Scottish and International Golf Greenkeepers Association (SIGGA) were selected for the team the next year.

In 1985 the Association of Golf Writers was invited to participate. The format was match play foursomes and singles.

In 1988 The English Golf Union (EGU) was invited and in 1991 The Golf Foundation also took part. This was a great tournament, enjoyed by many members of the various organisations and played in a very competitive manner. From 1983 to 1997 fifteen tournaments were played, with the greenkeepers having the lion's share of the spoils and winning nine. The EGU won three, the secretaries two and the Golf Foundation one.

### *Date; Venue; Competing teams; Winners*

1983; St Pierre GC; BGGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards; Greenkeepers  
1984; St Pierre GC; GK's Assns, Secretaries, Club Stewards; Secretaries  
1985; The Belfry; GK's Assns, Secretaries, Club Stewards, AGW; Greenkeepers  
1986; The Belfry; GK's Assns, Secretaries, Club Stewards; Greenkeepers  
1987; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards; BIGGA  
1988; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards, EGU; BIGGA  
1989; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards, EGU; BIGGA  
1990; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards, EGU; Secretaries  
1991; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, Club Stewards, Golf Foundation; BIGGA  
1992; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; BIGGA  
1993; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; BIGGA  
1994; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; Golf Foundation  
1995; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; English Golf Union  
1996; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; English Golf Union  
1997; The Belfry; BIGGA, Secretaries, EGU, Golf Foundation; English Golf Union

## Iseki Tournament

In 1988 the Iseki company held the first of what would be a five-year sponsorship of a regional team tournament, where a nine-man team from each of the five regions of BIGGA competed for team and individual prizes. Another most enjoyable tournament that gave many members the opportunity to play for the pride of their region in a fiercely competitive but friendly way on some very high-quality courses. It also gave a large number of members the opportunity to interact with their fellow greenkeepers from all over the country.

In 1988 I was part of the team that hired a coach to take us to St Pierre, leaving late afternoon. On the M4 at night the coach broke down. I stayed with the coach, which was a terrible decision as the coach rocked all night long from the huge lorries roaring past. Chris Kennedy took the rest of the team to a service station a mile along the motorway. A replacement coach arrived from Scotland at about 7am the next morning and we eventually got to St Pierre.

While playing the tournament, Charlie White found himself fighting off a swarm of bees and was quite sorely stung. But like a brave Scotsman he carried on. We didn't win, but had enjoyed the tournament and meeting guys from all over the UK.

The next morning we were told that the replacement coach would not start. A pickup truck arrived to jumpstart the coach and soon we were on our way. All went OK until we stopped at a services near Gretna. Soon after starting off again the coach lights and windscreen wipers failed. So the driver was heading down the motorway in the rain at night with no wipers and no lights! Boy were we pleased to disembark at Hamilton services and needless to say, we never used that company again.

*Date; Venue; Winner; Regional Team Trophy*

1988; St Pierre GC; Edwin Walsh, Whitefields GC

1989; Moor Allerton GC; Les Shrubbs, Pycombe GC; Northern Region (946 points)

1990; Moortown GC; John Lax, Worksop GC; South East Region (937)

1991; Hillside GC; Telford Jarvis; Northern Region (884)

1992; Coventry GC; Jim Byrne, Eire; Midlands Region (926.5)

## Hayter National

With the end of the Iseki sponsorship, the Hayter company stepped in to carry on more or less the same format with slight differences in the rules and conditions. As with the previous tournament, the competitors had to qualify from events held in their own region and they were not hand-picked teams. This gave many members old and young the chance to play in a national tournament.

This event ran for five years and once again was played on some of the best courses in the North of England.

*Date; Venue; Winner; Regional Team Trophy*

1993; Sandmoor GC; Mike Hughes, Edgbaston GC; Northern Region (916 points)

1994; Pannal GC; Maurice Clark, Eire; Northern Region (885)

1995; West Lancs GC; William Banks, Herne Bay GC; Scottish Region (899)

1996; Fairhaven GC; Stephen Heap, Rothey Park GC; Northern Region (642)

1997; Ganton GC; Nick Webber, Northern Ireland; S West & S Wales (943)

In 1996 Hayter introduced an international flavour to events when it hosted the Hayter International. This was played between a team from The Rest of the World and a team from the Americas. The first one was held at West Lancashire GC in parallel with the Hayter National being held at Fairhaven. Two years later and the fixture was held in Atlanta, Georgia. In both cases the American team proved too good.

*Date; Venue; Winners; Score*

1996; West Lancs GC; Americas; 10-8

1998; Atlanta; Americas; 13.5-10.5



### **John Deere tournament**

In 2002 John Deere held a tournament for teams from throughout the UK comprising the head greenkeeper, professional, secretary and captain from each club. The team qualified through a region event and played in the final at the Belfry. This was a tournament that had run for many years in the USA and the big incentive for winning the UK final was the invitation to play in the Grand Final in the USA.

The winning clubs were:

2002; Brockenhurst Manor

2003; Whickham

2004; Worfield

2006; Horne Park

2008; Rotherham

### **Greenkeepers and golfers**



There are many instances of greenkeepers or members of greenkeepers' associations who were top class golfers and it is impossible to list them all, especially those from the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

One that I do know of from the early part of the century was J T Dobson, a greenkeeper at East Renfrewshire Golf Club who won the Scottish Amateur Championship in 1925.

While this record is really about greenkeepers who achieved success in the playing of the game, it would be remiss of me not to include a non-greenkeeper, but one who has an association with the BIGGA from its inception and is now our patron, Sir Michael Bonallack. Bonallack's achievements in amateur golf are too numerous to spell out here but suffice to say he won five Amateur Championships, five English Amateurs and four Brabazon Trophies. He also played in nine Walker Cups and seven Eisenhower Trophies, plus many other tournaments. With a record like that he is one of the best amateurs ever from the UK.

A highlight of any amateur golfer must be playing for your country against the USA and Sandy Pirie, greenkeeper at Hazelhead GC in Aberdeen, achieved this when he played in the 1967 Walker Cup. He also represented Scotland from 1966 to 1975

Tom Craddock, who was chairman of the Eire Section of the BGGA, also played in the Walker Cup teams of 1967 and 1969 and won the Irish Amateur in the late 1950s.

In Northumberland in the 1950s and '60s Jimmy Hayes, greenkeeper at The Northumberland, played for his county 108 times and was seven times county champion. He also won the Scottish Seniors in 1988.

Edwin Walsh represented England as a Boy International and was placed fifth in the British Youths Championship in 1958. Edwin was for many years the man to beat for the scratch award at the BGGA National Tournament.

Lachlan Millar, or Jock as he is better known, won the Berkhamsted Trophy in 1965 and also won the Somerset County in 1971 and 1980. Not to be outdone, his brother Alec Millar, who was at Denham, also won the Berkhamsted Trophy in 1971.

Malcolm Latham, the former head greenkeeper at Hexham Golf Club, was an England Boy International and in the 1970s played alongside Nick Faldo and others of that stature. He represented both Durham and Northumberland on many occasions.

Stuart Taylor, course manager for the Glasgow Golf Club, has a most impressive CV of awards. He was a Scottish Boy International in 1976, Scottish Boy Champion in 1977, runner up Scottish Youths in 1979 and '80, Scottish Youth International in 1977, '78 and '79, captain in 1980, full Scottish International in 1979 and '80 and British Youths International in 1979 and '80.

Alister Taylor, twin brother of Stuart was a Scottish Boy International in 1976, Scottish Youth International in 1977, '78 and '79 and Scottish Stroke Play champion in 1978.

Trevor Foster, a course manager at Accrington, led The Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes in 1988 during the first round. One of the finest amateur golfers of his generation, Trevor has won the Seniors Amateur Championship, the Irish Senior Amateurs Championship, and played in the British Senior Open in 2019.

Tony McLure, from Whickham Golf Club, won one of the most prestigious trophies in amateur golf when he won the Lytham Trophy in 1993 and followed this up with the English Mid Amateur in 1994. He also won the French Mid Amateur in 1997 and represented England in the Nations Cup. He was also a six-time Durham county champion and a BIGGA champion.

Down in the South West and Paul Newcombe, now at East Devon, won the Devon County Championship and also captained the county team.

Greg Evans, from Ealing GC, was also a top-class amateur, counting the Berkshire Trophy in 2001, the English Champion of Champions in 2002 and Middlesex County Champion in 2002 as highlights in his career.

Glenn Campbell, Blairgowrie GC, was the Scottish Amateur Champion in 2005, a Scottish International and Perthshire County Champion in 2000, '01 and '02.

John Gallacher a greenkeeper at Swanston GC in Edinburgh, was runner up in the 2005 British Amateur, having already won the Craigmillar Park Open that year. In 2006 he won what is possibly the oldest amateur tournament in the world, the Tennent Cup, and in 2007 he capped his amateur career by winning the Scottish Amateur. He also played for Scotland in the Home Internationals of 2005, '06 and '07. John is unusual in that although a right hander, he plays with his left hand below his right.

Gary Tough from Carnoustie won the 72-hole Craigmillar Park Open from a high-class field and has represented his county on many occasions.

There are many instances of greenkeepers winning their county championships and representing their counties. People like Derek McJannet, who is also a past BIGGA Champion, Walter Woods, George Brown, Craig Kilgour from Ponteland, Gordon Child, who played in a couple of Open Championships in days long ago, and there must be many more.

My last entry is a little unusual as she was never a greenkeeper, but in the early days of BIGGA she was a valued member of the BIGGA office staff. Emma Duggleby won British, English, European, South African and Scottish Championships, played in three Curtis Cups and six European Ladies Team tournaments. We should be proud to count Emma along with Sir Michael as members of our Greenkeeping Associations 'Good Golfers Club'.



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## **Greenkeeping**

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### **History of Greenkeepers' Associations**

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