

Groundsman

THE LEADING UK MAGAZINE FOR THE GROUNDS CARE INDUSTRY

VOLUME 59. No.1 January 2006 UK £4.00



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Groundsman

THE LEADING UK MAGAZINE FOR THE GROUNDS CARE INDUSTRY

VOLUME 59. No.1 January 2006 UK £4.00



**HAPPY
NEW YEAR
TO ALL
OUR
READERS**



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By Andrew Varley

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goes to our
own **Sarah Middleton**



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Breeding grass to survive everything

GRASS breeders are getting to grips with all types of weather in these uncertain times – even climbing mountains to conduct trials in the toughest conditions.

In this issue you can read about the latest developments from breeders Top Green who have discovered cultivars that can germinate and survive in freezing conditions in the Cairngorms – plus survive long periods of drought.

And DLF Trifolium have produced results of STRI research into overseeding at different rates, using treated and untreated seed.

The report, in this issue, makes for very

interesting reading and might dispel a few myths surrounding overseeding.

British Seed Houses have also been doing some very interesting work at IGER in Aberystwyth. A report on their results is also in this issue.

New cultivars coming into the marketplace have exceptional toughness and good colour, making life slightly easier for hard-pressed groundsmen – particularly in stadiums.

But some of them may struggle to survive the pounding of two rock concerts and capacity audiences such as experienced by head groundsman Craig

Richardson at Bristol City FC. His story makes the word “challenge” an understatement.

Congratulations

Well done to Sarah Middleton for her well-deserved feature-writing award from the National Turfgrass Foundation.

The NTF awards in Blackpool recognised some outstanding talent, including Professor Bill Adams and Doctor Alan Gange, both well-known to IOG members for their research work.

Finally, a happy New Year to all readers from all on the magazine.

Editor

***Don't forget BTME at Harrogate (January 24-26) which cheers the month. We hope the snow holds off and we get some of that mild spring-like weather that the show is often lucky to attract.**

Manchester area members – the IOG needs you!

ARE you a groundsman, or someone involved in the grounds care industry, in the Manchester area?

Would you like to help resurrect the Manchester branch? Once a lively and dynamic branch of the IOG national network, in recent years meetings and events have been a bit quiet.

As such, we would like your help. Following their annual meeting earlier this year when new committee members were elected (Ian Mather-Brewster of Middleton Cricket Club as chairman, Lee Jackson of Manchester City FC as secretary and John

Bancroft of Bancroft Amenities as committee member) it has been decided to try and move the branch forward.

Local branches provide grounds staff throughout the country with support, information and educational opportunities – and the chance to meet socially with like-minded people. It was on this ethos that the IOG was founded and continues to grow.

The following IOG Corporate Members have already pledged their support to re-establish the Manchester branch:

Steve Halley, Cheshire Turf Machinery

Simon Gumbrell, Campey Turfcare Systems
Andy Roberts, Sisis

Jayne Leyland, Barenbrug UK

Andrew McMahon, Rigby Taylor

Brian Mainwaring, Aitkens Sportsturf

Martin Solari, Fleet Line Markers

If you would like to have access to this in the Manchester area, why not help form a new committee and influence the direction of your branch?

You will receive the full support of head office staff and your surrounding branches.

Interested? Contact Lee Jackson by email: lee.jackson@mcfc.co.uk

DEATH OF CHARLES PARKER: We were sorry to learn of the death of life member Charles Parker as we went to press. Condolences to his family and friends. There will be an obituary in the next issue.



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Poisoning case sparks action

A PARKS worker in Sheffield has resigned pending a dismissal hearing after he stole paraquat weedkiller responsible for the death of a 35-year-old father of six.

City council gardener Gary Knight stole 250ml of paraquat from council stores, transferring it to an opaque drinks bottle for use on a friend's patio.

But the bottle passed between four people and ended up in the fridge of Carol Langdon.

Her son, Mark Langdon, mistook the paraquat for a soft drink. The liquid is thought to have only touched his lips but was enough to cause abdominal pain.

He died three weeks later in intensive care following respiratory failure as a result of paraquat poisoning.

Court action taken against Knight saw him fined £250 on two occasions.

Sheffield council has now changed pesticides operations. Only staff in supervisory

positions have access to pesticide stores and are keeping more detailed records of usage.

The council is urging other authorities to review their pesticide storage and usage procedures to prevent similar incidents.

Martin Page, head of parks, woodlands and countryside, said: "The systems the council had in place at the time of the incident were considered by the Health and Safety Executive to be adequate and within the legal requirements for the safe storage of this particular substance.

"It is the case this herbicide was stolen from that safe storage by an ex-employee."

*The Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is seeking a worldwide ban on the use of paraquat. The chemical's main producer, Syngenta, said it did not pose a risk to users when correctly used.

A spokesman said: "We spend millions on product safety and user safety advice."

Tameside council wins gold with soil help



A NATURAL compost and soil improver from ALS Natural Solutions has been credited with helping Tameside MBC win a prestigious Gold Medal in this year's North West in Bloom Awards.

The result secured also a national nomination for Tameside MBC in the 2006 RHS Britain in Bloom Awards, when the Borough will join an elite group of entries from around the country that will be judged next summer in the Large City category.

Gold Awards are the highest accolades in both the regional and national Britain in Bloom competitions organised by the Royal Horticultural Society. Winning a Gold Medal recognises outstanding efforts in the areas of horticulture (floral displays and permanent planting), environmental cleanliness, sustainable development initiatives and community involvement.

Trialled on a small-scale by Tameside MBC in 2003, Mycorrmix produced a marked

improvement in the long-term vigour of the selected beds and borders, according to corporate operations manager Pete Hadfield who is also Tameside MBC's Britain in Bloom Officer.

"The excellent plant growth and vigour achieved by the natural compost in its first year led to its use in all of the floral gardens in the town of Ashton during 2004," said Pete. "The results convinced us that Mycorrmix should be incorporated within planted beds, borders and floral gardens across the Borough in 2005 when we hoped to improve upon our previous North West in Bloom entries."

Applied in early summer at a rate of one 80 litre bag per two square metres of soil, Mycorrmix was utilised in more than 15 different locations including all of the flower beds on the judging route within Tameside – a compact Borough of just 40 square miles located seven miles east of Manchester.

Details: ALS on 01952 641949 e-mail: sales@amenity.co.uk web: www.amenity.co.uk

Landscape gardener killed by mower

A YOUNG landscape gardener in Essex died when he drove a mower he had not been trained to use.

An inquest in Chelmsford recorded a verdict of accidental death after hearing Elliott Wilson (24) had defied company instructions.

William Broomfield, managing director of Acer Landscapes, said Wilson had received a written warning for using the ride-on mower without authorisation.

He said no employee was allowed to use equipment without training.

But Wilson persuaded his supervisor to let him use the mower. He was told to leave wide berths round obstacles and trees which would be strimmed around.

Later Wilson was found with the mower overturned and a tree branch across his neck.

Stephen Hook, a health and safety inspector, said: "It is impossible to say categorically what happened. One thing was obvious – whatever Elliott had been instructed he was getting as close to trees as possible. Some trees had been cut right up to the trunks.

"It is conceivable he simply did not see the branch and ran into it."

The mower was found to have a non-functioning cut-out switch and other faults but the accident would not have been prevented had the mower been fully working.

Acer Landscapes has set up training courses on mowers and every employee is only allowed to use equipment they have been trained to use – a message reinforced in an induction and health and safety course.

Groundsman writer wins feature award

GROUNDSMAN writer Sarah Middleton won the best non-technical feature award at the NTF (National Turfgrass Foundation) conference in Blackpool.

Four other *Groundsman* writers were nominated for awards.

Editor Mike Beardall and writer Maureen Keepin were named in the non-technical category and Terry Mabbett and Chris Gray in the technical feature category.

The magazine was also nominated for a design and layout award.

Sarah, who also won a farming feature-writing award at the Royal Show, said: "To win two awards connected with the natural turfgrass industry is amazing and I am truly honoured and very proud."

She was unable to attend the conference and her award was collected on her behalf by Mike Beardall. He said: "We are delighted her talent has been recognised by such eminent judges."

*NTF awards and pictures: Page 9.

Council parks staff win business 'Oscar'

COPELAND Borough Council's Parks Department is celebrating its success in winning two prestigious awards at the North West Business Excellence Awards in Liverpool.

The Parks Department won the awards and the whole team were honoured. Copeland beat off a number of much larger public and private sector competitors to take one of the awards for customer results.

The Parks Department has been involved in the Excellence North West scheme for two years, and the two awards achieved this year (one for being a finalist, and one special award for Customer Results) are a step up from last year when the team won the Marques of Excellence.

Terry Chilcott, Copeland's Corporate Director (Quality of Life), enthused, "I am absolutely delighted for all of the parks department. The whole team worked especially hard as can be seen from the borough's success in Cumbria in Bloom and Britain in Bloom.

"The awards are also a triumph for the council at this time where we are striving to improve our customer focus."

Toni Magean, the Parks and Open Spaces Manager who received the two awards from Sir Tom Farmer, CBE, the Founder of Kwik-Fit



Pictured: Parks apprentice Gary Mossop (left) and park warden Michael Little (right) receiving the awards from the Mayor of Copeland, Councillor Norman Clarkson (centre)

added: "We knew that we had done well to be invited to the award ceremony, but even I was surprised when the result of the award for Customer Results was announced. Our whole team worked hard throughout the year."

The Parks Team's success has been recognised

at a ceremony where the team was thanked for their efforts by the Mayor of Copeland, Councillor Norman Clarkson, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Environmental Services, Councillor Allan Holliday, and senior Council officials.



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Regional parks forum in Northern Ireland

MORE than 100 delegates from across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland attended Your Space, a conference organised by GreenSpace on behalf of Belfast City Council, at Belfast Castle.

Northern Ireland's first GreenSpace conference, Your Space was an important first step in establishing a GreenSpace Regional Forum in the province that will work to raise the profile and standard of its public spaces.

GreenSpace has already established several regional forums in other parts of the UK, which are working effectively to provide members with a vehicle for strategic information exchange.

Regional forums provide an opportunity for local authorities and other stakeholders to form a united approach to work towards the improvement of parks and public spaces.

Delegates at the conference showed support for the concept of a GreenSpace Regional Forum in Northern Ireland, and many indicated their willingness to become actively involved in its establishment.

Encouragingly, potential members included representatives from the Republic of Ireland, suggesting a potential for the proposed forum to provide a united voice.

Hilary Brady, Chair of the Chief Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) in Northern Ireland, said:

"CLOA was greatly encouraged by the interest shown in the potential Regional Parks Forum and supports its establishment.

"A seven-council model has now been announced with increased powers in enhancing the public realm, and it is now opportune to collectively discuss key parks and open spaces issues and promote the benefits they bring to communities."

Speakers at the conference included Maurice Parkinson, Belfast City Council's Head of Parks and Cemeteries Services, who presented the city's recently launched Open Space Strategy, which outlines its vision for Belfast's parks and open spaces until 2020.

Dr Jane Wilde, Director of the Institute of Public Health in Northern Ireland, discussed the potential of parks and green spaces to improve the nation's health.

Mark Robinson of the Heritage Lottery Fund (Northern Ireland) focused on the significance of heritage to today's society, and gave useful advice on how to access HLF funding.

Glasgow City Council's Tony Boyle presented a case study of how local people were engaged to help transform Glasgow's Tollcross Park from a no-go zone to a treasured place for the community.

Details: 0118 946 9068 or email beckyv@green-space.org.uk

Major boost for Reaseheath turf event

THE REASEHEATH Sportsturf event in July received a boost at an exhibitor 'think-tank' held at the College.

Various exhibitors from the past three years were in attendance including Fleet Line Markers and Lloyds of Letchworth.

New exhibitors for 2006 were also present including 4-Cast Fertilizers Ltd who see the event as being a prime location within their existing sales area and providing good potential to meet with golf and amenity customers.

Among several new initiatives are a potential seminar on education, held on the afternoon prior to the event and a new, more tightly-structured show layout to maximise foot-flow.

A public relations campaign has already commenced and will include an official show guide for the day of the event which is scheduled for the first Wednesday in July as usual.

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First chairman for SAPCA natural sportsturf division



WILLIAM MARTIN, sales and marketing director of Kestrel Golf and Sports, has become the first chairman of The Sports and Play Construction Association's (SAPCA) newly-launched Natural Sportsturf Division.

Elected officially by members of the division in early November, William will serve as chairman for the next two years.

The association's new vice-chairman, also elected in November, is Graham Longdin, of Agripower Sportsturf.

William said he would be doing his utmost to give governing bodies and prospective clients the security that by choosing a SAPCA recognised natural sportsturf contractor, a project would be completed to the highest standards.

Among its main roles, the division has been formed to represent and promote experienced contractors that meet the division's agreed membership criteria.

The aim is to promote high standards of construction within the sportsturf industry, and to provide a valuable forum for on-going dialogue within the industry involving contractors, manufacturers and suppliers, consultants and specifiers, governing bodies and funding agencies.

SAPCA is the UK trade association for the sports facility construction industry and represents specialist constructors, manufacturers and suppliers of sports surfaces and related products and plays an important role in the promotion of high standards for sports facilities.

With an annual investment in these facilities of over £100 million, the UK sports construction market is one of the largest in the world.

Details: SAPCA on 024 7641 6316/email: info@sapca.org.uk

Help with judging to raise standards of our parks

THE CIVIC TRUST is appealing for more judges to help in the quest of raising the profile of the nation's parks and green spaces as the Green Flag Award scheme continues to grow.

As the Trust's Liverpool team gears up for the Green Flag Award application Award Round 2006, the spotlight is on the dedicated band of Green Flag Award judges, who will begin their training at the scheme's regional training venues in the new year.

Over 500 green space professionals now make up the ever growing network of Green Flag judges who volunteer their time to assess applications.

But judges are always needed to meet the continuing growth in the scheme year on year.

The rewards of becoming a Green Flag Award judge are numerous. As well as the inevitable benefits such as training and personal development, volunteers will join one of the fastest growing networks of green space professionals in England and Wales today and become a member of the judges' association.

Operations manager, Lorraine Scanlon said: "Our judges are the backbone of the scheme which thrives on the quality, professionalism and experience they bring. And from feedback received, it is clear our judges find the whole experience of assessing a Green Flag Award application a tremendously rewarding one."

For further information about becoming a Green Flag Award judge, visit www.greenflagaward.org.uk or call 0151 231 6900.



New sportsturf book from STRI

A NEW book, written by Dr Stephen Baker, will be published by STRI next month.

It replaces his popular but now out of print "Sands for Sports Turf Construction and Maintenance", first published in 1990.

The new title, "Rootzones, Sands and Top Dressing Materials for Sports Turf", is a complete revision with four additional chapters. Content covers all aspects of sands, rootzones and top dressing materials for sports pitches, golf courses, bowling greens, cricket pitches and lawn tennis courts.

Published in full colour, the new book also

incorporates a useful directory, listing contact details of suppliers in the UK and Ireland.

The book will cost £12.95 with 10per cent discount for STRI subscribers, plus post and packaging.

As a special promotion all orders received with payment before January 27 will be sent the book post FREE (a saving of £3). Orders for pre-publication copies should be sent to Linda Gallagher in the STRI bookshop by telephone on 01274 565131, e-mail linda.gallagher@stri.co.uk or via STRI's on-line book catalogue at www.stri.co.uk.

Dates for your diary

January

22-27 Harrogate Week
24-26 BTME and Clubhouse
25- 26 The Hire Show, Excel, London

February

6-11 GCSAA Show, Atlanta

March

1 Amenity Forum, Edgbaston
1-2 GCSAI Annual Conference, Galway

April

7-10 IOG Conference, Watford

May

16-18 SED, Milton Keynes
23- 27 Chelsea Flower Show

Golden smiles at Blackpool dinner

HUNDREDS of industry names gathered at the National Turfgrass Foundation's annual awards dinner in Blackpool last month.

Groundsman magazine writer Sarah Middleton won the award for best non-technical article – a feature on Northampton County Cricket Club.

Other writers nominated were editor Mike Beardall, feature writer Maureen Keepin and technical writers Chris Gray and Terry Mabbett.

The magazine was also nominated in the design and layout award category. A full list of awards and nominations appears below.

The event was part of a week of seminars at the Hilton Hotel on all aspects of turf culture.

IOG chief executive Geoff Webb, who was presenting awards, said: "This is a tremendous event to recognise all those who support this very vibrant industry."

As well as media awards, various individuals were recognised for their achievements.

The NTF lifetime achievement award went to Professor Bill Adams for his work in sportsturf research. He was at Aberystwyth University until his retirement, but is still an active figure in the industry. The results of his work on cricket pitch research is still considered the definitive guide to the subject.

He also received an IOG lifetime achievement award at the Newport conference three years ago.

"There is still plenty of work to do in this industry and I think there are many niche areas



Some of the audience at the NTF awards at Blackpool Hilton

which don't get a lot of funding," said Bill.

Richard Linley, senior inspector of courses for the Jockey Club, was given a celebrity award for "progressing, enhancing and influencing the British turfgrass industry beyond the call of normal working duties".

He praised the IOG for their work in developing courses for racing groundsmen and former inspector of courses Neil Wyatt for developing training and awards for groundsmen in the racing industry.

His award, said the judges, was for his "tireless efforts in bringing education and training to a previously-neglected facet of the turfgrass industry".

Doctor Alan Gange, senior lecturer in environmental biology at Royal Holloway, University of London, received the 2005 NTF research award.

The corporate care award for the company which has done most to promote and advance the industry was Syngenta Products.

All the nominees in this category were congratulated for contributing massive sums of money to the Tsunami Appeal and the Gulf Coast Hurricane Appeal.

More than £5million was donated by the six nominees who included John Deere, Rainbird, Textron, Toro and the Golf Course Superintendents' Association of America.

NTF award results

BEST NON-TECHNICAL ARTICLE

WINNER: 'Aeration boosts wicket quality' by Sarah Middleton in *The Groundsman*

NOMINATED: 'Cream of Irish sport' by Mike Beardall in *The Groundsman*
'Commanding presence' by Maureen Keepin in *The Groundsman*
'Keeping it in the family' by Ellie Tait in *Pitchcare Magazine*

BEST TECHNICAL ARTICLE

WINNER: 'Turfgrass disease – recognition and management' by Dr Kate Entwistle in *Pitchcare Magazine*

NOMINATED: 'When Winter comes' by Noel Mackenzie in *Golf Club Management*
'Knapsacks unpacked' by Dr Terry Mabbett in *The Groundsman*
'Performance enhanced' by Chris Gray in *The Groundsman*

BEST DESIGN AND LAYOUT OF A MAGAZINE

WINNER: *Golf course architecture*

NOMINATED: *The Groundsman*, *Pitchcare*

Magazine, *Golf Club Management*

INNOVATION OF THE YEAR AWARD

WINNER: The 'Beamrider' laser marking machine by FLEET

NOMINATED: The 'Pocket laser thermometer' by DELTA
'Grassworks' computer software by Greenfactory

CORPORATE CARE AWARD

WINNER: Syngenta Products

NOMINATED: John Deere, Rainbird, Textron, Toro and the GCSAA

CELEBRITY OF THE YEAR

WINNER: RICHARD LINLEY, Senior Inspector of Courses, The Jockey Club, for efforts in bringing training and education to his sector of the industry

NOMINATED: DAVID GOLDING, Executive Director, Greenkeeper Training Committee, for the development and expansion of greenkeeper training, particularly within the workplace

LOUISE CLEGG, British Seed Houses, for her work in giving her free time to administer the National Turfgrass Foundation, for which she receives no remuneration, and her efforts to promote the British Association of Golf Course Constructors

INTERNATIONAL CELEBRITY OF THE YEAR

WINNER: STANLEY ZONTEK, Director of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the USGA Green Section, for the support and encouragement that he gives to course managers, young greenkeepers and trainees in the British golf course maintenance industry
NOMINATED: GERRY BYRNE, The K Club, Ireland. Course manager for the forthcoming Ryder Cup
DR PANAYOTIS NEKTARIOS, University of Athens, for research into environmental issues of nutrient and pesticide losses through leaching

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Professor Bill Adams



Groundsman editor Mike Beardall with Sarah Middleton's feature award



William Gilbert of British Seed Houses hands over the feature writing award



IOG chief executive Geoof Webb (left) hands the innovation award to Phil Sharples of Fleet



Martyn Jones (left) hands the lifetime achievement award to Bill Adams



Alan Gange collects the research award from Martyn Jones, NTF trustee



Bruce Graham (left) of Golf Course Architecture and Paul Simpson (right) with William Gilbert of BSH



Stanley Zontek (left) collects the celebrity award from David White (BAGCC)



Dave Saltman of Pitchcare with Duncan McGillvray handing over a feature award



Duncan McGillvray with Roger Hargreaves of Sisis during the prize draw



Louise Clegg of BSH with Nick Martin of Scotts during the raffle



NTF trustee Martyn Jones with partner Linda



Clive Liddiard of Hampton School with greenkeeping legend Jack McMillan

Back to VICTORY



SARAH MIDDLETON *re-visits a rugby club groundsman who was struggling under the financial shadow of the receivers in 2003, but whose efforts have now won him the much coveted title of the RFL's Groundsman of the Year.*

GRAHAM OSBOURNE'S daily battle to maintain the pitch at Halifax Rugby League FC's Shay Stadium is financially a little easier than it was in 2003, but physically no less demanding.

Back then he had minimal groundcare equipment to work with – and no budget to speak of – to help him protect the pitch against the damage inflicted on it by both footballers and rugby players.

As well as being the home ground for the rugby league club also known as the Blue Sox, the 9,500-capacity stadium is also home to Nationwide Conference division Halifax Town Football Club.

Today he and his colleague Mark Hans have a budget – around £9,000. And although there have been no new additions to the machinery shed, the pair says that the job has become a little less frustrating from a financial point of view.

"We loved our jobs back in 2003 and we still do. We are committed to the club – that's why we do it," says Graham.

And committed they must be. At worst, Graham and Mark faced 20 matches in one week to prepare for and clean up after – their remit also involves cleaning the stands, toilets and stadium as there is no dedicated staff for these additional jobs.

"It was just the same two years ago – I don't know how we find enough hours in the day," says Graham.

One big difference is that he and Mark now know that their efforts will be rewarded with a pay

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packet at the end of the month. "In 2003 HTFC was in administration and the Blues were having financial difficulties. That's no longer the case. The club was taken over by The Shay Stadium trust about 18 months ago and everything has been sorted out now," he says.

Gone are the days when Graham was forced to resort to using economy white vinyl silk emulsion to mark out the pitch rather than a purpose-made product. "We use the proper stuff now," he says with a smile, adding that they get through

quite a bit of it as different pitch lines are needed for football and rugby. "But we don't have to worry about the cost of it now. And we use specialist paint to 'green out' the lines. If football lines are visible on a rugby pitch, or vice versa, then a match can be called off."

Despite the difficulties two years ago, pitch management remained Graham's priority – it still is. And his award is testament to that.

Seeding is carried out all year round, using a disc seeder, and he and Mark like to verti-drain as often

as possible – between six and eight times a year – whenever the pitch begins to hold water. It's not an easy task and can prove expensive.

"The club doesn't have a machine for the job so a contractor has to be called in to verti-drain, as well as disc seed, spread sand, scarify, and carry out most other 'big and expensive' jobs. Sand spreading costs came to more than £1,000 per application last year – a lot for a small, lower division club. And this all comes out of our budget – there's no extra cash available."

Back in 2003, Graham said he'd like the club to buy a vertidrainer (once he'd been paid too of course). Today he says he's happy to hire one. "For the amount of time it would be sat in the shed, it would be a waste of money to buy one. Hiring is so much cheaper and we can do just as good a job."

A new mower is still on his wish list, although he says that the one he has now is not too bad. "It's second hand. It's better than the one we had, but I'd still like a new one."

Mowers are what Graham and Mark dream of, preferably two of them. "When the rugby and football seasons overlap, we can be here until 10pm some evenings cutting the grass. Two mowers would dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes to cut the pitch and get us home at a sociable hour," explains Graham.

He's had a taste of how easy life could be since the club borrowed a mower for the winter from a local cricket club. "It's a smaller, 30-inch Ransome machine and, even though

it's 40 years old, it's better than what we've got in some ways because it's more mechanical and doesn't break down."

A solid mechanical mower would be ideal for the ground, according to Mark, who reminisces fondly about a sit-on John Deere mower the club borrowed last year. "It mulched the grass as it went along, but again, more importantly, it didn't break down."

In the past, the pair tried not to dwell on thoughts of their ideal mower, and certainly didn't look through machinery catalogues because the stadium had no money. "We didn't bother looking because we only got despondent," says Graham, who says that although cash is still limited, things are certainly looking up.

If money was no object then there are many things that Graham would like to do to improve the pitch.

Re-laying the pitch would be a good place to start, according to Mark. It was last laid in 1999, using fibre sand, but is in need of more work. "I'd like to put more fibre sand in the goal mouths and along the linesmen's runs. The pitch is built on an ash base and the stadium is built on top of a rubbish dump, but Graham and Mark's work means that today it's a long way from that.

This is predominantly because the pair keep on top of routine tasks such as applying fertiliser and seeding. Rigby Taylor, a company local to the club, carries out routine soil sampling to pinpoint any nutrient deficiencies. "A rep comes every 10 weeks or so and, as you can imagine, the pitch is deficient in most things," says Mark. A 12:0:9 fertiliser is applied during the summer months, and a 3:0:3 plus magnesium and iron dressing is applied in the autumn to improve root growth.

Weeds are not a problem at the ground. Graham and Mark swiftly remove any 'invaders' by hand.

Magpies and foxes – the bird and mammal variety, not rival football teams – are less easily dealt with and two years on are still causing problems. "We still often catch magpies trying to bury discarded burger buns and chips in the pitch – God only knows why. And we sometimes get problems with foxes digging it up too," says Mark.

Human vandals used to be a problem, cutting nets, covering the pitch with paint and daubing the



Graham with machines pictured two years ago



Graham Osborne (centre right) collects his award from Andrew Cartwright, son of the late Brian Cartwright, after whom the award is named. His grandson is on the left



The superb state of the Halifax pitch is testament to Graham's hard work

ground with graffiti: "But things are better now. There are fewer housing estates near this stadium. The number of break-ins has also fallen. Now we're the only people painting the pitch," adds Graham.

March through to May and July through to September are the busiest times of year for the groundcare team. The working week length can vary between 40 and 70 hours, but no overtime pay is offered. "I suppose we could take the extra time we work off in lieu, but there's no respite in the work to be able to take it," says Graham. "If the pitch and stadium aren't ready for a match, the club loses money, so we have to get on with the job. We take great pride in what we do," he adds.

As far as Graham knows, the Shay is the only UK ground ever to have held both a rugby and a football match, at professional level, on the same day. Obviously gluttons for punishment, they did it for a second time.

"And this time it was worse for us because it was on January 3. It was horrendous. The football game was live on Sky in the afternoon and the rugby match started at 7.30pm. We had to clean the stands and mark up the pitch before the second game could start," says Graham.

Back in 2003, Graham and Mark's problems were compounded by a half-built stand – the east stand. Work stopped in 2000 when HTFC ran out of money. So far £1m has been spent on the project, and another £1.5m is needed to finish

the job, according to Graham.

The good news is that the money has been found and should be completed in 2006. The bad news is that, even when finished, the stand will still shade the pitch, so the pair will still face the same problem. "It shades all the way up to the half-way line in winter – we cancelled two matches in December because the pitch was frozen and I suspect there will be more of that this winter," says Graham.

"But at least the finished stand won't be an eyesore and, once the corporate facilities are open and the 'gate' goes up, more money may be available for pitch improvements."

The south stand, which was covered in 2000, also causes a shading problem. "We said at the time that we needed a clear, Perspex roof to prevent shading on the pitch, but we were told it would cost too much money. In the event the roof they did put up blocked out much more than just sunlight – it blocked the floodlights. Additional lights had to be added to the front of the stand to compensate and that meant that the job cost just as much as it would have done if transparent roofing had been installed, says an exasperated Graham.



"Perhaps there will be some spare money in future to correct this. In the meantime we're ordering some new covers to keep the frost off, protect the pitch and prevent any more match cancellations.

Fortunately the pitch is good, says Graham – an understatement,

considering his recent accolade. "We'd be struggling even more to keep it up to playing standard if it wasn't," he says. "Particularly as both teams also train at the ground – the pitch never really gets a rest."

Perhaps Graham and Mark should take a well-earned one themselves,

but they won't. That's why the pitch, and Graham's skills in managing it, impressed the RFL judges. And that's why the pair continue to take the stadium pitch from strength to strength, despite the many obstacles they have faced and any new ones that appear in the future.





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Tough job needs energy



Alan Little: "Moving gave us facilities"

SARAH MIDDLETON *meets the man who keeps Melton Mowbray's rugby pitches up to scratch for a busy season*

ALAN LITTLE has a big job – and plenty of the energy needed to do it superbly.

He looks after the four pitches and a training area, used by Melton Mowbray Rugby Club and King Edward VII school's under 15's and under 16s teams rugby team. More than 150 matches a season means that they take quite a hammering, but Alan and his team take it in their stride.

MMRFC has 17 teams – 12 junior and five senior. "So we see a lot of wear during the winter," says Alan, unfazed by his annual battle to keep the pitches even and 'green' during the coldest months of the year in what is locally known as the highest, coldest and windiest part of Melton Mowbray in North Leicestershire.

"When you take in the mini tournaments that are played here, I think we're looking at more than 150 matches each season," he adds.

His season begins in September and runs until April. "It's very rigid too. We're not allowed to

play outside the RFU calendar – they're very strict on that," says Alan, who is probably glad of the rest, come May, not that his work stops there.

The pitches have to be renovated, cut and one is converted to an athletics track during the summer months. And areas for javelin, shot and discus all have to be marked too.

Alan has worked for the school, which takes 2,000 pupils and boasts Monty Python star Graham Chapman as a past student, on a contract basis for more than 10 years. He and his team are also charged with tending its shrubs, flowerbeds and other sports surfaces, including four tarmac tennis courts, an Astroturf hockey pitch and three football pitches.

The rugby club has been based at the school for the past seven years. Prior to that its matches were played on several pitches across the town. "Moving to the school meant it had better facilities – for changing, playing and



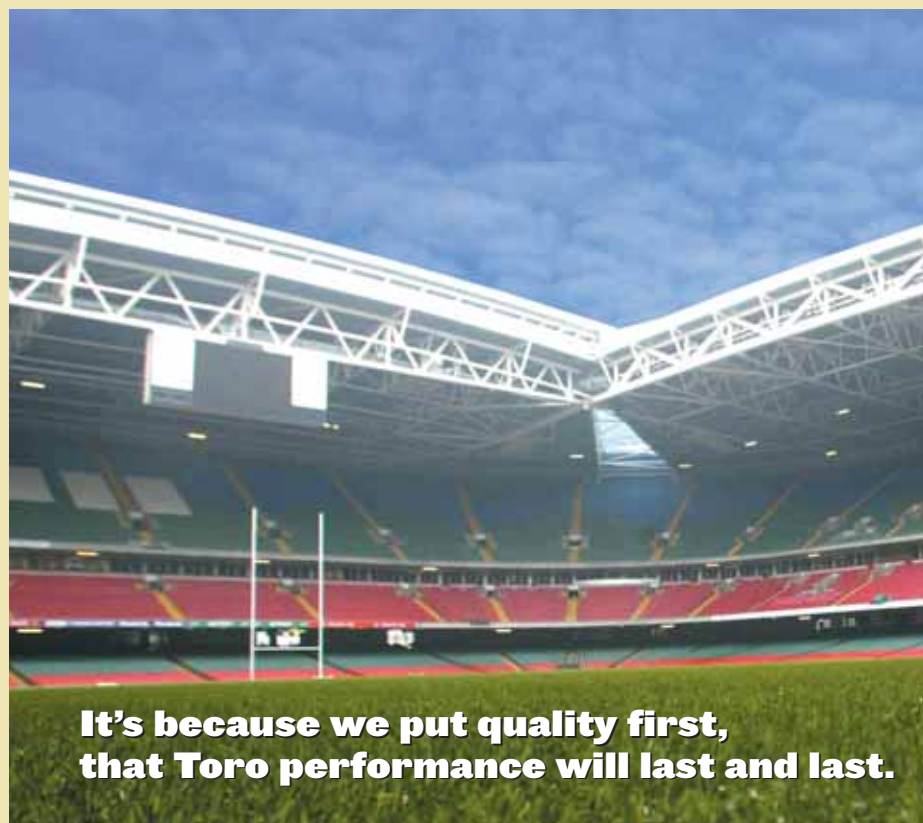
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socialising,” explains Alan.

Alan has three ride-on mowers in his artillery of turf machinery to help him keep the rugby pitches in tip-top condition. It takes two days to cut all the school’s grass pitches using a triple mower attachment.

“We try to keep things as simple and economical as possible. Just one of the three football pitches is ‘kept up’ right through the winter. The other two are brought into play as and when required,” explains Alan.

The Astroturf has to be brushed – usually using an ATV on turf tyres with a drag mat or a brush – to prepare it for play and keep it clear of leaves and other debris. The same can be said for the tennis courts, which are in use all year round. They also have to be treated with moss killer on a regular basis.”

Other routine jobs include spiking an area of one of the rugby pitches that’s prone to flooding. “The pitch that doubles as an athletics track in the summer – ‘number two’ pitch – does get slightly waterlogged at one end, particularly when we’ve had a lot of rain. It’s on a slight slope and the water tends to gather at the bottom end,” says Alan, adding that the problem is exacerbated by the fact that all the pitches are on clay.

One pitch – the newest one at the school – had herringbone drainage installed in 2004.

Alan says that he thinks that there is some



One of the rugby pitches at King Edward VII School

kind of drainage system under the third pitch: “If there wasn’t, I suspect it would get much wetter than it does at the moment.”

That said, Alan says that they don’t get an awful lot of rain at the site: “It can be raining all around us, but we don’t get any here,” he says,

adding that when it does rain, it rains hard and the centre of the town, which is just down the hill, often floods.

Alan began his groundsman career in 1990 after spending 22 years in the army as an electronic systems engineer. He took a course at



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nearby Brooksby College and one of his first contracts was looking after the nearby Asfordby Mine site.

"It had more than 15,000 trees and twice a year I had to make sure that all shelters and stakes were in good order. And the bank they covered also had to be cut every summer – it was a big job.

"When the mine closed, the local county council moved my company – Lancar Horticulture – on to school contracts and that's how we ended up here," says Alan, who now has two permanent full-time staff, as well as employing temporary labour during busy periods.

Alan and his team also look after a variety of other sites, including doctors' surgery grounds, schools and the gardens of several large local houses.

After 15 years 'in the field', Alan loves his



Good sward on the corners

job and enjoys the varied – and sometime challenging – aspects of looking after MMRFC's pitches.

His renovation work – and preparation for the summer sport surface 'switch' – begins just prior to the last rugby match of the season. "As soon as we see a good amount of broad-leaved weed growth we get on and spray – usually with Headland. We're controlling mainly dandelion, daisy and plantain."

The grass is then cut to just an inch (25mm) – using a Hayter Beaver triple mower – and then the school contracts in a local farmer who overseeds all the grass pitches.

"Every other year, the same guy will also hollow tine and top dress with sand, to aerate the pitches and to aid drainage," explains Alan.

The contractor also applies a slow-release fertiliser and then it's up to Alan and his team to mow throughout the summer.

"We cut to around 12mm – the same as the rest of the grass fields, but stop cutting the areas where the rugby pitches will be at the beginning of August. Then we just hope and pray that the sward grows to about 50mm," says Alan.

The club used to like playing on longer grass – about 150mm: "This was dropped to 100mm and then again to 50mm. The game's got faster," adds Alan.

Cutting stops at the end of October: "After that I only cut the pitches at the request of the club. I start cutting again in March and gradually reduce the sward height down to 50mm to avoid shocking the grass," he explains.

All goalposts remain in place all year round, except for one set which stand where the athletics track is situated in the summer. It takes a couple of days for Alan and his team to set up and mark up all four pitches before the beginning of the season.

"It has to be right. We usually get through the season without re-setting – just re-marking. But if by sometime near Christmas the lines are not true, we will re-set them as simply re-marking is not accurate," says Alan.

Alan enjoys rugby. He used to play as a schoolboy and is an avid spectator. That said, he stresses, with a wry smile, that he only comes up to the club on a match day to ensure that the facilities are not being abused.

"Parking can be a problem here and some people were parking on the grass next to the pitches, so we put up a rope cordon. And then that was being taken down and ignored, so now we have concrete bollards," he explains.

With cars no longer on the top of his hit list, Alan is now focusing his attention on another problem – dogs, or rather their irresponsible owners! "I really do wish someone would head up a campaign against allowing dogs onto school fields. Whether they're used for sport or not, I think it's dangerous when owners allow their dogs to foul on school grounds and not clear it up."

Alan suffered with a nasty cyst before he left

the army and his doctors said that is was the result of contact with dog faeces when Alan was abroad. So he feels particularly strongly about irresponsible dog owners.

"There are signs up at every entrance to the school and its grounds saying that dogs are forbidden to enter, but people just ignore them. And they add insult to injury by not cleaning up after their dogs.

"I think that they think that it is their right to walk their dogs here. But what about the rights of the children and rugby teams to play on a clean, safe pitch, without having to worry about what they might land in!"

Due to the blatant flouting of the rules by some dog owners, another of Alan's tasks is to ensure that the pitches are clear of dog faeces, as well as anything else that may cause a hazard, such as broken bottles. Litter is a problem, but the school has a dedicated 'litter picker' who picks most of it up.

'Golfers' can also cause problems and it's difficult to deter them from entering the school grounds too. "So much so that we've resigned ourselves to letting them play on one field – we don't bother chasing them off it any more," says Alan. "Golf balls can do a lot of damage to mowers, so we keep the 'golfers' in one place and use a triple cylinder mower on that field.

Divots left by rugby players – not golfers – are a bigger problem. "The players are supposed to replace them after a match, but the away teams sometimes neglect to do it," explains Alan, adding that, on the whole, the MMRFC players do respect the pitch and what Alan is trying to achieve. "After all, it's predominantly for their benefit," he adds.

"If we get a nice dry spell during the winter, I turn the chain harrow upside down, attach it to the back of the ATV and push the divots back mechanically. I don't like to roll the pitches too much as I think that this compacts the soil."

Disease, unlike dogs and golfers, keeps a respectful distance, helped by the rapid air movement and dry conditions at Melton Mowbray's highest point. "We do get blackened, dead patches of grass, but that's where the children have walked or cycled across frosted grass – and who can blame them when it feels so good under foot!"

Alan would, however, prefer it if they were to use the Lottery-funded paths that have been recently installed across the school, rather than taking shortcuts across the grass.

"It would help to ease the burden on the grass, but they don't use the paths as much as we'd like them to. They tend to take the shortest route between two points.

But he sees the funny side: "Getting the children to walk on the paths is about as likely as there being no games to mess up the pitches," laughs Alan.

"Now that really would make my job so much easier, but it would also take all of the satisfaction out of it."

Hard work for good results

DAVID HURST
*describes his work
for the Cambridge
University rugby
ground – and reveals
the pressure on him*

I HAVE been employed by Cambridge University Rugby Union Football Club, for the last 16 months.

My previous job was as head groundsman at a large comprehensive school in South Wales.

I have been involved with sports turf for the last 20 years and have recently acquired my NVQ Level Three.

The club was formed in 1872, two years after the opposition in Oxford. The ground is in the middle of the gown part of the city, located off Grange Road. Cambridge City Rugby Union FC is near one end of Grange Road and St Johns is at the other. Most of the sports grounds for the university colleges are within a radius of about a mile. This makes it a top position for all types of sports.

CURUFC is a charitable organisation, which relies on sponsorship and the entry money from the annual Varsity match for its funding. This is then divided between Cambridge and Oxford. The club does not receive any funding from the University Colleges.

The main focus for each year is the Varsity match between Cambridge and Oxford. This,

as many people will know, is held at Twickenham in the first week of December.

All of the Light Blues (Cambridge) efforts throughout the year are focused towards the day. The Cambridge Blues and the under-21 side both play a Varsity match on the day.

The Blues captain is chosen in the January before and has the task of creating a strong team, ready to play at Twickenham in December. To help the Blues prepare, they play various sides at home and away which include teams such as Wasps, Harlequins, Samoa, Leinster and London Welsh to name a few.

Then after the Varsity the whole process starts again. This starts with the choosing of a new captain.

The main rugby pitch was laid in 1937 and is of a sandy loam soil. The pitch does not have any drainage, so I put on 80 tonnes of sand per year. About 40 tonnes after the pitch is verti-drained in the spring, then a further 40 in the summer, if the budget allows, which gives us better drainage.

When I came into this post the pitch had been over-used and not maintained with the

best equipment. One of the main issues was compaction of the soil. So my first job was to start to get as much air to the roots as possible as this is the backbone of a good maintenance program.

The pitch is verti-drained as soon as we come to the end of the season, then slit tined from the middle of August to the end of December. This has improved the root depth from three inches when I arrived to nine inches now, a year later. I have begun to use liquid kelp as a soil conditioner and a product called energiser which stimulates microbial activity and enhances the uptake of nutrients. We need good root depth to sustain the amount of rugby and football played on the pitch.

The equipment that the club had when I started was a 20-year-old Kubota with agricultural tyres, a small ride on MTD garden mower and a triple Ransome Parkways.

Over the last year the Ransome has been replaced by a John Deere 2653A which enables me to present the pitch more professionally and has helped to reduce the amount of rust because the grass is being removed.



The pitch is always in good condition - even after heavy matches



David Hurst surveys his handiwork

The next piece of equipment that is desperately needed is a verti-drainer, as compaction is a real problem. I hope to get this within the next year.

The pitch is maintained by mowing up to four times a week in the growing season and is kept to a height of 35–40 mm. This leaves the pitch with a good sward and a cushioned playing surface. The pitch is cut in opposite directions to prevent nap formation.

Scarification is completed twice a month from end of April until September. We only use the roller in the spring to bruise the ligule; this encourages the plant to tiller.

Ten tonnes of divet mix is used to put the divets back. I use a chain harrow with the spikes up and two old tractor tyres on top, so you do not get the compaction from the roller. This helps to ensure a better soil structure and

encourages the drainage to work.

The pitch is tested for nutrients and PH two to three times a year. This ensures the pitch has the right PH and NPK levels. Currently the PH is a little high but is coming down with aeration and the right type of fertiliser.

The first year saw many problems with chafer grub but, with spraying in autumn, this is now under control with no signs of reoccurrence.

About £1000 is spent on seed for the main pitch and the training pitches. The main pitch is over-seeded at 17gm per m² in three directions. This is done as soon as possible after the season is over, as we have very little rain to start germination. I start irrigation as soon as I can, this helps combat the poor rainfall. This is done with a javelin speed rain. The whole main pitch can be watered in a day

and with the use of a wetting agent – this is then cut down to once a month.

At the moment the pitch consists of about 20 per cent annual meadow grass, as I have not got the resources available to get in a koro top maker to remove this; I use a better cultivar of seed with a mix of Jade Verdi with a creeping red fescue. This is used to knit it all together.

The best buy of this month was a large piece of artificial turf for the run out of the clubhouse. This has cut down on the amount of mud in the club after a match which in turn helps with cleaning.

My biggest bugbear is the amount of tape and strapping left on the pitch after a match – or am I turning in to a stereotypical sad old groundsman?

A typical day, when there is a large Blues match in the evening, starts at 7.30am. Cleaning the whole changing room area and pavilion from the previous evening's training is the first task – this takes about two or three hours.

Then I have to ensure all the required kit is prepared and laid out ready and drinks made to be left out for the team. I then ensure that the ice machine is working so the physios have enough ice.

Astroturf is put in place, the pitch is then brushed or drag matted to keep the playing surface dry and the presentation good. Then I remark the pitch which I now have down to twenty minutes.

Post protectors are put up next with the line flags. The scoreboard is altered for the visiting side and the PA is set up. Health and safety checks are carried out on the ground and this is then handed over to the safety stewards.

During the match I need to be available if new kit is required or more balls.

After the match it all starts again, but not before a few drinks in the club house.



David examines the excellent sward on his pitch



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Scotland racing into the lead



CAROL DUTTON *examines how the close relationship between consultants and racecourses is having a major impact on course conditions across top Scottish venues*



Perth racecourse in the autumn

SCOTLAND is not just for golf. Horse racing is the fastest growing sport in the country.

Attendances have increased by 42 per cent in the last six years, and although the industry is currently conducting a new economic impact study, a report produced in 2001 rated racing as being worth £125 million to the Scottish economy. During 2004, 5,947 runners raced on Scottish turf, creating some unique challenges

for the groundsmen involved.

Anthea Morshead, Clerk of the Course for three of the five Scottish racecourses, Perth, Ayr and Musselburgh says that, as the condition of the turf has improved, this has attracted higher quality horses from Newmarket and Ireland.

"We are lucky to be served by three airports," she explains. "Runners from Newmarket usually fly into Edinburgh for the flat racing at



Gavin Brown of Stewartsturf (left) presents a jockey award at Perth racecourse

Musselburgh, Ayr is served by Prestwick, and those jumping at Perth use the airport at Dundee."

Perth, the smallest of the three and the only one providing jump racing only, nevertheless played host to 777 competing horses last year, in meetings spreading from spring to late autumn.

Donald Gow, who has been at the course for 28 years, and head groundsman for the last 20, remembers that, when he first arrived, there were only two meetings a year, one in April and the other in September.

These days with just three to four weeks between meetings, Donald, like the groundsmen at Ayr and Musselburgh, relies on the support of Stewartsturf, a company synonymous with the Scottish sports market, to advise on turf maintenance, provide equipment hire (both men and machines) as well as supplying fertiliser, grass seed and divot mixes.

"The going is essential," says Donald. "It dictates the number of horses that come here. Stewartsturf have a wider range of machinery than we do. We're on very heavy clay soil and they come in at the end of the season and aerate using their Earthquake machine. They also spray with foliar feed during the growing season, to perk up the grass if it needs it."

With four full time groundsmen, Donald employs casual staff for race days and the labour intensive repair operation immediately afterwards. "After a meeting 12 or 15 men put all the divots back, followed by a team of eight to 10 who go round with a tractor and trailer, hand filling each hole with a 70/30 sand/soil combination, containing a ryegrass seed mix," he concludes.

Phil Stephenson, head groundsman at Ayr has two racetracks under his wing, as the course provides flat racing from May to October, followed by jump racing, which begins in November. "Stewartsturf comes in to decompact the jumps track in September about six



Jock Whitelaw (left), Musselburgh head groundsman, with Gavin Brown of Stewartsturf

to seven weeks before the start of the season," he says. "This way we get the benefit, but the track has a chance to settle. We need to give the ground this time to ensure the horses' safety."

Gavin Brown, manager of Stewartsturf's Groundcare division visits Phil regularly and the two men walk the course together looking at the quality of the turf and deciding on their maintenance regime for the following months.

"If I've got any worries about pests, diseases or weeds for example I can talk to Gavin over the phone or on one of his site visits," Phil says. "The company takes surface soil samples and provides a fertiliser regime based on analysis, and they also recommend weed control options."

As part of a continuing programme of improvements, which has seen a total stables refurbishment and a bid for planning permission to build a tunnel under the two tracks and create new workshops and storage facilities in the central non-racing area, Phil has ordered a scan of his 44 acres of track which will give him a detailed map of the soil structure.

"We've got two different soil types," he explains. "Sand in the home straight and top bend, with mostly clay on the back straight and bottom bend. The soil map will allow us to identify the key areas to install new drainage and decide on the type of drains to use."

Bill Farnsworth, general manager at Musselburgh Race Course gives three reasons for the industry's growth over the last 10 years, citing investment in improved facilities, marketing and improved turf husbandry.

"Before I arrived six years ago the course was managed by the local authority," he says. "These days we have our own five man team, better training, better equipment and better information." With 25 race days a year, eight jump meetings and 17 days of flat racing, Musselburgh like Ayr has two tracks and is active throughout the year.

That said, the course's main activity is flat racing and Bill is adamant that the flat race track is always presented to the highest possible standard. "We race on this track virtually every other week in season which gives us very little time for maintenance," he maintains. "The expectations of the condition of the turf by both jockeys and trainers are extremely high. They expect it to be in pristine condition."

Planning is crucial, and Bill's groundstaff often need to feed, de-compact and mow between meetings. "We cannot allow the ground

to become too firm," Bill continues "and if we need to do remedial work during the day then we often water at night. In summer, it's a 24hour day."

Luckily, Musselburgh has a good relationship with the Met office and a direct information line. They work with the weather whenever possible. Bill, who is full of praise for his own groundstaff led by head groundsman Jock Whitelaw expects almost the same level of dedication from Stewartsturf who have been employed by Musselburgh as turf consultants, suppliers and maintenance contractors since the course took responsibility for its own turf husbandry six years ago.

"We need to be flexible," he explains, "and we'll call them in to verti-drain, feed, re-seed or spray, often at short notice. They very rarely let us down, even if we need them at weekends."

Musselburgh has spent £5million on its course over the last decade, reconfiguring the bends and working with Stewartsturf to apply thousands of tonnes of top quality topsoil, as well as refurbishing facilities.

During the last five years this investment has more than paid off. Prize money has doubled but so has the traffic through the gates. "Scottish racing is now comparable with the best in its class," Bill maintains. "I'd like to think that, whilst we are possibly not in the Premier League which features a small number of racecourses like Ascot and York, we're certainly playing at the top of the First Division."

Details: Stewartsturf on 0131 6636617



Musselburgh on Scottish Spring Cup day

From MOUNTAIN to PITCH

MAUREEN KEEPIN discovers how a project to improve pitches in London's Regents Park has benefited from grass cultivars developed in the chilly Cairngorms of Scotland

ELEVEN tonnes of Top Green seed has been used on the £2.2 million Regents Park project, which included the building of six new cricket squares.

Cultivars were specially selected for their durability and the fact that they will grow late into the season.

"This is a vital factor as on our pitches there is a fast turn around between the cricket outfield and winter games," says Nick Biddle of the Royal Parks.

"Pitches need to be restored as quickly as possible so games can play straight after one another.

"Feedback from those using both the winter and summer sports pitches is very good and they say they are playing well," he says.

Developing pitches

Grant Holmes, director of Agripower Ltd, contractor for the project, says: "Two years ago we commenced the project spraying off 20.5 hectares of grass.

"A drainage system was then installed together with a Rain Bird valve and head irrigation system with more than 450 pop-up sprinklers.

"A new 90mm water main was put in and a 250 cubic metre tank."

All irrigation pipes share the same trenches as the drainage pipes, due to special site considerations.

"During the blitz that part of the park was covered in London's bomb rubble and finished off with a thin layer of clay top soil," says Grant.

"As we were trenching in this rubble we cut



The funicular railway in the Cairngorms needs grass cover in exposed conditions

down on the normal amount of trenching."

Depending on the pitch area, most main drains were 160mm with some 200mm and lateral drains were 80mm.

The final phase of the contract was supplying all the infrastructure and services for a new compound and pavilion.

"This area was put down to grass and overseeded in September 2005," says Grant.

Everything was seeded using a special seeder and applied at the rate of 350Kg per hectare.

The Royal Parks adhere to the grass maintenance procedure suggested by the Football Foundation and Sport England, who provided funding support for the project.

"It is great having this level of support from the Football Foundation and Sport England," he says.

"Local authority budgets can often be slashed leaving little money for maintenance, but this ensures pitches are maintained to a high standard."

An agronomist has set the cutting height and regular fertiliser applications are made.

"With the football season ending on 10 April and the pitches required for cricket outfields from early May, it's all hands on deck to renovate and prepare the pitches after a full season of football," says Nick of The Royal Parks.

"Because of this, it is critical we have seed which germinates quickly.

"Mascot R14 supplied by seed agent Rigby Taylor has been very good for speedy establishment with the added benefit that grasses grow very late into the season,

"This is very impressive as last year they grew right through to Christmas time."

Cultivars used on the project include Top Green's Elan, Greenfair, Greenway and Action. One mix has been used for cricket and another



The problems of keeping grass cover can be easily seen next to the railway



Brian Robinson inspects grass growing in the Cairngorms from Rigby Taylor seed

one for games – which include football, rugby and hockey.

Mountain-top trials

Special cultivars are able to create these hard-wearing sports pitches thanks to extensive windchill trials carried out in the Cairngorms – where winds often gust up to 100mph.

A major project to build a new funicular



Grass varieties surviving these conditions are used in sportsturf mixes

railway to replace an ageing chairlift spurred the research, which has since been transferred from scenic hilltop to sports pitch.

Charting unknown territory in 1999, initial trials were carried out to discern if it was feasible to carry out the large-scale vegetation translocation and reinstatement in this part of Scotland.

Spanning altitudes from 600 metres to more than 1,080 metres the aim was to minimise the environmental impact of this project. Liaison with the Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highland Council was vital on this sensitive site.

Grass cultivars were carefully selected for this project following extensive initial tests at Top Green's Les Alleuds site in France. In situ trials in Scotland, at three altitude levels, then clearly demonstrated which seeds germinated most speedily at these extremely low temperatures.

Creating immediate groundcover was the primary function of the new grass – helping to combat soil erosion on the site.

“Good root growth was essential to secure the soil and a not too vigorous sward density to allow native seeds to colonise,” says Brian Robinson, seed research director at Rigby Taylor, who oversees the project.

At locations where there was insufficient vegetation to reinstate the ground the new dedicated grass seed mixtures were used.

Seed was sown and Seed Aide, supplied by Rigby Taylor, was applied for thermal protection and to provide small quantities of nutrients. Once the pellets are wet they expand and hold the surface in place. The material consists of cellulose fibre, wood fibre, organic tackifier, marker dye and seaweed extracts. A biodegradable material, the green colour blended in well with surrounding vegetation. The application rate was 140-180g per square metre, depending on the ground gradient.

Work had previously taken place in Scotland to re-seed upland footpaths - but nothing on this level.

Cultivars tested on the Cairngorms for use on football pitches were Greenway, Action and Elan.

Top performance

“An extended growth pattern is particularly vital for sports pitches during the winter months,” says Stephen Alderton, marketing manager at Top Green.

“The information gained from the Cairngorms enabled the formulation of mixtures for high profile locations including the Royal Parks and Wembley.

“Following these trials we are now producing cultivars which grow at lower temperatures, down to around 38degF, from early spring until very late autumn.

“This has certainly helped transform natural turf sports pitches, enabling them to cater for heavy usage and year-round play.”
Details: stephen.alderon@limagrain.com / www.topgreen.com



Greenwich Park cricket pitch with varieties tested in Cairngorms (Picture: Royal Parks)

Positive results of over-seeding

FIONA CROSSLEY of the STRI reports on over-seeding trials carried out for DLF Trifolium

A TRIAL to evaluate the effects of different over-seeding rates on the appearance of a heavily worn perennial ryegrass sward (simulating an end of season winter sports pitch) was established at the STRI on 20 May 2004.

In the study five different perennial ryegrass seed rates were used (12.5g m⁻², 25g m⁻², 50g m⁻², 75g m⁻² and 100g m⁻²).

Additionally a treated seed (iseed) was also included at a rate of 25g m⁻² to allow a comparison of treated seed against untreated seed sown at standard rate to be made. The initial effects of over seeding, at the different rates, on live ground cover and turf quality were assessed weekly for the first nine weeks of the trial.

The longer term effects of the different over seeding rates, under simulated football wear conditions, were then assessed for a further nine

months until the end of the trial in May 2005.

This work has shown that increasing over seeding rates above the standard rate (25g m⁻²) could help to produce a well-grassed and visually appealing surface more quickly, particularly when the rate was increased to four times the standard rate.

Although, the benefits of this - the highest seed rate - only lasted for the first four weeks after renovation, using twice and three times the above-standard rate also had a positive effect on both live ground cover and turf quality throughout the renovation period.

Once artificial wear started the benefits on live ground cover of higher than normal seeding rates started to become less apparent. It was found that once wear began the highest rate treatment had less ground cover and a poorer turf quality than the treatments sown at 50g m⁻² and 75g m⁻².

By the start of 2005, four months after the start of artificial wear, no significant differences were found in the amount of live ground cover among any of the over seeding treatments. However, increasing seed rate to twice and three times standard rate did have a positive effect on the turf quality.

The iseed treated seed had no positive effects on ground cover or turf quality throughout the duration of the trial. However, during the initial establishment phase some negative effects were noted. The iseed treated seed performed less well in terms of ground cover and turf quality than the untreated seed sown at the same rate.

As the trial progressed under the artificial wear conditions, the iseed was not found to perform significantly less well than any of the other over seeding treatments in terms of ground cover and turf quality.

However, it did have the lowest score of all the over-seeded treatments during the later stages of the trial.

The un-seeded control was found to perform significantly less well in terms of live ground cover and turf quality than any of the over seeding treatments throughout the duration of the trial.

Over seeding is an important part of the renovation programme for intensively used winter games pitches. This study, funded by DLF Trifolium, examined the effects of different over seeding rates on the speed of recovery of a heavily worn perennial ryegrass sward.

The objectives were:

- To examine the speed of recovery, over an initial eight-week period, of a heavily worn perennial ryegrass sward over-seeded with a perennial ryegrass mixture sown at five different seed rates (12.5g m⁻², 25g m⁻², 50g m⁻², 75g m⁻² and 100g m⁻²) compared to an un-seeded control.
- To compare the use of a treated seed (iseed) against an untreated seed sown at 'standard seed rate' (25g m⁻²).
- To examine the longevity of any treatment effects over a 10-month period under simulated football wear conditions.

Materials and methods

A TRIAL to evaluate the appearance of a heavily worn perennial ryegrass sward over-seeded with a perennial ryegrass mixture, sown at five different seed rates 12.5g m⁻², 25g m⁻², 50g m⁻², 75g m⁻² and 100g m⁻² and an un-seeded control was established in the STRI trial grounds in May 2004.

A treated seed (iseed) was also included at a rate of 25g m⁻² to allow a comparison of treated seed against untreated seed sown at 'standard rate' to be made. The trial was sown in a randomised block design with five complete replications, giving a total of 35 plots to assess. Individual plots measured 1.25 m x 1.25 m.

Prior to initiating the work a suitable area of perennial ryegrass turf was selected within the STRI's experimental ground. This was then intensively worn using the STRI's differential slip wear machine fitted with football stud rotors to simulate an area after it had been subjected to hard domestic/football pitch usage.

Following wear and prior to over seeding, renovation work was carried out on the area using a Sisis Auto-Seeder. Making four passes in different directions with the Auto-Seeder created a fine seedbed suitable for over-seeding.

Following normal practice fertiliser (8:12:8, N:P2O5:K2O) was applied to the experimental area (35g m⁻²) prior to seeding. All plots were then sown by hand at the appropriate rate and a top dressing added at a rate of 4kg m⁻².

Twice weekly mowing commenced on 8 June 2004 at a cutting height of 50mm. The height of cut was reduced on 11 June to 40mm. Further reductions in mowing height to 30mm and then 25mm were made over the next four weeks to achieve a final mowing height of 20mm on 16 July 2004. Mowing continued twice weekly at



Untreated seed (25gm) in September



Treated seed in the same trial

this height until 8 October 2004.

From 18 October 2004 until the 5 April 2005 the trial was mown as and when necessary. A weekly mowing regime was reintroduced on 5 April 2005. Weekly mowing continued until 3 May 2005. From this date to the end of the trial on 17 May 2005 the trial was mown twice weekly. All clippings were boxed off the trial area.

Three and a half months after over seeding, on 24 August 2004, artificial, football type, wear commenced on the trial area. This continued throughout the normal soccer season until the end of the trial on 19 May 2005.

Grass cover

VISUAL assessments of live ground cover were made weekly for the first nine weeks of the trial (27 May, 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 June and 6, 14 and 23 July 2004). Assessments were then made monthly from August 2004 until the end of the trial in May 2005. Artificial, football type, wear began on 24 August 2004 and continued throughout the winter period until the end of the trial in May 2005.

The greatest differences in over seeding rates were found during this initial nine-week period and consequently this will be dealt with separately from the wear phase of the trial from August 2004 to May 2005.



Patchy: Treated iseed (25gm) in June

When the third assessment of live ground cover was made, 18 days after over seeding, on 8 June 2004 a very similar situation was found to that on 1 June. Again the three higher seed rates all had a significantly higher live ground cover than the standard and half standard rates.

They were also all significantly different from each other with live ground cover decreasing with seed rate. However, when this assessment was made the standard seed rate was found to have a significantly higher live ground cover than the half standard rate and the iseed treated seed.



Good cover: Non-treated seed

It is interesting that the iseed treated seed, although sown at the standard rate of 25g m⁻² was performing less well than the untreated seed sown at the same rate. Again the control had a significantly lower live ground cover than all the over seeding treatments.

The assessments made on 15 and 22 June 2004 showed very similar results. Although the highest seed rate was still found to have the greatest live ground cover it was only found to be slightly above that of the 75g m⁻² rate. No significant differences were found between these two rates.

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Although the 50g m⁻² over-seeding rate was found to have a significantly lower live ground cover than the two highest rate treatments it had significantly more live ground cover than the standard and half standard treatments. As when the assessment was made on 8 June the standard rate was found to have a significantly higher live ground cover than the half standard rate and the iseed treated seed.

The un-seeded control had a significantly lower live ground cover than all the other treatments.

There was a marked positive effect of increasing seed rate on grass cover from the control (no over-seeding) up to 50g m⁻². The benefit on live ground cover of increasing the over seeding rate above 50g m⁻² is much less pronounced with no significant difference between the two highest rate treatments.

When the assessment was made on 29 June 2004, six weeks after sowing, very little difference was found in the amount of live ground cover for the two highest rate treatments. Both were found to have over 96per cent live ground cover at this time. Although the plots over sown at 75g m⁻² had more live ground cover than those seeded at 50g m⁻², this difference was not found to be significant.

There was no significant difference found between the standard rate for over seeding and the twice-standard rate of 50g m⁻².

Again the iseed treated seed was found to have a significantly lower live ground cover than

the untreated seed sown at the standard rate. In fact the iseed treated seed had a lower live ground cover than the half standard rate treatment (12.5g m⁻²), although this difference was not significant.

Although the iseed treated seed had a lower live ground cover than the seed sown at half standard rate (12.5g m⁻²) on each of the above three assessment dates this difference was not found to be significant.

The un-seeded control had a significantly lower live ground cover than all the other treatments on all three of the assessment dates in July.

Conclusion

This study examined whether increasing normal over-seeding rates could increase speed of recovery and visual quality of a heavily worn perennial ryegrass sward. The effects of over seeding were also compared against a control, which was not over seeded.

The effects of the increased over seeding rates on wear tolerance over a 10-month period, that was timed to coincide with the football season, were then monitored. A treated seed iseed was also included in the trial, sown at the standard rate of 25g m⁻².

Increasing over seeding rates during the renovation of worn perennial ryegrass turf dramatically increased the speed of establishment and turf quality of the sward. During the establishment phase there was a

direct relationship between seed rate and turf quality.

The higher seed rates markedly reduced the time required to achieve a surface that would be deemed fit for use. The density and uniformity of sward produced at the end of the establishment phase was also improved by increasing the normal seed rates.

Artificial 'football' type wear was applied from 24 August 2004 and continued throughout the winter until the end of the trial in May 2005.

Once the wear treatments started to have an effect (three to four months after the start of wear) the highest over seeding rate was found to have lower ground cover and turf quality in comparison with some of the other seeding rates.

It is interesting to note that as the winter progressed and the effects of wear on the trial became increasingly apparent, the half standard over seeding rate (12.5g m⁻²) was found to have the highest ground cover. It is likely that lower plant density at the start of wear influenced the durability of individual plants.

As a result, the bigger plants in the lower density treatment were able to tolerate more wear. In this high wear study it appears that a point was reached where the benefits of plant size started to outweigh the higher plant density. This may not have been the case if wear had been less intensive.

It is our view that the benefits of seeding rate will vary at different times of the season and will be influenced by the intensity of wear applied. Further studies that combined seeding rates and different degrees of wear may be warranted.

Overall variation among seed rates was markedly less than the difference observed between the over seeding treatments and the un-seeded control.

In this study the un-seeded control failed to reach acceptable standards by the start of the wear treatments and was significantly poorer than all other treatments during wear. This clearly demonstrated that over seeding is necessary to aid recovery after wear.

The use of iseed treated seed was not found to have any positive effect on ground cover and turf quality in this study. This treatment also appeared to delay establishment in comparison with the untreated seed in this investigation.

Overall this experiment demonstrated that increasing over seeding rate by two to three times the standard rate could produce a well grassed and visually attractive sward more quickly than over seeding at the standard rate.

**This is a highly-edited version of the full report which is available from Miranda Chambers at DLF Trifolium on 01386 791120/email mchambers@dlf.co.uk. The report will appear in full on the new DLF UK website when it goes live in the spring.*



The wear machine at the STRI replicated heavy boot impact on the overseeded surfaces



EACH January, the British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB), in conjunction with the STRI, publishes its turfgrass seed listings.

The booklet is available to all groundsmen, greenkeepers, contractors and specifiers for a small charge and is intended as a buyers' guide to quality amenity turfgrasses.

It's A5 in size, presented in table format and designed to assist buyers and end-users in selecting the most suitable cultivars for their site.

All the major seed companies who develop new cultivars for UK customers submit their seed for testing at the STRI. Entries are made once every two years into three separate trials – close mown, winter sports wear and lawn, landscaping and summer sports.

A cultivar is then eligible for addition to the list upon completion of two trial series, subject to it meeting the standards outlined in the trials protocol. Seed companies undertake a considerable investment to have new cultivars assessed. Not all of them make it through, which is reassuring for the end-user as continual improvement is part of the process.

Each of the companies also has a representative on the BSPB Amenity Committee which is responsible for the annual publication of the listings and the co-ordination and funding of independent trials for amenity grasses.

Simon Taylor, amenity sales director for British Seed Houses and its representative on the BSPB Amenity Committee explains what the listings mean for both the end-user and supplier.

End-user

"The listings are an independent assessment of all the cultivars available within the UK amenity market and an important reference tool for anyone who purchases seed. The information is completely impartial and can help end-users and specifiers to compare the attributes of different cultivars so they can select the most suitable ones for their situation.

They aren't a marketing exercise for the seed companies, but an important form of consumer protection. All the cultivars are shown with their true attributes with no poetic licence allowed, so the customer can be confident that they're looking at accurate, unbiased data."

The characteristics which are assessed are:

- Visual merit
- Shoot density
- Live ground cover
- Slow re-growth
- Fineness of leaf
- Cleanness of cutting

- Freedom from disease
- Colour
- Recovery

The tables are split into two sections – current and new cultivars. End-users can see which new cultivars have been tested and which of the seed companies will supply it. It's scored in the same way as the current cultivars so you can also get some idea of how they compare to those already available.

Suppliers

"I'd like to think that all the seed companies support the listings. We all welcome unbiased, independent testing and want end-users to choose quality seed which has undergone such trials. British Seed Houses has its own turfgrass breeding programme based at IGER in Aberystwyth. We know we produce first-class seed so we're more than happy to submit it for independent trials.

The seed companies compete for business within the industry, but in a way the listings give us a level playing field. Our product has to stand alongside those of our competitors in the tables so the purchaser can select one or the other on its merits. This gives us the impetus to improve our offering by investing in the research and



Simon Taylor: "Helping end-users"



Perfect sward on trial ground



Danny Thorogood at the IGER grass breeding site in Aberystwyth

development of new cultivars within our breeding programme."

Top tips for selecting the right seed

Simon added: "There's no doubt that choosing the right seed is one of the most important decision a groundsman or greenkeeper will make. It can have significant implications on the long-term sustainability of your surface."

1. Buy quality seed

I know it sounds a strange thing to say, but there's plenty of seed available that's not suitable for the professional market. The relative cost of grass seed compared to the cost of turf (machinery, groundstaff etc) is negligible. By using the best cultivars, you'll reap the rewards in the long run.

2. Consider your situation

No two environments are the same. Consider the area you're wanting to seed and what it's used for. Draw up a list of the key attributes, such as wear tolerance, shoot density or year-round colour and check how cultivars score for these attributes in the listings. Just because a cultivar is at the top of the list doesn't mean it's the best one for every use.

3. It's not 'one size fits all'

Whilst grass seed for winter and summer sports pitches is marketed as a set mixture, you don't necessarily have to buy 'off the shelf'. Ask a technical advisor from your seed company to visit your site and recommend the right mixture for you. Special mixtures can be formulated to suit the needs of the surface, by substituting a certain cultivar for one that has enhanced shade tolerance for a stadium environment, for example.

4. Check your delivery

Seed mixtures vary and occasionally one cultivar may be substituted for another dependent upon availability. When you take delivery of your seed, check it to make sure it contains the cultivars you've requested. Each bag should have the statutory DEFRA label which lists the species, cultivar and percentage inclusion.

5. Keep up to speed with developments

There have been great advances in the development of new cultivars in recent years. We're now able to breed grasses with traits to suit all situations and the seed companies' offering is improving year on year. Obtain a copy of the STRI listings to see what's new. You could also request a copy of your seed supplier's catalogue and talk to your technical advisor who'll keep you up to speed.

The turfgrass seed listings booklet is available from the STRI's online bookshop at www.stri.co.uk or from your seed company. You can obtain a free copy of British Seed Houses 2006 seed catalogue by calling Freefone 0800 328 8276 or visit www.britishseedhouses.com.

Pop goes the football pitch

MIKE TAYLOR gives an insight into the pressures which faced Bristol City FC head groundsman Craig Richardson last year when he battled with the effects of two big concerts



Seating in place for the Neil Diamond concert



Show day: Crowds pack Bristol City Stadium

HAVE you heard the one about the groundsman who reseeded his pitch and then had two pop concerts within ten days of each other and still had to prepare a pitch for the first friendlies within three weeks of the second concert?

Well, this is no joke, this is the punishing schedule that Craig Richardson of Bristol City FC had to contend with last year. The actual facts are as follows:

30 April	End of season.
7 May	Scarified, reseeded, top dressed.
9 June	Concert materials started to arrive.
10 June	Construction of stage begins, pitch covered.
11 June	Construction continues. Crane on site.
12 June	Stage completed. Crane on site all day and arrival of generators. Begin installing seating.
13 June	Generators tested and lights erected. Continued seating installation.
14 June	SHOW DAY (Neil Diamond) 22,000 crowd expected. Final preparations.
15 June	Crane on site to dismantle lighting then commence

removal of stage.

16 June

Clear site by the end of the day.

17 June

All hire equipment, fork lifts etc collected.

1 July

Rod Stewart concert (same build-up)



Marking out the pitch ready for seating

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Damage after the seating had gone



Clear difference between covered and uncovered turf



Recovery apparent after lots of hard work



Craig Richardson stands on the post-concert pitch

Craig then walked the pitch to pick up any obvious litter, swept the pitch and cut the bolted grass. Grass and nature being a wonderful thing, the grass that was under the stage (ie covered for eight days) was yellow and white and the grass under the plastic protection had bolted and gone to seed. Within five days the pitch started to recover and looked almost as good as on a match day.

Craig decided to leave any major repair until after the next concert on July 1 (Rod Stewart) with a full house expected and the same routine of a mad seven days. He then had to really start work in earnest to top dress where necessary and reseed where required.

The directors of the club have not been backward in coming forward, so to speak, as Craig acquired a new Blec overseeder to help with the difficult task of preparing the pitch for the first games from July 30.

So while the accountants did their sums, Craig, virtually single-handed, has three weeks to achieve a miracle with a little help from Mother Nature.

Craig, who hails from South Shields, joined Bristol City Football Club as assistant to Martin Plumley in 2001, having been a greenkeeper at Woodspring Golf Club from its inception in the early 1990s.

He has studied at Cannington College but, due to work commitments, was unable to complete those studies. However, the benefits he has gained are obvious for all to see.

Martin left the club to pursue his landscaping interests and Craig took over the onerous task of head groundsman and he has made his mark on the quality of the playing surface.

But the spectators do not appreciate the amount of work that goes in to achieve the perfect playing surface. Craig thinks it took him at least an extra 50 hours of work to recover the grass cover for the present season.

The pictures give fellow groundsmen an idea of what a lot of work is involved, but without this extra revenue, single sport clubs will not survive. Craig has also had to deal with rugby, cricket and religious meetings on his pitch in the past, so he is becoming an old hand and is well-organised to sort things out.

(Pictures: Craig Richardson)

To advertise in The Groundsman please call
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Don't be bogged down in Winter

ANNE O'BRIEN, *head of organics for WRAP*, describes how compost is providing solutions to waterlogging



Spreading compost at an Essex golfclub

THE SPRING and summer of 2005 was dry and fine, with rainfall below average for nine out of the eleven months leading up to September.

Yet it was a very different picture in the summer of 2002, when June, July and August saw three times the average rainfall across the UK.

That season left a problematic legacy for a number of sports grounds, cricket pitches and golf courses as the turf became severely waterlogged.

In the worst cases, some golf courses had to close for several weeks and grass was left uncut because the ground was too soft to take machinery.

This year, in spite of the dry conditions, recent flash flooding in the North of England and in the Welsh and Scottish borders has shown that downpours like this can strike at any time and bring their own set of problems – partly because the ground was dry and compacted and the water couldn't soak in.

Worryingly, these flash floods appear to be increasing in frequency, according to meteorological experts.

To keep turf healthy and maintain continuity of service in the face of these challenges, green keepers and groundsmen need to do everything

possible to ensure that their courses and sports grounds can cope with prolonged wet weather and sudden influxes of water. As well as poor or impossible playing conditions caused by waterlogged turf, long-term damage to the grass is possible.

Boosting soil and organic matter content can often tackle water logging and drainage problems. Recycled compost, produced from waste such as grass cuttings, prunings and leaves can significantly improve the structure of the soil when used to establish and dress turf, making it easier for water to penetrate the surface and helping to minimise the effects of water logging.

How compost can help

Recycled compost is made from organic waste materials. In the UK, this usually means plant trimmings, prunings and leaves.

When incorporated into soil or applied as a turf top dressing, compost both acts as a fertiliser and improves its physical properties. Compost slowly releases nitrogen, phosphate and other minor nutrients into the ground, helping to keep turf healthy.

The organic matter in compost also improves the aggregate strength of the soil – its open and



Croham Hurst Golf Club near Croydon uses a blend of compost and sand as top dressing

Can you and your colleagues afford to miss the educational opportunity of 2006?

The recent announcement that London will be hosting the 2012 Olympics means that the legacy planning starts now. Additional funding for sports facilities at all levels, both in London and across the UK, means skilled and competent grounds staff will be in demand.

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This year's conference will open with an insight into just how much of an impact London 2012 and other major sporting events could have on our industry.

Conference highlights will include:

- An exclusive preview tour of the brand new Wembley Stadium

The new Wembley will be the most spectacular football stadium in the world, built to the highest specifications, using the latest technology. With the pitch laid and in its official bedding down period, you will be one of the first members of the public to visit the 'Venue of Legends'.

The visit will include an introduction to the stadium and an overview of the build, as well as a guided tour and a questions and answers session with Grounds Manager Steve Welch and other key players in the pitch construction.

- An educational tour of Ascot Racecourse

Review the £180 million reconstruction work that has recently been carried out at the course - the most extensive project of its type ever seen in Europe. Guides for the afternoon will include Chris Stickles, Clerk of the Course, and 'Gilly' Gillard, Head Groundsman.

- The seminar programme, which will be complemented this year by a number of workshops, will focus on hot topics including:
 - How will the Olympics and other successes impact on you and your industry?
 - The impact of climate change and the environment on future resources
 - Assessing the impact of current and future regulations and legislation including noise and vibration
 - The highlights of industry research and developments

The full programme of seminars and study tours for our 2006 Conference is detailed online at www.iog.org. Alternatively, contact the IOG on 01908 312511 for a copy of the Conference brochure 2006.

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bulky nature also increases its porosity. As a result, treated soil compacts less, water drains more freely and grass roots can penetrate more easily to find nutrients and water.

The soil is also better able to absorb rainfall and irrigation water, meaning that turf is much less likely to become waterlogged. Essentially, the compost acts like a sponge, soaking up, absorbing and dispersing water rather than letting it sit on the surface and damage the grass.

Similarly, in dry conditions, the absorbent nature of compost helps to conserve water. This means that turf will stay greener for longer with less need for regular maintenance, and will be more able to cope better with flash flooding. This was evident in recent STRI top dressing trials on golf fairways where compost plots showed higher levels of moisture in fescue-dominated fairway turf, particularly during the dry summer season.

Using compost

In turf maintenance of all kinds, compost can be used both to establish and renovate turf. When establishing or seeding turf, compost should be applied 25-50mm deep and then incorporated to an approximate depth of 100-150mm. Once the compost has been mixed into the soil, a seed bed can be established by lightly brushing seed onto the surface.

Compost can also be used as a top dressing for turf. It can be blended with other materials such as sand to make it suitable for applying to closely-mown fine turf; fine grades of compost – screened to include particles no larger than

Sportsgrounds benefit from well-sifted compost



5mm – are available especially for this purpose.

Divots on golf courses can be filled using a blend of compost and grass seed mix. The compost contains nutrients and holds moisture, and the dark colour helps absorb heat from the sun, speeding up germination.

Quality matter

Groundsmen have no need to worry about the quality of the compost they are using due to a compost certification scheme introduced a few years ago. The BSI PAS 100 quality standard

was introduced in November 2002 and subsequently updated in June 2005.

The Composting Association (TCA) adopted BSI PAS 100 as the specification that composted materials must meet in order to achieve the independently verified certification and use of their logo. There are now over 65 sites registered on TCA's BSI PAS 100 Certification Scheme, offering greater availability than ever before. Details of where to find a supplier of PAS 100 quality compost can be found at www.wrap.org.uk/organics.

Croham Hurst blends sand

CROHAM Hurst Golf Club is an 18-hole parkland course, two miles from Croydon. The course is planted on chalk, and for the past four years, green keeper Roger Tydeman has been ensuring good drainage for year-round playing by using a blend of sand and compost as a top dressing to ameliorate thatch build-up.

Produced by Midlands-based supplier Banks Amenity, the compost – Fendress Greentop – is a mixture of green compost and lignite. Roger has found the compost easier to work with than the traditional product he used before because the recycled compost does not form small balls which are difficult to work into the ground.

Overall, Roger has been very pleased with the results of using the compost, which include reduction in compaction and the finer grass growth.

"Frequent use of compost as top dressing has created a firm surface for our players," he says. "The compost causes any excess water to drain through more effectively, especially in clay soils. This means drier, frost-free fairways and keeps our members playing all year round."

Newbury racecourse benefits

NEWBURY Racecourse in Berkshire is one of the UK's most prestigious sporting venues offering exciting racing on the flat and over jumps. With around 30 race days every year, busy staff face an ongoing battle to maintain the course throughout the seasons and fill the numerous divots carved by each horse.

Immediately following each race meeting, the estate team reviews the state of the course and springs into action. A pre-prepared mix of compost, soil and sand is combined with new grass seed to fill all the divots by hand. This process, covering the whole 2-mile course, is completed within three days so as to give as much time as possible for recovery before the next meeting.

The mix, sourced from White Moss Amenities, contains BSI PAS 100 compost from accredited producer Cheshire County Council.

Richard Osgood, Estate Manager and Clerk of the Course, says: "With compost we have seen germination happen a lot faster and, over the milder winter months, the new growth has been exceptional. This is aided by the superior

consistency of the mix which makes it easy to work with and apply.

To date, Newbury Racecourse has used 1,000 tonnes of White Moss Amenities' Root Zone Mix which contains 25 per cent compost.

Richard says: "We need to keep the ground consistent with a healthy grass sward and have been impressed by the difference the mix has made to the drainage of the turf."

"The compost mix allows water to run down through the soil, away from the surface and thus avoiding any standing water. In very cold months, this is of vital importance to keep frost off the course and avoid the expense and disappointment of cancelled race meetings."

Full results of the turf topdressing trial work, currently being carried out by WRAP with the STRI and Glendale, are available.

Visit the *WRAP Organics* website for more information on compost, the turf trials or to find a supplier near you. www.wrap.org.uk/organics – or call the freephone helpline on 0808 100 204.

● WRAP is the Waste and Resources Action Programme.



Members' Bulletin

President: Derek Walder BEM
 Chairman: Alex Millar
 Treasurer: Martin Ford
 Chief Executive: Geoff Webb

Branch notes and zone reports should be sent to:
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 not later than the 1st of the month preceding
 publication. e-mail: mrs1@blueyonder.co.uk

28 Stratford Office Village, Walker Avenue, Wolverton Mill
 East, Milton Keynes MK12 5TW Tel: 01908 312511
 Fax: 01908 311140

BRISTOL

WE HOPE you have all had a good Christmas. For those of you who didn't attend the lecture by Martin Ford in November on cricket wickets and the scientific approach (and it was good to see some new faces), I can only say you missed one of the most fascinating talks I have ever been to – and that's a lot. This was being repeated in December on the Isle of Wight and if you are interested to hear if there will be more talks on this subject, contact Dave Carvey of Rigby Taylor on 07774 943629.

Not a lot to tell you this month as every sensible animal is hibernating. One nice piece of news for those of you who remember Brian Bailey's daughters, Lucy and Melanie, is that Lucy recently had a son and Melanie will soon be presenting Brian with another grandchild. Congratulations and best wishes to them all and we hope to see them in the New Year.

In early December, twenty-five members and friends joined together to enjoy our Christmas extravaganza at Coombe Dingle. Our caterers, Sue and her team, did a magnificent job, and the highlight of the evening was the presence of our guest speakers, Martin Rospide and Bernardo Stortoni, who play for Bristol Rugby Club.

They told us a little of their lives and their hopes for the club and then took part in a very interesting question and answer session. These two young men hold 23 caps for their country, Argentina, and it was an honour for us to have their company.

The usual quiz and raffle followed with lots of friendly banter and thanks go to the organisers, Andy and Rita Gray. It was good to have the support of Dave Carvey of Rigby Taylor and our old friend Peter Prior from the Memorial Stadium and to meet Ben Chapman, an NDT student who joined us all the way from Bridgwater.

Thanks to Peter Hudson for his continued support and to Bristol University for the venue.

Don't forget your New Year's resolutions and we would like to wish our new chief executive, Geoff Webb, success for the future. We hope he can find time to visit the branches in due course.

Maintenance reminder! Check your antifreeze and if in doubt, double check or change the coolant anyway, as it probably hasn't

been changed for years.

Our next meeting will be on January 16 when we have round four of the national quiz and our AGM. Please try to be there at the University Sports complex, Coombe Dingle, 7.30pm.

On February 13, we will be going to visit Bill Bennett Engineering at Sodbury Road, Horton, near Chipping Sodbury when Sales Manager Malcolm Collier will give a presentation on Kubota products and natural seaweed fertiliser. As a special treat, Bill Bennett's well-known trials MG J2 car will be on display. Refreshments will be provided and a map is available from Peter Hudson or me. I could also provide transport if anyone needs it.

Talking of quizzes, we continue to enjoy these once a month, but were disconcerted when our quizmaster had not received the missing answers to the October questions before the November meeting and also to find that there were apparent errors in the November answers (what about the Were-Rabbit)!

Mike Taylor

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE

PLEASE NOTE the branch annual general meeting will be held on Wednesday January 18 at the Marston Sports and Social Club, Shobnall Road, Burton-on-Trent beginning at 8pm.

All members are welcome to attend.

D E Newman

NORTHANTS/MILTON KEYNES

A HAPPY and healthy New Year to all branch members and their families and all the best for 2006.

On behalf of the branch I would like to record our thanks to Leigh Siddon who has been our secretary for the last six years.

He has arranged most of our educational visits and social events during this time, coupled with two excellent bowling green seminars and made a major contribution to us winning the Wheatley Cup. Leigh has recently left the industry and we all wish him well in his new career.

This is the last reminder that the branch AGM will be held at the Pavilion, Woughton on the Green playing fields in Milton Keynes on Monday January 9 at 7.30 pm. Do get along if

you can. We shall have another round of the national quiz on the night and the usual buffet will be provided.

Peter Oliver

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

A HAPPY New Year to everyone. I hope you all had a joyous and happy Christmas and that are refreshed and raring to go for the coming year. We in the Republic finished out the year with two events in late November on the subject of winter pitch maintenance. These Level One training days were held in Parnell Park on November 23 and in Cahir Park soccer club on November 24, on both of these days a presentation was given by Alan Ferguson, Head Groundsman, Ipswich Town FC.

Parnell Park is the home to the Dublin GAA and is the pitch that is home to the Dublin hurlers and footballers. The stadium is floodlit and has a seating capacity of 10,000. Alan Ferguson's presentation was very well received by the 25 attendees and a large interest was shown in the benefits of IOG membership.

We would like to thank John Costello, secretary of the Dublin County Board for the use of this fine facility; Noel Brady, Head Groundsman, for his organisation on the day and Pat Kiernan and his staff for providing first class refreshments.

On the following day Alan repeated his presentation for another audience in Cahir Park soccer club and again this presentation was extremely well received by over 20 people who attended this event.

The morning was taken up with Alan's presentation and a lively question and answer session, where the audience used the opportunity to pick the brains of one of the top groundsmen in the business. Alan imparted a vast amount of valuable information in reply to the questions asked.

Helping Alan deliver his top class presentation were Brian Fraser, training and development officer for the IOG in Scotland and Ireland, and Joe Morgan, chairman IOG Republic of Ireland.

After a very enjoyable lunch in the Cahir House Hotel, there was a display of ground maintenance equipment given by Penturf Ltd and Elms Sportsfield Management (Bill

Collins) in which the audience were given demonstrations on verti-draining, overseeding, hollow tining and scarifying of pitches. Toher Grasscare Ltd (Markus Mohinan) was on hand with the latest in grass cutting equipment for everyone to see and admire. NAD (Colm Ryan) was also there with information on their range of products. The day was rounded off with a presentation from Michael McSweeney of Tour Greens Europe on the reasons as they saw it for using synthetic sports surfaces.

All in all both events were a great success and a tribute to the people who organised them. A special word of thanks to Brendan Cowan of Cahir soccer club for all the work he put in to organise the event in Cahir. This work led to the success of the first IOG event to be held in the county of Tipperary. We plan to run more events in both of these venues again next year.

Now just to get us going for the New Year. In January, we can verti-drain (weather permitting) for deep compaction problems, you could slit-tine as an alternative to verti-draining and now might also be a good time to repair goalmouths on Gaelic pitches. You could think about ordering your chemicals, sand and line marking material, so that you have everything to hand when it is needed.

Let me finish by welcoming new members to the IOG and by wishing all members both new and old a happy and prosperous 2006.

Noel Connolly

SHROPSHIRE

THE GUEST speaker at the 25th anniversary dinner on Friday March 3 will be John Aldridge, who played for Liverpool and was a Republic of Ireland international. Music will be provided by High Society.

IOG chief executive Geoff Webb has accepted an invitation to attend the dinner.

It would be appreciated if booking forms and cheques could be returned to me as soon as possible.

New members to welcome this month are Mr D G Gwilt, Mr S Hamer, Andrew Downes, Tim Mason, Lee Turner, Richard Griffiths, Gary Turner, Michael Emlyn, Grant Rubery and Stephen Turnbull.

A reminder that the branch AGM is on Tuesday January 10 at 7.30pm at Arscott Golf Club, and the Midland Region AGM is on Sunday February 5 in Coventry.

The branch requires players for the Midland Region bowls day in Coventry on Sunday May 14. If you are available to play, please contact Mike Lewis on 01902 374612.

Ian Morris

TEESSIDE

I HAVE just heard this evening (November 30) that Carl Pass, who was regional director for the north east region for several years, has had a

heart attack. I was pleased to hear that Carl was now home from hospital and on the mend.

I am sure I speak for all those who know Carl, when I say that we wish him a good and speedy recovery.

We had a good turnout for the second round of the quiz. It was good to have Pat with us. After the quiz we had a good discussion on various topics and future events. We find that these evenings are a good opportunity to talk amongst ourselves and discuss any problems that do arise.

Our visit to Scarborough to visit Econoplas, which we were hoping to arrange in the autumn, has now been put back to the spring. John would like us to go and see how they produce the recycled plastic which is made into drainage material. John was telling me that they had a busy time at IOG Scotsturf, and also they have been involved in drainage work in Holland.

Our next meeting is on Wednesday January 18, same venue, same time. This is the fourth round of the quiz and the AGM. Do try to come and have your say. It is your Institute.

On Wednesday February 15 we have Alan Gray coming along from Sisis. I am sure he will give us an interesting talk. Again, do try to be there, as when we invite speakers it is important that we have a good turnout.

Checking on our membership this year it appears that several members have lapsed their membership. Several years ago we had 50 members; then in 2003 we had 72 members, which then became 80 members in 2004. Let us hope that this year we can recruit some more people and keep this branch thriving.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy New Year.

Tom Francis

WALES

FIRSTLY, may I wish all readers a happy New Year and the hope that 2006 will bring you all you wish.

The 54th Annual General Meeting of the branch will be held on Friday January 20 at Taffs Well Rugby Club and will commence at 7.30pm. After the business of the meeting, we will have an informal social with buffet provided and bar available. This will be open to wives, partners and visitors, so make an effort to join us to start the new year.

In the hope that your journal arrives in time, a reminder that the January meeting with BIGGA is on Wednesday January 11, when Alex Edwards of Inturf will speak on how cultivated turf is produced, from start to finish. The venue will be Pencoed College, in the Bar Lounge, commencing at 7pm.

Also put the following in your diary if you have not already done so (both meetings at Pencoed College).

February 8 Martin Ward of Symbio will

talk about composted tea – a new approach.

March 8 Chris Briggs from Avoncrop will give us an update on amenity pesticides.

On April 12 at 7pm, we have a tour of the maintenance facility at Celtic Manor Resort, Newport, conducted by Jim McKensie, Director of Golf and Courses. The tour will be followed by a buffet and if you have not visited Celtic Manor before, prepare to be amazed!

We have several new members to welcome. Unfortunately, I can only report information I am given and with the computerised format now used, first names are not always given and neither is place of work, so I cannot quote these unless I happen to know the person.

New members are Mr W Morton who is a student from Caerphilly; Mr M Powell from Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC. (I wonder if this is the Mike Powell I have known for many years? Time will tell!)

Then there is Mr J Walker also from RCT Council; Mr C Sutcliffe from Cardiff; Ms J Allen who is a student and hails from Porthcawl; Ms Y Hughes also a student from Llantrisant and Ms L Masden, a student from Barry. Mr G Nash is a groundsman from Abertillery Comprehensive School.

Last but not least we welcome Peter Lacey, Head Greenkeeper at Pennard Golf Club in the beautiful setting of the Gower peninsula, west of Swansea. Peter is very well known indeed in this area as he is regional secretary for BIGGA.

Several years ago we presented him with our Frank Dickenson trophy in recognition of the contribution he has made over many years to the world of turf culture. This is the only time that we have given our award outside the branch.

Peter Gillard

WEST YORKSHIRE/LEEDS

I HOPE you are over the excesses of the festive season and have all your New Year resolutions in place.

There appears to be an abundance of worms encroaching onto our cricket squares this autumn following the rains of late October. Have any of you out there any suggestions on worm control that we can publish prior to next season or bring to our January meeting on Wednesday, January 18 at Old Leos Rugby Club, next door to Alwoodley Cricket Club in Leeds?

This has become an annual event now and 'An evening with Boycey' will commence at 7.30pm with the quiz then Keith Boyce will entertain us as only he can. A hot supper will be provided. One not to be missed.

An excellent turnout enjoyed the presentation by Allan Grey, Northern Territory Sales Manager for Sisis, at our meeting on November

9 at Cleckheaton Sports Club. In spite of a technological hitch with laptop and powerpoint presentation projection equipment, Allan carried on to give us a superb talk on sports turf aeration. His vast experience within the industry showed through and bit of history up to current day groundscare equipment usage were included, with excellent banter with the members and guests.

Nice to see Tony Rugg back in circulation and getting fully involved in the aforementioned banter as usual. Many thanks to Allan and Sisis. Also to Cleckheaton for again putting on the superb hot pie and pea supper. I hope to see the new faces again at our future meetings.

Congratulations to David Hodgson, ex-branch chairman, who had some of his paintings included in an exhibition in Leeds. David Robinson and I went along to do a recee and enjoyed the event (along with the complimentary wine). David was exhibiting pictures of farm animals and landscapes. Not bad for a groundsman. Some of his work is for sale. He can be contacted at 0113 269 2674. Have a word.

Congratulations also to Bob Armstrong who at 76 years young has won the award for 'Best kept allotment' presented by Otley Borough Council for 2005. Good on yer mate. Bob

specialises in growing soft fruit and spends many hours on his patch giving much TLC to his charges. He also finds time for walking and pedalling many miles a week on his bike.

Don't forget on our patch in January is BIGGA's Harrogate Week. For further information and to pre-book your entrance ticket and register visit www.harrogateweek.org.uk.

Any information or news that you think other members may find of interest, please contact me on 0113 285 2962 or e-mail rodheyhoe@talktalk.net and I will include it in these notes.

Have a happy and prosperous New Year. May your grass grow green, strong and healthy.

Rod Heyhoe

WINCHESTER

WE HOPE you all had an enjoyable festive season and wish you a prosperous New Year when we look forward to seeing you at our meetings.

For those of you who attended our November 7 meeting - fifteen members - I am sure you found the evening extremely interesting. Branch member Nick Jeffery held our attention with his excellent slides and commentary on life at Pilgrims School, where he works as head groundsman.

Nick took us through the different seasons with slides to demonstrate how the same scene differed. This covered the trees, gardens and grounds. He is always keen to show the pupils the plants and wildlife within the schools perimeter whenever he has a chance to do so.

We also saw the groundwork and how one sport gives way to another with the minimum time for change over. Some slides from the large list of birds and mammals that have been seen in the grounds were also included. It was a great evening and our thanks go to Nick for his time and for sharing his expertise with us. Also thanks to his son who was technical adviser IT. It has been reported to me that Nick has now been booked for dozens of WI meetings and other interested organisations! Who is your agent, Nick?

Our AGM is on Monday January 23 at 7.30pm at Winchester College. Please try to come along and air your views on what activities you would like for the coming year. If you don't know where our meetings are held please ring Colin Kimber on 01962 867679 for directions on how to get there. I will report next month on our December meeting.

If you have anything to report that may be of interest to our members please let me know, Tel. 01962 712443.

Terry Forder-Stent

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SARAH MIDDLETON looks at websites that prove useful to those working in grounds management

Stay in the warm while you do seed research

ON A COLD January day who could blame a groundsman for seeking a little warmth in front of their PC?

If you need an excuse to take a well-earned coffee break, then a guilt-free option is to go on-line and gather some useful information about grass seed – with happy thoughts of the coming spring in mind – at www.britishseedhouses.com

There's such a wealth of information and resources that even the most busy groundsman won't fail to be drawn into at least one of its pages, providing some respite – no matter how short – from spiking, line marking and, in some instances, worrying!

And it's not just a 'seed selling' site. The home page asks visitors to 'select your entry point', offering five choices, including amenity.

Click on this and it's like opening Aladdin's cave. The drop down menu on the left hand side of the page – the Amenity Index – directs visitors to an area of their specific interest. Options include sportsground mixtures, golf

course mixtures, amenity fertilisers, and poor soils and problems.

The latter opens a page containing tips and information on what grass varieties are best suited to sites offering less than ideal grass growing conditions.

More tolerant seed mixtures need to be used and the site says that British Seed Houses can cater for every eventuality.

It has mixtures for rapid establishment, low maintenance, returning land to agriculture and even a nitrogen fixing 'green manure' mixture.

Of particular interest in the Poor Soils range is the inclusion of Reubens, a variety of Poa compressa that has shown tolerance of pH between three and nine. Resilient of soil toxins, Reubens forms a low growing, tightly knit turf.

On every page, visitors will see a logo for the 'Grade A' club. Clicking on this logo tells you what it's all about.

Becoming a member will not only mean that you gain exclusive access to new and improved cultivars from the Institute of Grassland and

Environmental Research (IGER) amenity grass breeding programme, but you will also benefit from an initiative designed to support continuing high standards of turf grass industry professionalism, claims the site.

And as a registered Grade 'A' Club member, if you buy the Grade 'A' range of seed mixtures you can now take advantage of their new training credit scheme (TCS) to claim discount off the cost of approved training courses and materials from BIGGA, IOG, LANTRA, STRI, TGA and BAGMA.

Registration is free, with just one member per trading account permitted, and you can register on line where you'll also find more information about the benefits of doing so and how the club works.

So, plenty to take your mind off the dark and damp day outside, time to warm your feet (and fingers), and food for thought as you think ahead to your re-seeding decisions when the warmer weather arrives.

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Groundsman

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			8	6				4
		6			9		3	7
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	2		1		6			
4	8		6			3		
3				1	7			
2							6	5

To be in with a chance of winning the £50 cash prize, simply complete the grid, and send your completed Sudoku to Paul Holness with your name and address at The Groundsman Magazine, Ewell House, Graveney Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8UP. First correct entry drawn wins. The Publisher's decision is final.

Name:

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.....

Entries by January 31

The answers from last month's crossword are: **ACROSS** 6. Arsenal, 7. Liana, 9. Sushi, 10. Willows, 12. Imprecision, 14. Plantations, 18. Systole, 19. Hayes, 21. Ankle 22. Suicide **DOWN** 1. Grout, 2. Hexham, 3. Saw, 4. Fields, 5. Snowdon, 8. Biscuit, 11. Treacle, 13. Playing, 15. Nettle, 16. Nuance, 17. Weeds, 20. Bud

The winner of the November Groundsman crossword is John Williamson MBE from Cupar

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Andy Church joins the Inturf team

ANDY CHURCH has joined Inturf as director of sales. He was previously with Rolawn.

"Andy has almost unrivalled experience of sales in the turf grass sector," says Alex Edwards, joint managing director of Inturf.

"His appointment comes at just the right time for us

since we have clear goals for the next few years and are very excited by the contribution he can make towards us achieving them."

For Andy Church the new position presents the opportunity to make a "big mark in an ambitious business".

Details: 01759 321000



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GROUNDSMAN

Wanstead Cricket Club, one of the most prestigious and successful clubs in the South East of England, is in the process of merging with another local cricket club which will result in there being two grounds to maintain.

The Club is seeking tenders from suitably qualified individuals or organisations for the maintenance of the squares and outfield at these two grounds.

To obtain a job description/specification for the post, please apply to:

Trevor Hebden, 21 Richmond Way, Wanstead, London E11 3QT

e-mail: trevor.hebden@ntlworld.com **mob:** 07957 620075

www.iog.org

Grounds Person

We currently have a vacancy in the East Wiltshire area for a suitably qualified & experienced individual. The ideal applicant must have a good knowledge of sports field maintenance, essentially cricket, lawn tennis, football & rugby.

The applicant must be self motivated & enthusiastic. It is essential to have the ability to work on one's own initiative. Salary is dependent on experience.

Please send CV to: Mark Hibbs, J V Strong & Co Ltd, Hopton Industrial Estate, London Road, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 2EU



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