

► Greenkeeper profile

off; once Peter Lacey explained to me the new AquaVita technology that has been used within Attain, and the benefits it has on soil health, it was a must-have for my nutritional programme. The visual results so far have been impressive – the fescue is standing up after an application and looking strong. And the green has a natural look after it has been applied. With the product now being more concentrated it means that instead of the large IBC unit we were having shipped over every year we now get a small 110 litre barrel that takes up less space and costs less to ship. The product has also lost the strong smell that used to linger on you for the whole day.

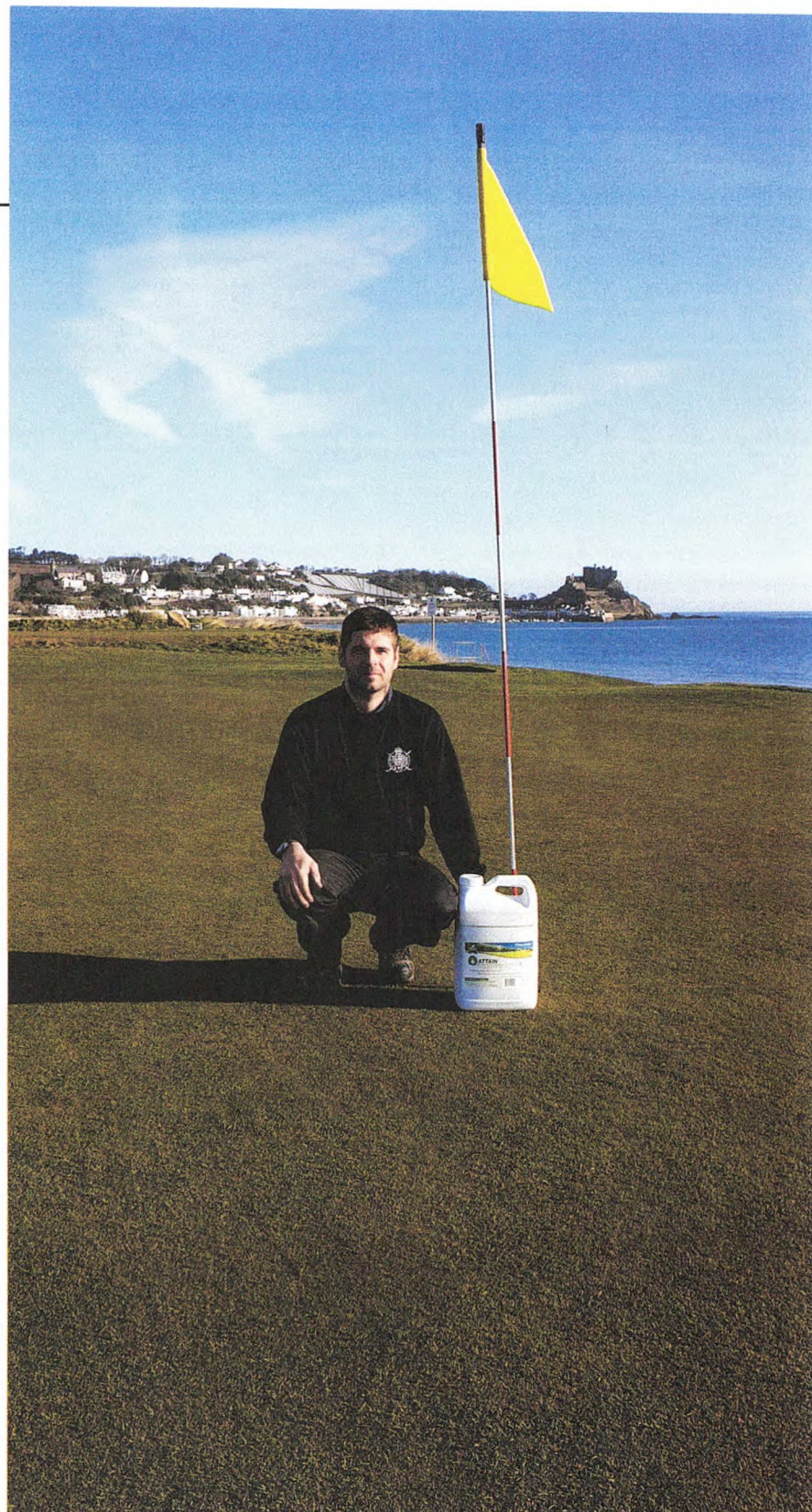
GreenKeeping: What do you think are the strengths that have carried you through your career and current position at Royal Jersey and how do you keep the course evolving?

Allan Black: I would say my strength is my passion for the job – even the two years I had away from the job working on the building sites I still tried to keep up-to-date with the industry and what was going on, I never gave up on getting back on to a golf course and knew it was just a matter of time. Another area I am always trying to improve is communication within the club, and team. I am lucky to have inherited an amazing team that are hard-working and understand the way I work and what I and the club expect from them. They also share the passion I have for the job and this shows by the condition of the course. Going forward the mantra really is presentation.

The course has seen several big changes in the past which were needed at the time. This has now come to an end and it is time to take it forward by trying to improve on the high standards of presentation we already have on the course.

GreenKeeping: What height of cut do you use across the course and what hours do the team work?

Allan Black: Greens are cut at 4mm in the summer and 6mm in the winter. Tees are cut at 13mm all year. Fairways are cut 13mm in summer and 15mm winter. Approaches are 7mm in summer and 9mm winter.



Summer working hours are 6am to 2pm Monday to Friday with two-man teams at weekends doing three and a half hours every third weekend. Winter hours are 6:30am to 2pm Monday to Thursday and 12:30pm on a Friday, and two-man teams at weekends doing two and a half hours every third weekend.


During the summer months we have a lot

of shot gun starts where we will be in at 5am to get everything done, and when we have shotguns on the weekends we will be in at 4:30am.

This means that all our kit has lights on; we also have residential areas around the course which means we have to change our route at those times to not disturb anyone.

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GreenKeeping: Training and education are key to developing a good team, what do you do to ensure you are investing in raising the standard of practice and performance of your team members?

Allan Black: The club has always been a big supporter of training staff and that is not just in our department. All the assistant greenkeepers here have done their NVQ level 2 and three of the lads are now in their second year doing their level 3.

One of the trainees has almost finished his level 2 with the other trainee starting his later this year. This training is a must for these guys if they want to progress in the industry and it gives them a great insight to the job. We also do a lot of other off-site courses like first aid, Excavator (180/360), spraying, chainsaw, working at height, manual handling and some health and safety courses. I also try and get the team involved when we have reps over and when STRI do their yearly visit. We try and have

a monthly team meeting which is either in the staff room or a course walk, and this is great, so I can get my plans and ideas across but it also gives them a chance to put forward any ideas they have.

GreenKeeping: You are a practitioner of sustainability. What are the factors that have caused you to pursue a more sustainable maintenance programme and how has this benefitted the course?



The 11th hole at Royal Jersey



Allan Black: I think the industry as a whole is now looking at becoming more sustainable and with each passing year we are losing more and more of the chemical tools we once had in our armour to attack turf disease and pests. So, we need to look at different ways in which we can solve these problems and, for us, it has been things like improving our water use, lowering our inputs using products like Attain to improve our soil health and introducing more fescue to the greens and discourage the poa as much as we can. I think tougher times are still to come in our job and communication to the membership will become vital and, for us, sustainability across the whole course is a must to make those tough times a bit easier (hopefully).

GreenKeeping: The pressures on the course manager to deliver a better product are growing year on year and the level of professionalism is rising with this. What do you think are the qualities now needed to meet the requirements and demands of golfers by someone in your position and how does this help contribute to the business of golf?

Allan Black: I think communication by keeping the membership up-to-date with changes in the industry like products being removed and why we do certain practices. Educating the team; I am trying to explain and give the team as much info on things we are doing on a day-to-day basis so they have the

answers for the membership. Blogs and social media now are becoming a good tool for educating and communicating with members. Greenkeeper forums are great too as you can see what other guys are up too and ask for advice and our industry is great at helping each other.

GreenKeeping: What gives you the greatest satisfaction from your job?

Allan Black: The biggest satisfaction for me is presenting the golf course, whether it be for a big competition or for a corporate event. Even though the lead up to it or the morning of the event can be stressful there is no better feeling when it all goes to plan, and everything looks sharp.

Walking around the course daily is the time I think I enjoy the most – I can get a good look at things, make lists and plan the jobs ahead, take moisture readings, speak to the team doing their jobs and talk to the members.

As I have only been head greenkeeper for six months I would have to say our biggest achievement to date was building ten bunkers this winter within two months – granted the weather was on our side but the team really worked hard and to a very high standard to produce some of the best bunkers I have seen built on the course.

GreenKeeping: With your many years

experience, what advice would you give to youngsters starting out and wanting to pursue a career in the profession?

Allan Black: This is something that really concerns me in the industry – the lack of young people taking on apprenticeships. We have had a couple of vacancies in the last few years and have struggled to find apprentices, which I just put down to it being a Jersey thing. But I was talking to several people at BTME who were saying they are having the same problems. So, my advice to any young person looking to get into greenkeeping – take every opportunity you can to learn, look at everything that is going on around the course and ask plenty of questions. Don't be scared to put forward your ideas. This job is a great opportunity to travel and each course will teach you something new.

GreenKeeping: What were the benefits of the new BTME layout to you this year and what changes do you think need to be made to benefit the industry sector and profession of the greenkeeper?

Allan Black: I think the new layout was great. The first day took me a little while to get my bearings but it felt like you had more chance to talk to the reps at their stand and weren't queuing up waiting to catch their attention.

The Continue to Learn was good and organised as always. I really enjoyed it this year and am looking forward to BTME 2020.