

FIFTY YEARS OF GREENKEEPING

by TOM MASON

One of our earliest members looks back on some of the highlights in the Association's long history and his own career

THE British Golf Greenkeepers' Association has reached its fiftieth year. Its formation was mainly due to our tactful and far-seeing friend the late F. G. Hawtree, known to us older ones as Freddy. As a member for forty-nine years and a very close friend of his, I know I am speaking for all who knew him, when I say that we owe him the deepest appreciation and gratitude for the untiring and splendid work he did for the Association. Not only do we miss him personally but also as an Association, particularly for his genius in smoothing out our tricky problems whenever they arose.

His gift of speech did much to improve the status of the Association; one often wonders whether it would have got so far today without him and those loyal and constructive early members—to name a few—Messrs. MacNiece, Baker, Prickett, Lacey, Smithers, Scott, Kirby, Steward, Dunn with whom I was proud to serve on the Executive Committee for many years just before and after the first World War before the Association broke up into sections. They were busy times.

Best Endeavours

The objects of the Association are now well-known. We, its members during these fifty years have done our best to improve our technique and better the conditions of golf courses. How often do our employers realise the work done for their benefit by the Association, and the loyalty and knowledge of their greenkeepers?

In 1912 a greenkeeper was assessed by the hours and the hard work he put in on the course, and, so it was said, by the number of sheep droppings he could balance on a shovel.

When I look back at those hard days, my thoughts drift to what the present day golf course worker would say if told to carry out what had to be done then. I quote: "Summer hours—Commence work six a.m. finish six p.m. One-and-half hours off for meals". Wet or fine one was expected to keep going, walking behind a 30 in. or 36 in. horse-mower, or pushing one of the old silent Messers on the greens with the box on. No tea and cake in the morning nor in the afternoon, only after lunching, with your bread and dripping and cold tea out in the fields in order to get the work done. Why bread and dripping? What was wrong with the steak and chips that one might smell when passing the clubhouse, and a nice warm shed to eat it in?

Rewards

Those were the good old days but this is why there was no steak and chips:—

	£	s.	d.
Head Greenkeeper ...	1	10	0
Skilled Groundsman ...	1	2	0
Horse driver, etc. ...	14	0	

and this often included working three hours on Sundays, sweeping and rolling greens and on Bank holidays until work was finished.

There were times when one could put in an hour or two overtime, at sixpence per hour. Some will say: "But look what you could buy for your money in those days.

The old ones know all about that, and the most sensible will say, as I do, that the Greenkeeper and his staff are far better off now in all ways, than they were in the early days.

But thank goodness for those early days of 1912 and for the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association with its lec-

tures, essays and meetings where knowledge was pooled and often debated for two hours or more. The 1914-1918 war temporarily checked the good work but in 1919, with the rehabilitation of the Association (here again thanks mainly to our friend, F. G. Hawtree) things really began to liven up with more visits to places of interest and education,—Carters, Suttons, Ryders, Ransomes Sims and Jefferies, Shanks, Greens and, in addition, our splendid companion, *The British Golf Greenkeepers' Journal*, so popular that within five years it more than doubled its size. Its contents with the exception of half-a-dozen or so advertisements, consisted of essays and the practical findings of some of the best greenkeepers of that time, all in plain language to be understood by all. But eventually, due to pressure on the Editor and cost, the present-day journal was produced by the late Mr. Philpot, and is now carried on by the son of the famous F. G. Hawtree.

First Triple

Around 1919, when the old horse roller machine was the only means of cutting fairways, we the Executive Committee of the B.G.G.A. introduced to Mr. Sandy Cuthbert, Mr. Reed and other officials of Messrs. Shanks and Sons, at the Hendon Golf Course, an idea that we felt would reduce labour, time and horses. The idea was three skeleton machines placed in triple formation, with a seat fixed over the top and a pair of shafts to be drawn by one horse. It would do the work with one man riding, and one horse pulling, three times quicker than the old roller machine method, three men, three horses plus continuously cleaning the rollers of worm casts. However Shanks and Sons turned it down. We then approached Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies again without success.

Our next thought was, "What about pooling our cash and getting a trial one made up and patented?" But we felt that if we did it ourselves, we would upset the traders. And so it was forgotten until 1923 when many of us were invited to Rangers Park Golf Course to see a machine for cutting fairways sent over

from America by a firm known as the Shornie manufacturers. With the exception of a few minor details, it was the same as ours.

You may guess the rest of the story.

The Shornie people did very well out of them and our manufacturers had to buy the patent rights.

The machine was so impressive that my own club and many others purchased, or gave orders on the same day. What a blessing and comfort it was to sit on a seat and cut the fairways in a third of the time! What a mistake not to have made it ourselves!

Early Trials

Next, as a result of the writer's findings on his own trial plots at Hendon, laid down in 1927, it was agreed by the Executive Committee to carry out similar experiments on other soils namely:—Seaside Sand, Inland Sand, Chalk, in addition to my own clay. The courses selected:—

Seaside Sand—Royal West Norwich.

Inland Sand—Frilford Heath.

Chalk—Coulston.

Clay—Sudbury.

As pioneer the writer was elected as chairman with two valuable assistants, Messrs. S. Morton and W. Kirby. Our duty was to attend the above courses and instruct the laying out of a number of plots three yards by one yard and boarded all round the allocated areas were dug up, neutralised as near as possible, and sown with different grass species. Then each plot was divided into three and treated with acid reacting neutral or control, and alkaline reacting fertilisers. The results would take up too much time, but our members learnt a lot from the scheme. This, together with write-ups from other members gave birth to much interest in the use and value of Sulphate of Ammonia, Sulphate of Iron and compost.

This scheme started a year or two before the Bingley Research Station was established, so it could be claimed that the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association should be credited with much that was later substantiated by the St. Ives Research Station, now the Sports Turf Research Institute.

As a staunch advocate of S/A and S/I plus plenty of compost, I am very pleased that our findings of that time as to their value are still valid.

Supporter

In the early days of the Research Station we were proud to have supporting us the Hon. Secretary of the Board of Management of the Station, Mr. Norman Hackett. Mr. Hackett's untiring efforts to prove the value of acid reacting fertilisers for encouraging the finest grasses and discouraging the more succulent species weeds and worms, were very pleasing, particularly to me because all he preached coincided with my own past findings. Unfortunately some took too much for granted and through wrong usage of S/A and S/I many greens were damaged for such long periods that it was considered by some too dangerous to use. However, any person interested would do well to read the book written by the late Mr. Norman Hackett in the early days of 1930 or to visit the plots at Bingley to confirm its claim.

Practical Link

As mentioned earlier, the Research Station at Bingley started in 1929. For quite a time many greenkeepers were reluctant to fall in with its aims but a year or two later the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association, affiliated itself to the Station and formed the Practical Advisory Committee. This fortunately helped to (and, I believe, eventually did)

eliminate the fears of greenkeepers about what the Research Station might do to them.

Demise

The Practical Advisory Committee met at Bingley in Spring and Autumn to survey the plots and hold a conference. We would discuss our findings on the plots, make recommendations thought to be beneficial to the Greenkeeper and voice any complaints from members. Our first meeting took place on the 9th October, 1934 and this continued twice yearly until the death of our beloved Chairman, the late Mr. F. G. Hawtree. I much regret that in spite of their great value, no further meetings have taken place since. Strange as it may seem, the same persons who were appointed at the start continued to the end and reported their findings in our own Journal.

The Future

It is a pity that new blood cannot be found to renew this most important contact with the Research Station and make the B.G.G.A. still more interesting and educative. It gives one more incentive to look forward to our Journal, when there are reports from our own Greenkeepers of their findings at the Station or on their own courses, Essay Competitions and accounts of lectures.

But now it will soon be 1963. Good luck to all those who have done so much for the B.G.G.A. in the past, and to all those who carry on the good work in the next fifty years.

GREENKEEPERS 1914-18 *(See page 9)*

1. S. Fletcher, D.C.M., M.M., Moseley Golf Club. Cpl., King's Royal Rifles. Twice wounded in France; awarded the Military Medal for holding up an enemy advance at Ypres, and the Distinguished Conduct Medal in 1918 for conspicuous gallantry in the Field.
2. C. Berridge. Late Woodside Golf Club.
3. J. Seager, Biddenham Golf Club. Pte., Buffs. 4 years' service.
4. T. Mason, Hendon Golf Club. Cpl., Royal Garrison Artillery. Served in France; wounded.
5. A. Scott, Cowdenbeath Golf Club. Driver, R.A.S.C. Served in France. (Invalided).
6. J. Henderson. Pte., Northumberland Fusiliers.