

LAST MONTH

by
The Editor

We parted last month on the way to Brussels. The brief return of winter made the plane only quarter of an hour late and my host ordered us a Steak Minute each in the grill at Melsbroek Airport. I have never found out whether 'Minute' refers to cooking time or size. In either event, the description is off-centre. The reality is a considerable slice of the animal concerned requiring not one but twenty-five minutes in preparation at Brussels. Even so, the general effect is one of slight external scorch with the inside remaining roughly as it left the butcher's shop.

Nevertheless, it fortified and helped to exclude the east wind as we circled later round a chateau only ten miles from the centre of the city. This was certainly a 'chateau minute' with three rooms on each of three floors surrounded by a tiny moat. The cellars, elegantly attired for sampling the stock on the spot, were 11th Century and each floor moved successively a hundred years nearer the present as one went up the staircase. Two stone cannonballs found when the moat was cleaned out showed that No. 4 on the Bofors gun in a more recent war had a relatively easy job. The mediaeval loader had to be a weight lifter of Olympic class.

Planning a golf course in Continental countries is often complicated by laws of inheritance which make the plan of the site look like a jungle of suburban plots. Pieces of land have been divided, sub-divided and divided again through the generations. Even if the owners are known, a world tour is likely to be necessary to see them all in order to re-unite

so many thin strips of land. Some have already been sold, so that on a coloured plan ominous white spaces obstruct the only route which can at first be visualised for eighteen holes. And all this comes before tackling the normal problems of contour, length, safety, and the rest.

Oddly enough, the more difficult the assignment, the easier the job. Either a respectable golf course can be planned or it cannot. If it can be planned, there is only one way to do so—if not "Good afternoon!". I leave aside the question of what makes a respectable golf course because any greenkeeper will know the answer instinctively. In this case we came out of it with 6,200 yards, five 3-bogeys, two fives and only two sub-standard fours in the remainder. Not brilliant stuff, but acceptable—indeed essential when so many golfers are knocking at the doors of clubs already crowded. Belgium, in this respect, has just the same problems as those from which we suffer in this country.

At dinner that evening by candle-light in front of the great stone fireplace, it was only appropriate that a count and countess should have joined the party, and as I climbed the stairs later on and into my fourposter bed, I had no trouble in leaving behind the ghosts of the centuries on the floors below.

Changeover

The next day Dusseldorf appeared under the wing of the aircraft. The English greenkeeper, 'Lofty' Duncombe has now left to Wiesbaden and has been succeeded by a German, Herr Strünker, who came from the Essen Golf Club. He has quickly got into his stride and was all ready to get going as soon as the frost was out of the ground, so that the course would be in good trim for opening later in the year.

Then on to Bochum, a last-minute invitation which had to be fitted into a programme already uncomfortably congested. This factor, combined with a sharp east wind, speeded up operations to such an extent that within 70 minutes of walking round the site we had the nine holes planned and the ordnance map marked with the area which would

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be required. I must admit, however, that a few details like bunkers and green designs will still have to be settled at a later date.

That night I walked round Essen. The modern re-building of the centre has happily preserved the alleyways and passages between streets which make it all so much more interesting for the pedestrian. They also give momentary relief from the continuous facade of red, green, yellow, blue and white neon lights which decorate virtually every building in the city centre. Aida was being played at the Opera House, but was unfortunately starting within 10 minutes of the time when I walked into the foyer. As I had not yet dined, there was a brief controversy between conscience and stomach, but the issue was never really in doubt. On my way out I passed an artistic-looking gentleman, studying the poster and muttering as he did so. I moved closer, thinking to hear some pertinent comment on the performance which would add to the pleasure of the meal I was about to enjoy. But all he was saying was "Schandenpreise". The prices did not appear particularly steep to the English eye, but perhaps he knew more about what would go on inside than I did.

Top-heavy

In the morning I arrived at the Essen Golf Club. This is a nine-hole course recently constructed, but has the most magnificent clubhouse of any nine-hole course that I know. It is really worthy of 36 holes and the club had already got an option on land to extend to 18 and this was the purpose of my visit. The country in this part of Germany is strongly undulating on a short scale which does not add to the pleasures of designing, but an answer was happily feasible and only two greens of the existing course had to be given up. One might add that the existing nine holes

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had eleven greens because two holes were played in a rather different form the second time round. The loss was, therefore, more or less inevitable.

Back home for the weekend and then off to Paris again for a round of the courses being constructed there and a couple of luncheons organised by Publicis who are charged with the public relations of the new golf course at Le Lavandou, in the South of France. The Publicis offices are on a corner at the top of the Champs Elysées and from the terrace just above the dining room one of the best views in Paris provides a useful talking point before the meal. Mr. Michael Fenn, who is going to be Secretary at the new course, was also at the luncheons and I sat next to Mr. Henry A. Bertrand, who is Editor of

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Adam. He is a keen golfer and this, no doubt, explain why free periscopes, bearing the name of his magazine were given away at the Canada Cup last October.

On Wednesday, Mr. Tom Scott arrived and we dined with Mr. and Mrs. Cuvelier. Mr. Cuvelier is the promoter of the new 36-hole golf club at Le Prieure. We went to the Auberge de Notre-Dame, where the normal beginning to the meal is a selection of 24 different types of sausage all named by the waiter, with their districts added. The next day, Mr. Tom Scott was delighted to find George Wilson, a fellow-Scot on the job, and they exchanged

memories of Kirriemuir, Dundee, and a large number of places which I could not pronounce. Mr. Scott, incidentally, took to the ploughed land as if he had been walking over it all his life, even though he must be more used to the finished product than a golf course in its constructional stage.

We flew back to London that night and after a few hours at the Ariel Hotel I stepped on to the Prestbury Golf Club, via Manchester Airport, where possibilities of an additional nine-holes are occupying the Committee's attention. An active member here is Mr. Harold Humphreys, a well-known Cheshire golfer for many years. He was rather regretful that, having been scratch since 1930, the handicapping Committee has put him up to 1. Personally, I think that it is his opponents that should be regretting this move.

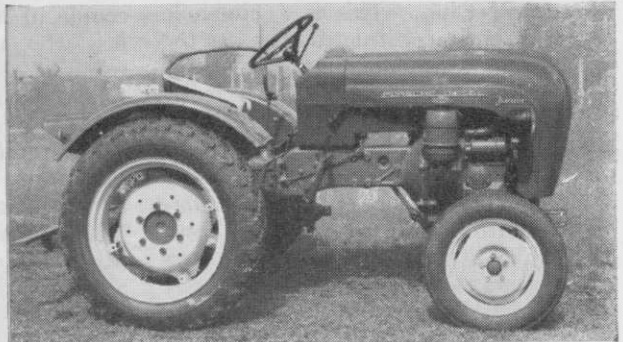
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