

# THE CARING OF THE GREEN: TRAINING THE YOUNG

By S. L. McKinlay

**I**F I know my greenkeepers they will not, in these days of frost and snow, be idling their time away before the small screen because there is limited opportunity for work on the course in their care.

At the very least they will not be falling into the errors of the power boards who were recently caught with their plants down. If outside work is impossible they will be overhauling their equipment against the spring when the song of the mowers will again be heard in the land. They will be mending their fences, mixing their fertilisers and feeding preparations, tending their trees—in short, they will be well occupied.

The greenkeeper is, to my way of thinking, the most important single person associated with a golf club. To be sure, it is wonderfully agreeable to have an efficient clubmaster who cares for our creature comforts indoors, it is comforting to have a good professional who will repair our clubs (though that is now a rare requirement), sort out our swing, and generally have a thought for our playing performance.

## Key Man

But it is possible for a golfer to make virtually no calls on the pro. or the clubmaster and yet have a fairly full golfing life, and it is the greenkeeper who can make that life a misery or a joy. If the course is ill-kept then even a golfer playing at his best in the most genial weather and with the right kind of company will go home ill-content. Trim teeing grounds, well-cut fairways, tidy bunkers, and smooth greens are a joy to behold, they are also, I am persuaded, a joy to create and maintain.

Last summer I played at Killermont on the Sunday after the Tennant Cup competition and mentioned to the duty greenkeeper that the course had looked to be in excellent trim on the great day. His reply astonished me. "It wasn't quite right. We couldn't make up our

minds what was wrong, but we decided it was a little too hard to be just right."

It would have been easy for that greenkeeper to accept my commendation, which was honestly given, but pride in his craft would not allow him to escape what he regarded as his responsibility to have the course perfect. And he refused to make an excuse of the weather.

It will be gathered that I have an especial respect for greenkeepers, and not only because some years ago they saw fit to give me an office of honour in their organisation. They have always been an essential part of the game, though for too long they were lightly regarded as being not much more than unskilled labourers.

## Many Jobs

Now they have to possess a wide range of skills. Even routine maintenance of a course involves knowledge of machinery, its operation and maintenance, fertilisers, weeds, diseases, and pests (and these may include conveners and committees), the management, planting and pruning of trees, the timing of operations, such as turfing, the ordering and care of materials.

If new greens or tees are to be made the greenkeeper has to be wise about grading and drainage, seeds mixtures and times of sowing, lifting and laying of turf, rolling, top-dressing—the lot.

How he finds time and the energy to keep abreast of new developments in soil science and mechanics, botany and biology, I don't know. But he does.

I have told before of an experience I had one miserable winter night some years ago when I was asked to chair a meeting in Glasgow at which some of the Bingley boffins, the experts from the Sports Turf Research Institute, were to talk to West of Scotland greenkeepers. There was frost and fog and no inducement at all to be elsewhere than at the fireside. But about 50 greenkeepers turned up, some from as far away as Helensburgh and Lanark and almost all dependent on public transport.

Not only did they listen to the experts with the most intense interest; they deaved them with questions which proclaimed a lively awareness of their own skills. It was a most heartening reminder that the modern greenkeeper is a dedicated craftsman.

Some clubs and club members appreciate their most important employee. Recently at the Hayston Golf Club's dinner-dance the greenkeeper, the club professional, and the clubmaster were present as guests and, very properly, publicly applauded for their work during the year. This is as it should be, for golfers are in general not the most altruistic of people, we are too ready to take for granted essential services that are sometimes difficult to maintain.

I find it a little chastening that the admirable golf greenkeeper apprenticeship scheme should not be thriving more mightily. It was instituted a year or two ago by the golf unions, the Sports Turf Research Institute, and the greenkeepers' associations because of the real, and justified, fear that the time might come when golf as a game would founder because there were no greenkeepers to maintain courses.

#### More Needed

At present there are only six apprentices in Scotland registered under the scheme, 40 in England, numbers which are not nearly sufficient to ensure the maintenance of the game as it exists, to say nothing of the courses that are under construction or planned. It is a well thought out scheme that ensures the proper training of young men who, because of the continuing popularity of the game, are assured of a good job for life. And it is a good job—a hard job, a

job making great demands on the intelligence as well as the physique, but a rewarding job.

We would do well to cultivate our greenkeepers. Without them we would be like the golfer in the old story who on his death descended into Hell and there found a wonderful golf course and a wonderful set of clubs. But there were no golf balls to play with and that, as Satan said, was the Hell of it!

*With grateful acknowledgement to the Glasgow Herald.*

\* \* \*

The following letter appeared in the same newspaper two days later,  
**IN SUPPORT OF GREENKEEPING**  
November 30, 1965

Sir,

With reference to S. L. McKinlay's article on greenkeeping and greenkeepers, may I, as one of the six apprentices in Scotland, express my surprise at the paucity in numbers of those taking up this outdoor career. In the past Scottish greenkeepers have been renowned for their knowledge and skill, but how can that reputation be carried into the future when there are so few making this their career?

After having served two years of my indenture I can thoroughly recommend the job as a career for a youth who is prepared to study and work hard with the view to becoming a greens superintendent.

It is up to Scottish golf clubs to make it an attractive career, offering good wages and conditions as an incentive, thus ensuring the continuance of first-class greenkeepers from Scotland.

ALLAN CRAWFORD.

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