

# THE CLUB GREENKEEPER

by CECIL MORTON

## NOW, AND THE FUTURE

**T**HINGS have moved a long way from the days when the only greenkeepers were the rabbits.

Greenkeeping is now a highly specialised science and cannot any longer be left to the vagaries of nature and pests. The head greenkeeper is a tough, sturdy, weatherbeaten man of the open. He has to know all about soils and turf, its texture, its wants, drainage, top-dressings, mowing, fertilisers, weeds, moss and fungi; he must know how best to deal with the pests of the animal world; he must have a good knowledge of trees, the species, what and when to plant; he must know about fertilisers and their action, and the use of poisons on the course; he must know about irrigation and modern watering appliances, when and how to use them. He must be a man of diplomacy in dealing with directors, captains, committees and members, many of whom sometimes think they know more about his job than he does. He must be a man of mechanization, knowing all about mechanical operation in turf upkeep, and the maintenance of his machines, which today are numerous. He is always a man of the weather, knowing nature's signs for change; he is usually more accurate than the B.B.C.

### **Dedicated**

Finally, he is a man of unending patience. With the high standards of turf maintenance now required and with the greater wear courses are subjected to with the present golf boom, such dedicated head greenkeepers as clubs now have, now gradually reaching retiring age, which for them is often 70, are just irreplaceable.

Pay and conditions for greenkeepers have at long last improved vastly and is now on a par with many other employments. The recommended weekly

pay of head greenkeepers averages from £22 to £26 plus accommodation; that for first assistants from £17 to £19 and assistants from £13 to £16. Many of the most competent first assistants are now in demand as head greenkeepers. Also, many clubs now have a pension scheme which will ensure that a retired employee will enjoy an income, including his state pension, of not less than half his income on retirement.

In most clubs, head greenkeepers are given free accommodation, free light and heat facilities. In a few clubs there is accommodation for all greenkeepers employed, but only the few as yet. It is of course an advantage for greenkeepers to be accommodated near the course since they have to start work early, and frequently take their turn on Saturdays and Sundays brushing up the course.

It is now common practice for greenkeepers to play golf. There are annual matches between the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association and the Association of Golf Club Secretaries, and many others. Many of the greenkeepers are scratch golfers. They run their own annual championship trophy. As far as their job is concerned, the playing of golf not only keeps them fit and happy, but also enables them to appreciate the club members' viewpoint on the course. In short, it helps to sustain their interest in their own courses and improves their greenkeeping. Clubs therefore should widely encourage the playing of the game by all their greenkeeping staff.

Since the course is a golf club's biggest asset and the pride of all the members, it follows that a club committee must be appointed for overall control. This is the green committee. This committee should limit itself to control of money spent on the green staff and on

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the course and machinery; to very general supervision of the course maintenance without attempting to do the head greenkeeper's job for him, or the secretary's for that matter; and for minor alterations to the course (all major ones should be decided after seeking the advice of a golf course architect).

All instructions should be transmitted through the club secretary who in turn conveys them to the head greenkeeper. The secretary is responsible for seeing that the policy of the green committee is carried out. On no account should members of the green committee give instructions direct to any of the green staff. The chain of command and control should be rigidly observed.

### **Instruction and Advice**

The Sports Turf Research Institute at Bingley, Yorkshire, was first established in 1929 as the Board of Greenkeeping Research. It is officially recognised as an independent scientific research organisation and is the only one of its kind in Europe. It is non-commercial and non-profit making. Its board of management is represented by nominees of the four individual national golf unions and the Council of National Golf Unions.

Its objects are the raising of the standard of turf used for all sports, and to further the production of good playing areas on turf through scientific research, practical trials, education and advice. Any golf club may become an associate member of the institute on paying an annual subscription. This entitles a club to free advice on course maintenance, including the testing of samples when necessary. Advisory visits to members' courses are carried out on payment of a fee.

Courses of instruction in greenkeeping are annually held, both for greenkeepers and for club secretaries. Greenkeepers stand to benefit greatly from their clubs belonging to this institute, both from any courses of instruction they may attend and from advice and visits to their own courses. They are invaluable to club secretaries when in trouble over their courses.

A number of clubs employ the services of some trade firm. These too are very good and exceedingly helpful. I have had personal experience of both the Institute of Research and of trade firms and can strongly recommend both. In my view, such an organisation forms a valuable base behind the two men on the spot, i.e. the head greenkeeper and his secretary, to which to appeal for help when in doubt.

### **Apprenticeship**

As early as 1959 it was foreseen that, unless something was done to induce young men to take up greenkeeping as a trade, there would be no trained men to take over from the numerous head greenkeepers soon to reach the age of retirement. Scotland felt the pinch before England and moves towards an apprenticeship scheme began that year. It was not until 1963 that the newly formed Joint Council for Golf Greenkeeper Apprenticeship had its first meeting and approved a draft scheme. This Joint Council includes representatives from the golf unions of England, Scotland and Wales and from the Scottish and British Golf Greenkeepers' Association.

Briefly the scheme was as follows: It was a scheme to provide for the systematic recruitment and training of greenkeepers on golf courses. The Joint Council was responsible for administering the scheme and was composed of the following representatives:

- English Golf Union (1)
- Scottish Golf Union (1)
- Welsh Golfing Union (1)
- Sports Turf Research Institute (2)
- British Golf Greenkeepers' Association, England (2)
- Scottish Golf Greenkeepers' Association (2)
- British Golf Greenkeepers' Association, Wales (1)

This Joint Council, *inter alia*, co-operated with the Youth Employment Service in the recruitment of suitable young persons for entry into apprenticeship, and with Education Authorities in the establishment of facilities for

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further education of both a general and a technical character.

Fuller information about the scheme is given in the employers' guide which is available from the Hon. Secretary, The Joint Council for Golf Greenkeeper Apprenticeship, who is now Mr P. C. French, of 3 Skeet Hill Cottages, Dalton's Road, Chelsfield, Orpington, Kent.

Apprenticeship figures show that in 1966, three years after the inception of the scheme, only 74 deeds of apprenticeship had been issued. At the same time, the demand for replacements for greenkeepers had further outstripped the supply. There had been many retirements, especially among head greenkeepers. In England alone there are over 900 courses, and they go on increasing, and so the demand for greenkeepers is bound to be heavy. A number too take greenkeeping jobs in Europe.

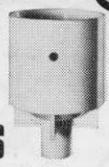
By September 1968 the 74 deeds of apprenticeship issued had risen to 164. Forty-two apprenticeships had been completed. I am told that the biggest difficulty for clubs is the procuring of theoretical training in many areas. The Council considers, so its hon. secretary informs me, that further education in fairly simple background science is an important part of the training.

The number of apprentices is certainly on the increase, particularly in Scotland. The aim of the Joint Council is to have at least one apprentice in each golf club. It is important that clubs should not treat the apprentice as a form of cheap labour, but should ensure his proper training for the benefit of golf at large, and not just for the employing club itself.

### Prospects

At least two head greenkeepers of long service have told me that there is a wonderful opportunity for apprentice greenkeepers ahead of them. In about 10 to 15 years' time, first-class head greenkeepers will be at a premium, and will be able to command a salary in keeping with their status. The fortunes of any good club revolves round a first-class head greenkeeper. Another head

  
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greenkeeper on the point of retirement also told me that "if any lad is looking for a life where he can work happily all his days, if he is willing to study and learn as much as possible, then it's the best life one could look for".

And so, you club committees, please support this apprenticeship scheme for all you're worth. It really is the start of a brave new world in greenkeeping. DON'T let your courses slip back to nature's courses, such as were the only ones in the early days of golf, when the only greenkeepers were the rabbits. Much as our forebears evidently enjoyed their golf under those conditions, somehow I don't think the present-day club members would be much amused!

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### MISCELLANEOUS

PROFESSIONALS AND GREENKEEPERS having stocks of used golf balls contact Sparkbrook Golf Ball Co., 295 Highgate Road, Stoney Lane, Birmingham, with a view to filling export orders.