

18 HOLES WITH HAWTREE

No. 7—TREES

by FRED HAWTREE

BY now, we should have got the framework of the golf course as good as the site permits and the time has come to paper the walls.

Ideally, planting trees should form part of the original conception, they may even be essential to full and interesting use of the ground. They should not be relied on as a safety factor, either present or future, but a good plan will use existing trees as strategic playing features.

Once established, the right varieties need little upkeep and make a welcome addition to the limited number of weapons in the designer's armoury.

Those situated in the fairways will be older than the golf course unless subsequent shifts of tees or greens have made use of planting which was marginal when the course began.

In principle, a tree hazard can be used exactly as a sand bunker but discretion will temper its distance from the tee in order to limit the number of players whose best drive will finish just behind it. In any case it is effective over a much wider area and far more interesting when it modifies but does not block a fair shot.

There are few shots in golf more satisfying than one which sails over trees exactly on target. If the line is optional then blindness is permissible; if it is obligatory, a thin screen obscuring some of the air-space on the way to the green but not the green itself is both decorative and stimulating. The not-too-long short hole is very suitable for this device, often found on courses carried out of pine woods. It is also the hole where the idea can be developed on existing courses by allowing small trees in the carry rough to creep up imperceptibly into view and eventually into play.

But most tree-planting programmes will be restricted to the margins. There are two things on which all golfers seem to be agreed. One, though not altogether relevant here, is that the

West Sussex golf course at Pulborough is perfect. The other is that a course with every hole completely isolated from the others is ideal. Unfortunately, many inland courses, especially round big cities, are laid out on closely parallel lines for maximum length and do not allow enough width between fairways for any considerable density. Here it is better to abandon the idea of total separation and plant as thickly as possible in areas where the fairway can be waived, connecting the groups with isolated specimens. A thin single line does not enhance the landscape.

Free spaces are still more important round greens for "air drainage". Trees planted as background to greens receive approbation from all except purists but if planting is carried round the sides it should allow air to move across the surface and reduce the risk of fungal attacks.

In colder climates the angle and direction of early morning sun in winter should also be studied. Frost may otherwise persist too long into the day. If there is drip from branches overhanging the green they are too close in any case but grass does not like it any more than it appreciates invasion by tree roots. Mole ploughing round the green or trenching and painting the severed roots with a hormone weed-killer will be needed.

All these factors apply more frequently to tees because it is relatively simple to put a tee back into woodland without disturbing the general effect and the narrow gap often leads to excessive shade and dampness.

The choice of trees for new planting on a golf course should be related to the landscape generally but it is even more important to plant in keeping with the artificial landscape which the golf course itself creates over its hundred acres or so. By the sea, on sandy or gravelly heaths and in pine woods the answer is ready made. Else-

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where the importation of sand and the slow development of an acid turf guide the selection. A basis of Pine and Silver Birch is widely adaptable, shows green throughout the year being only partly deciduous (small leaves at that) and is a very agreeable mixture in itself. Larch and Spruce can be added sparingly to vary colour and form but the latter should not be used in isolation because of their formal habit of growth. Similarly most Cypress and Thuya look better in the garden than on the golf course.

Oak, Beech, single specimens of Mountain Ash, the Wild Cherry (Gean) can be added, preferably away from greens, but Chestnuts, Planes, Maples (except the Hedge Maple), Sycamores; Ash, and Limes give leaf problems and may have the wrong associations. Poplars are generally best avoided altogether unless landscaping a stream or pool. Local considerations apply near water and in parkland courses where noble specimens may need replacing.

The line between what is wrong on a golf course and right in a garden gets more difficult to draw when choosing shrubs. Gorse and Broom obviously qualify for the golfing landscape: Sallow and Spindle also grow wild and there are plenty of colourful Hawthorns. Rhododendrons may be more demanding but there are many Heathers which tolerate lime. The less vivid Azalea, Forsythia and Dogwoods (but not variegated) might be adopted, but one should stop short of Berberis, double-flowered Almond and other common delights of the smaller nurseryman. No one will object if a few hundredweights of Daffodils are sown at random under the new trees. Exotic subjects can be planted between the club house and the first tee but from that point on our landscape should be native or at least naturalised while accepting imports with informal associations and tolerant of possible exposure.

Some clubs have dedicated remote areas and planted forest nursery stock costing a few pounds per thousand. Planting is rapid, being a dibbing

rather than a digging operation, but losses are severe because planting in grass is not the same as re-planting cleared woodland where vegetation is sparser and brambles give protection. Many trees have a system of fine root hairs, which we never notice when pulling them up, busy in just the same area as grass roots. The 2 x 1 transplant stands a poor chance against a hefty clump of Cocksfoot. After a few years, unless clearing round each tree has been regular, it is difficult to see either the wood or the trees. Near play the upkeep of the rough normally demands a planting interval of triple gang mower width and very small trees would not stand much chance.

"Instant" trees will become cheaper as more specially prepared stock becomes available. Unless so prepared they must be transplanted by the machines designed for the job. But it is still desirable to prepare larger trees on the course to be transplanted by trenching round and filling the trench with peat a year or two before they are moved. And it still has to be demonstrated that 25ft. of lanky tree, which may need guy ropes for a year or two and may fade away meanwhile, is better than a 6ft. specimen which will develop into a handsome shape and be a feature in under ten years if properly planted.

All the trouble taken in selecting and planning will be set at naught if the planting is not done with all the care lavished on a putting green. And care must continue for a year or two afterwards. Thorough preparation of the holes, careful spreading of the roots, fine soil well firmed round them but not puddled, a stout stake, physical protection—nothing can be neglected. If planting is done at the right season, only an exceptional drought need cause alarm and there is nothing against judicious fertilising with or without water. Then if the grass is kept back (and contact herbicides with a shield simplifies this) if tree-ties are checked, vermin kept out and errant golfers exhorted, it is surprising how soon a plantation will begin to make a show. Life is not so

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short on a golf course and future generations will be grateful for what is done now, even if you only start a nursery to make the job cheaper in their time.

Many committees discuss tree planting—not so many carry it to its

logical conclusion. One of the best examples of what can be done on an inland course both from the landscape and playing points of view can be seen at the South Staffordshire Golf Club at Tettenhall. The scheme is still relatively young but is already transforming the course. Can you, as the saying goes, afford not to?

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