

Those Sixty Years

by

Stan Morton

LITTLE DID I THINK when I joined the Association 58 years ago that I would have the pleasure of attending the Diamond Jubilee Dinner at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool, with so many fellow Greenkeepers, their wives, friends and guests.

The Association had only just got started when World War I began. A lot of us had to go, and some had to start again, more or less from scratch. This is where I feel I must mention a few names – most of them are 'The late' – F. G. Hawtree, Senior, A. Whittal, Chairman for many years, W. Smithers, Hon. Secretary from the revival of the Association, Tom Bridges, Tom Mason, and, from the North, W. Woods and G. McNieve, to mention a few. These stalwarts did most of the spade work.

Between the wars, membership was growing all the time. Wages began to improve, and well they might, for I remember going cap in hand to get my men a 2/- rise. This, I am glad to say, is not now the case.

I have seen a lot of changes, most of them for the better. For instance, we used to have essay competitions, prizes given by firms. These were all very well, but there were many Greenkeepers who could do their job on the course, but found it hard to put it on paper. This was overcome when the different sections were formed and were able to arrange their own lectures and meetings.

On the other hand, when other sections were formed we saw a great difference in the annual Tournament. Numbers started to drop and have never got back. In the early days it was common to have 120 to 140 entries for four days. Also in those days there was a lot more enjoyment, somehow. Where the most progress was made, I think, was in the 'Thirties'.

We had the Association's 21st Dinner at the Hendon Golf Club, with about 150 members and guests. Also, the first edition of the British Golf Greenkeeper came out in July 1936. At first it was issued once a quarter. The great favourite for years were articles by Harry Fulford. He was a great friend to Greenkeepers, and the wives loved to read his piece each time it arrived.

Also in the early 'Thirties', the Committee decided we should make ourselves known from the playing side. I was given the job to get a team of Greenkeepers to play anyone who would take us on. Around about that time I was able to call on about half-a-dozen Scratch men and make a team of 12 and 14 of 5 handicap and below. That great friend, Henry Longhurst, gave me a great start by arranging a fixture with Cambridge and Oxford, also the Pro's: the Stewards, Police and Secretaries followed and we were always able to give a very good account of ourselves. About this time we had started our own research and trial plots on half-a dozen courses under the leadership of Tom Mason.

The Benevolent Fund has always been a great concern of the Association. We have never been flush. I have always felt our partners at the Club, the Pro's, could help. Half-a-dozen Exhibition Matches up and down the country could have swelled our funds. After all, the better the course is in condition, the more trade the Pro is going to do.

Perhaps there is some other member who could fill the gaps I have left in these 60 years, so I would like to conclude on a personal note. Since starting as a boy at Camberley Heath, I have enjoyed every game of golf, visits to all Tournaments, Lectures and visits to firms in the trade, which have been most interesting. Having made a rough total, I have played, in the four Countries, over 300 Courses and only once was I asked for a green fee. That was last year at Flackwell Heath after having been given permission from the Head Greenkeeper to go ahead. I was later informed by the Secretary that no one

played there before a green fee is paid. So, away we went to Temple where we had a welcome, fit for anyone, from the Secretary, Steward, and my very old friend and Greenkeeper Jim Rosier. We had drinks half way round and were met by the Captain and his wife as we came off the last green, with an invitation to come again.

Having enjoyed the Dinner at the 21st year, also the Diamond Jubilee, I may not be about at the Centenary; but I hope the powers that be at the time will take the Tournament to St. Andrews.

The Funny Side of Greenkeeping

The late Harry Fulford, a former professional golfer and humorist, wrote this piece for our magazine 25 years ago. Its philosophy will still appeal to many.

AND WHAT I KNOW about greenkeeping could be written on a postage stamp. At the same time I am going to place on record – listen to this, Freddy Hawtree – that I was once in a job where I was responsible for the upkeep of the course. Never mind where it was, but it was not a hundred miles from the Research Station at Bingley, Yorks.

At that time amongst my members was one reigning Amateur Champion, a Captain of the victorious Cambridge team of that year, and many times Open and Amateur Champion of Australia.

And the Club, fed up with the Green Committee, composed of Doctors, Chartered Accountants, Solicitors and Mill Owners, decided that the poor dam pro. was the only man who could make a silk purse out of a sow's ear! In plain English, I was the cat's whiskers so far as the course was concerned.

My first job of reconstruction was to clear the ninth green of worms. The subsoil would have delighted the heart of a potter. All day long you could see the worms forming fours on its surface. A very keen member of the Club said: 'Destroy the worms and you do away with Nature's natural ventilation and drainage.' (Incidentally from a putting standpoint I prefer a green with wormcasts, for they often deflect my ball towards the hole!)

However, let me go back to the ninth. From information received I ordered one hundredweight of steel filings from Sheffield. We covered the green with them, and a week later that green went Bolshevik. It resembled the bottom of a tanker that had been six months at sea!

We wrestled with the problem, and giving it up, I constructed a new green some forty yards farther on, and placed a 'Ground under Repair' board on the 20ft by 10ft that marked the site of what had been. As a Bug Blinder, steel filings were napoo. That taught me something.

The era of rule of thumb greenkeeping has long since passed. When I find myself to-day in the presence of the modern greenkeeper I merely listen. Not for me to butt in where angels fear to tread. I am quite conscious of my own limitations.

If Mr Hawtree tried to tell me how to make a golf club it would be seconds out of the ring. If he showed me a hefty divot and explained that it was deficient in lime, or its surface was not Poa something, I should listen and then still understand nothing.

I am not trying to throw bouquets at the greenkeepers, but I have always held the opinion that the most important servant on the golf club staff is not the steak and kidney provider, despite the fact that he generally gets the lion's portion out of the poor box at Christmas, not is it the professional whose profits go in penny stamps for A/c's rendered, but it certainly is the greenkeeper who, if he did not produce the goods, would put the caterer out of work, and the pro. a shade nearer the workhouse.