

MOATS

by

Patrick Smartt

THE UNEXPECTED SIGHT of a constructed water hazard on the Downfield course, over which the Sunbeam Electric Scottish Open was played during the summer, made one old geezer pensive. No doubt others of the same vintage rubbed their eyes in wonderment.

It was in front of a green. We have all been tested by burns, an occasional lake and rivers. I seem to recollect that before the war, at Stoke Podges, at a short hole (the 17th?) there was a lake. At Worplesdon there is a similar hole in that a lake has to be carried. The Burn, at the first, on the Old Course at St. Andrews is near the green, but it is narrow. At Carnoustie the Barrie Burn has the effect as Frank Pennink put it; 'which gives even the best players "water on the brain".' Unlike that on the Old Course, it is twenty-five feet wide and a real menace at the final holes.

A memory, the bitterness of which has diluted with the passage of years, is of a hole on the Bulawayo course in (then) Southern Rhodesia. I can pronounce the name of the river that crossed and re-crossed it, the spelling is now beyond me. It was in the Rhodesian Championship (medal) and, for me going well, that water cost 16 strokes.

All those hazards were natural and the best tactical use had been made of them. So it would appear, from watching on television, was that created 'water bunker' on Downfield. It posed a question which I dare suggest is the hallmark of a good hole. While the ordinary player could not reach it in two, the good one had to make a choice of going for it or playing safe. The handicap player, from his teeing-grounds, could probably pitch over it easily with his third, save for magnet in front of him. Each of us has suffered that.

Despite all that, to the rheumy eyes of an ancient, it did not somehow look right. There was a sense of some chromium article of furniture placed among antiques.

The idea of water bunkers started in the United States. As has been the custom for many years, it looks as if we shall copy them again. While in full agreement that hazards are there to be avoided, I prefer them natural – something the course has been built round. Except on links, it has to be accepted that bunkers are not natural; they were handed down through history, the sand of the old links brought inland. There are, doubtless, round the country, holes that have streams encircling the green. The short Island Hole at Royal Ashdown Forest is an example. These are little more than ditches, shallow in water content, and usually too narrow in which to swing a club. Consequence, a lift and drop with penalty.

I am confounded in my mind as to the purpose of water bunkers guarding a green. It is one thing for an errant stroke to cost half a stroke, as it was deemed to do in days gone by. It is puzzling why water has to be brought in as a 'No Go' area. One of the notable coaches in golf was questioned as to the correct stroke from water. He admitted he had not tried.

Has this innovation been introduced to counteract the expertise of the 'name' players putting the ball from sand to six or four feet from the flag?

At this stage, I think it only fair to make it clear that at no time is there any consultation with the Editor as to what I write about. Thus my opinions, amateur versus professional architect, are probably ageing him before his time.

We had the niblick as the recovery club in the long ago. We have had the sandblaster, and now the sandwedge. Do we look forward to the waterwedge? I have always thought moats to be connected with castles, granges, and monasteries, inhabited by carp.

If we are to create artificial moats, is some day-dreaming fisherman with rod and line to be startled by an umbrageous bellow of 'Fore'?