

Reflections on design

ON THE club terrace that stands high above the last green, with Bobby Locke we gazed upon the scene. A superb view, embracing the 1st and last holes, the golden bloom of the gorse, whin, north of the border, the patchwork of the weald of Sussex spreading away to the undulating backcloth of the South Downs.

Bobby, somehow that genial bishop-like figure could not be addressed otherwise. He always called me Mr. Smartt. Few realize that is the custom of South Africans, and those who rather acidly criticise Gary Player for using that prefix, have not visited that country as often as the writer. May not a country use its own form of expression?

Pear into square

Bobby, as I was about to say, turned his eyes to the 18th green. "Why, Mr. Smartt, is that green cut as a square?" This touched me nearly. I had resigned the post of secretary some years before. All that could be said was, that in my time it was pear-shaped, narrowing and widening here and there. As did all the others.

His remark was significant, for here we had one of the great golfers concerned about the outline of a green. The general impression is that tournament players' sole interest is in the surface, the pin placement, and surrounding danger. To which may be added, in the days before watering, what lies behind. That, and a course could be named, leads to defensive play. The pin cannot be attacked.

The merging of greens and bunkers into the natural features of the available ground has been, to borrow from Bernard Darwin, my King Charles' head.

Patrick Smartt writes about the geometry of the golf course

A golf course should not be an exercise in geometry. Yet you can still find them. Fairways that run straight, the rough on either side, be it grass, trees or heather in parallel lines. Rectangular or circular greens, the latter in the days when we used British money, I called half-crowns dumped in a fairway. The bunkers are sited to catch the pulled or sliced drive of the long-handicap player. The same at the entrance to the green. The bunkers, a saucer of sand with a bank to act, as it were, a defence.

No imagination, little challenge, and even for a club category golfer, small incentive. That must be qualified. It could lead to a wrong assessment of his skill. On such a hole, he is put unfairly to the test of playing one of the most demanding strokes in the game—the straight one. His superiors (in skill only—let it be said) can carry those bunkers, and are then left with no stiff examination for the second stroke.

Practical test

In parenthesis, I cannot recall one of the army of "club golfers" complaining that the hole was too testing. That is, with one exception, when three oldish players (I have told this before) deemed a carry too long. They would not accept that the distance was only 150 yards. A stroke with a No. 5 iron—of greater loft than the modern club, convinced them. It eased their minds, and

[Turn to Page 20]

[Patrick Smartt from Page 19]

that is the way to help.

I have, as ever, wandered down side roads. A habit of which readers must be aware, and unfortunate editors.

It is inexplicable that at an early age, the picture of a hole made an impact. If there is one thing at which the professional golf course architect finds his hackles bristling, it is the amateur designer. That should not be confined to an individual; he is up against the Club Committee which, through the Green Committee has engaged him. His knowledge and **feeling** for a course are discarded on the grounds of cost.

The old courses were laid out long before specialists were thought of, some like Topsey "just growed". There are instances of some of the old heroes so engaged. James Braid comes to mind.

If changes are to be made, the object should be to make them more interest-

ing. In olden days in the colonies, it had to be amateurs. Somewhere about 1926, a young man the same in age as the year, in Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia, had the cheek of the young to suggest that the cross-bunker on the 1st, an intrenchment with a level bank was archaic. Left to his own devices, the alignment was altered to an angle from left to right. The bank was curved, creating small harbours in the sand, and there were high and low portions on its skyline. Placing it at an angle, gave the less expert members a safety route. The more accomplished in order to be up in two were faced with a longer and higher carry. Most important of all, it looked right. A bunker growing out of the ground, rather than a first world war trench, or a bank on an Irish steeplechase course.

Making their mark

It is high time we returned to the outlines of putting greens. Straightaway, it has to be accepted that there is no continuity in policy; and that applies to the whole course. The only permanency are the Head Greenkeeper and a long-serving secretary. Captains and committees change, and they seem dogged by the idea that they must leave a mark of their period of office; thus alterations.

There is one that confounds me. Reducing the size of greens. While this may lessen the likelihood of three putts, it adds to the strain of accurate approaching. The argument that it is an economy, is beyond an aging mind. Of course there is less time spent in mowing the putting surface, but the surrounds still have to be cut. The smaller the greens, the less space for pin-placing. Towards the end of the season, they are pock-marked with old hole plugs. The financial excuse is as specious as most Government budgets.

A murrain on greens shaped (if that be the right word) like a matchbox, or a coin dropped in the fairway.

EASTCOTE NURSERIES

(Solihull) LIMITED

for

TREE MOVING

We now have available a complete range of Tree Moving equipment to transplant Trees up to 35'.

**Hampton Road,
Barston,
Solihull,
West Midlands**

Tel: Hampton in Arden 2034