

# When scythe was king

**THIS special article is by N. Fraser who was Head Greenkeeper at Chester-le-Street G.C. for almost 40 years until he retired at the age of 62 for health reasons.**

IT'S A far cry looking back to the old days on a golf course when man and a scythe was maybe the main machinery, but in the hands of the right person it was the only tool for bunkers, bank-sides, and general cutting and was an every day routine; and for this maybe wages 6½d per hour. In fact the main implements otherwise deemed necessary to fulfil the other work were barrow, spade, shovel, rake, turfcutter, hole cutter, and cast iron side wheel machine for cutting greens, and as often there was no grass box to this, one could imagine it was often a wet job. Plenty of grass cuttings and worm casts thrown up on one's legs.

Brush the greens first was a must, and with a birch broom, that was an art in itself to do so, and a great necessity owing to the number of sheep grazing, an added hazard to cutting, and also the only manure the land ever got. But, as sheep were maybe one of the main incomes, a necessary evil! Income was small, green fees as little as 1/6d. and subscriptions £1.1.0.

These were the days of unemployment and a job was a job, so with little equipment, make do and mend, and try again was the way to find the answer. The Greenkeeper over the years built up a knowledge of many things, a Jack of all Trades to keep things running, but on the golf side also played the game and in so doing, knew what was required by all who played. Hence those men will now be hard to replace, and the experience gained still comes in handy today.

Those were the days of the horse, the pleasure of the tractor to come. A single unit for fairways, which might get cut once a fortnight, and of the horse, a

story could be told, it was human I'd say, and still talked about today. Fairways were cut, yes! But not the rough, that was the farmer's job once a year. But in that time it was not unknown to lose a ball, and set down a bag of clubs to find it, and start again looking for the bag of clubs. "Real Tiger country", as it was known.

Things did improve when the Ransomes "Sulky", 3 units for fairways came along, at least it had a seat, and as the horse knew its way round the fairways. It was a pleasure. Also hand machines were improving inasmuch were not so heavy, and so easier to push.

The main battle was worms. Today one never sees a cast owing to modern worm killers. It was nothing to see men doing battle on a pouring wet day, watering greens with maybe something like Sulphate of Copper to bring up the worms and brush them off, and what a pride to get one green clean. Mowrake meal took over but still needed plenty of water. Water laid on to the greens was unknown, maybe a hand pump from a water-logged bunker or a pond.

But the greatest evil of all, at least as I thought being young, were the drain pipe type rollers filled with cement, one at each green, with a detachable handle, one carried from green to green and roller to roller. The job ever stays with me today. But one day the "Pro Greenkeeper" gave me the job to "See" as he put it! how far each roller would run down the hill to the river. Strange! but they all finished up in the river. A lesson today on rolling and its results.

The beginning of the turn of the tide as it were. For it was the turn over right from only knowing how to feed and look after a horse, to the unknown whims of a tractor, a big step forward, and start again a new make do and mend.