



This year the British Wildlife Appeal and the Royal Society for Nature Conservancy are combining to sponsor the British Wild Life Classic in which every club will be invited to hold competitions leading to the Regional Finals.

Fred Hawtree took nature conservancy as the theme in his lecture to Northern Greenkeepers at Askham Bryan College last year. As you will read, his thoughts on the subject extend somewhat further than the birds and the bees.

Once upon a time if you wanted to build a golf course you got a piece of land, a scythe, and forty sheep and set about it. There was no Town and Country Planning Act 1947 (as amended), there were no Planning Officers; there were no conservation groups and no societies for the protection of endangered species; there were not even any golf course architects (a rare species which has come from nothing to being at risk of extinction in just over 100 years — the fastest piece of evolution on record). I will tell you why it is endangered later on.

For the moment let us stay in those carefree days when planning consent had still not been invented.

Golf courses were simple. Their impact on the ecological structure of their neighbourhood was negligible. It might in fact have been beneficial. It removed from the town a number of gentlemen who might otherwise have been engaged in drinking, gambling and smoking clay pipes — and sent them out into the fresh air for two or three hours on the links before they retired to the nearest establishment suitable for drinking, gambling and smoking clay pipes.

All they had done to the environment in the interval was tread down a certain area of turf helping it to keep free of coarse weeds and improving the grazing while making it more suitable for the matches of golfers following.

They had also taken a certain number of divots but since the clubs they used were mostly of wood, that was unlikely to have done more than superficial dam-

age.

But even in those days, they had trouble with the local pressure groups and residents' associations. The whole history of golf and of the St. Andrew's Links in particular, is sprinkled with incidents where golfers fell foul of other legitimate uses of the land whether it was the bleaching of sheets in the sun, the extraction of shell, the culture of rabbits, the exercise or welfare of other beasts suitable eventually for the table, or the pursuit of other pastimes whether warlike or not. All these tended to occasion disturbance beyond what the golfer can reasonably be expected to tolerate. Similar troubles at Bruntsfield Links (now in the heart of Edinburgh), at Leith, and later at Musselburgh on the outskirts, eventually drove golfers elsewhere to private territory.

St. Andrews worked out a compromise and has adhered to it ever since. But in London the Blackheath golfers had to move to Eltham and the Prince's Club went from Mitcham Common to Sandwich (though it left the course behind for others).

A number of other clubs on London commons like Tooting and Clapham, simply disappeared though Wimbledon split and only half became as it were, privatised.

I have dawdled perhaps too long in those early days but I wanted to show how the earliest courses were not inimical to the natural environment but only came into conflict with aspects of the human environment surrounding them.

I said earlier — that originally there were no golf

course architects. However as we leave the Commons and move forward to new inland clubs, in England, we find that the earliest professional golfers were consulted. They would visit the site, express enthusiasm, walk over it and put in 36 pegs before retiring with a cheque for 5 Guineas and mutual expressions of esteem.

Layout was indeed at the very heart of golf course architecture and has remained so ever since; to such an extent that there are still green committees who think that golf course architecture stops at the point when a consultant says "We will have a tee here and a green there."

Today that is no more than the first stage and from then on arise the problems of conservation which I have travelled 150 miles to discuss with you, expelling into the atmosphere on the way, in common with another million or so road users, brain damaging lead compounds, heaven knows how much carbon monoxide, acidiferous sulphates, carcinogens and other lethal substances.

I mention these matters solely in order to remind you that there is more to conservation than meets the eye, and that most of those who make most noise at the protest meetings, turn up in a machine whose exhaust is at once toxic, anti-social and offensive. But just you try and get them to walk a mile to the inquiry.

Now golfers do walk and I hope they always will. So that is one up to us for a start, at least in the matter of personal conservation.

The problems of conservation of other features of the

natural environment arose when the untold benefits of the game of golf to character, physique and society became so sought after that a few odd games on a seaside links during the summer holidays no longer satisfied the growing army of recruits. They wanted golf courses in the suburbs, in the shires, in the stockbroker belts. And they got them to the tune of some fifty new courses every year. But they paid a price.

Firstly the landscape had to be altered because the game was not designed for meadow, marsh or moor. I have quoted before what Gordon G. Smith (once an editor of *Golf Illustrated*) said on this subject in his book "The World of Golf" at the end of the 19th Century. If necessary I shall quote it again at the end of the 20th. He expressed his opinion as follows with the confident assurance which was a notable virtue in Victorians:

'It is quite certain', he said, 'that, had the ground, on which ordinary inland golf as played today, been the only available ground for the purpose, the game would never have been invented at all.'

That is the crux of much of our problem. We have to change things to make the game possible. If we change too much we shall risk destroying the precious heritage which natural processes have passed on to us. If we do not change it enough the club members will set about destroying their precious greenkeeper.

The second price exacted by the move inland was even heavier. The requirements of altering landscapes, placing bunkers and producing putting greens which demanded

golfing skills like those needed at the seaside, led to the appearance of a specialist consultant, generally an observant amateur golfer, who with the assistance of specialist seed-firms like Suttons or Carters or civil engineering firms like Franks Harris could produce plans and translate them into reality.

These people were called golf course architects and their status was recognised when an Act of Parliament specifically forbade, with two exceptions, the use of the word architect to describe a person not qualified in that profession by training. The exceptions were "landscape architect" and "golf course architect" and both have been recorded in favourable situations ever since, though not always with favourable comment.

It is no accident, therefore, that the term golf course architecture dates from the beginnings of golf's problems with conservation. Up to the Twenties, golfers would accept the stone walls of North Berwick, the roads of St. Andrews, the quarries of Blackheath. But the internal combustion engine began to be applied to other machinery than the motor-car.

The Ruston Bucyrus firm began to produce mechanical shovels which could rotate quickly and reach to a tolerable radius although they moved very slowly. Applied to golf course construction, they ended the gangs of forty or fifty men hitherto needed and could level out and feature a green in a couple of days.

You can still identify the greens which were cut and filled by a machine like this. They did not travel like a bulldozer, consolidating as it goes, but stood still in two or three suitable locations. The greens which they made in the Twenties have all sunk on the fill side and stayed up on the 'cut'. But on the whole they are still acceptable for putting even if holing space is a problem.

But, more pertinently, these machines could shift

walls and hedges very quickly, and could uproot trees. It is fortunate that the philosophy of golf course architecture was still restrained by tradition and, I suppose, money.

The earliest designers had always sought to use natural feature in their layouts just as they found it. Indeed a large part of their skills lay in identifying what existing features of their site would contribute to golfing interest, how best to use them, and then working them into the pattern of 18 holes.

This tradition carried on between the wars and indeed is still alive and kicking.

The new applications of the combustion engine were therefore restricted to improved green modelling, better looking bunkers, and bigger tees. True there were trees and hedges to remove but there were plenty of trees put back. Moreover, many of these new courses were laid out on farmland so there was a nett gain in habitat for the sort of wild life one could expect to find.

A large number of courses were built on the Bagshot sands to the west of London and pine trees had to be removed and drainage carried out. But here again, pine woods being what they are, the mingling of light and air and some grass would have been a benefit in conservation terms.

Golf courses therefore became havens for wild life in the twenties and thirties as bricks and mortar invaded the suburban and rural scenes — and indeed they still are.

Last month in Cambridgeshire I heard from a golf club secretary how he had been harangued by local government officers on the need to preserve certain rare species which they had found in the rough. He listened patiently but was finally obliged to indicate the bleak tracts of arable land all round him and point out to the experts that if it had not been for the golf course they would not have found anything worth conserving

within ten miles. The same might be said of a large number of golf courses, especially those within sight of the town dweller.

This bonus was largely bestowed by good fortune because the golf course architects of those days were not trained in landscape or any botanical discipline.

Harry Colt, who did work at Ganton, designed Wentworth, the New Course at Sunningdale and a host of others, began his life as a Hastings solicitor until the new course at Rye nearby caused him to change from the law. He became a golf club secretary at Sunningdale and then a golf course architect of great skill.

However I want to concentrate less on Colt than on his pupil, Dr. Alister Mackenzie, with whom he stayed when he was invited up to Alwoodley near Leeds. Mackenzie was doctoring at the time but had already taken a great interest in the design of courses and his models of greens so impressed Colt that he eventually left him in charge of the shaping of the whole layout.

Mackenzie was also the first course designer to lecture the Northern Section of the Golf Greenkeepers' Association which he did at Leeds in 1913. I still have a copy of that lecture as it was printed in the journal of the association, which was a technical year book published annually and certainly the first endeavour in this country to circulate helpful articles and suggestions amongst greenkeepers.

We now apparently need five publications to do the same job.

Mackenzie's greatest memorials are abroad, Cypress Point and Royal Melbourne amongst them. But the nearest examples to this room are Alwoodley, St. Ives at Bingley, Fulford, Moortown, Oakdale, Scarborough, Southcliff and Sitwell Park and Wheatley.

I do not know all of those courses but those with which I am familiar, illustrate just the

point I made earlier. The golf course architect came into conservation because it was the most economical and satisfactory way of producing character in a golf course.

Preserving the actual features gave each layout its own set of fingerprints. He did not have to manufacture them, although on a smaller scale he made a lot of interesting experiments with his hazards.

It is in fact a characteristic of the early architects that they envisaged a general form for the ideal layout but they never let that ideal impose on their adaptation of the contours which they found.

Modification of the site was held to the minimum necessary to secure visibility and a logical pattern of play. But they were even prepared to sacrifice a logical pattern if the site produced something different. Short holes might pop up at unusual moments in order to use some dramatic feature as a transition between two plainer neighbours.

It is still my belief that one can enjoy and grow fonder of a golf course conceived in this way than of those manufactured nearer our time in which feature, length, planting, water, and contour are produced artificially at enormous cost according to some abstract notion of what a golf course should offer in order to attract an adequate, if ignorant, clientele to recoup the investment.

A golf course which needs publicity to make its way is generally the one which has paid scant heed to conservation. At the risk of causing you sleepless nights I will try to describe to you the risks we are running not only in the damage to our golfing heritage but also in the antagonism which will undoubtedly injure our future peace of mind.

Today's problem, as I see it, is this. (And this is why the pure golf course architect may be an endangered species). There are certainly a number of projects which are

initiated by a group of enthusiasts who want the best they can afford and provided they engage a competent designer will get it.

Most of the economies he will make will be due to conservation factors because the less he disturbs, the less he is spending.

Then there are farmers and landowners who see a golf club as alternative income. Here, also, I think we are relatively safe because there will not be a lot of money to splash about and a competent golf course architect will produce a plan which will ensure that the golf course provides all the traditional requirements without requiring an astronomical budget.

The real danger comes from the financial groups, the long-term investors, the big developers, the hotel builders, the diversifiers. Very naturally they wish to make sure that their venture is successful. They only know one way of doing this — engage a big name to sign the plans whether or not he has prepared them himself.

Now the big name player has spent most of his life on the practice ground and has probably not had much time to study the finer points of landscaping. He will know all about greens and tees though not necessarily how best they can be constructed. He therefore takes unto himself an expert or two to see to these details.

But he has noticed as he travelled the world how some of the crankier holes get talked about and he imposes an overall requirement on his underlings that every hole should be memorable, the total length 7,500 yards plus, there must be lakes at every hole, reinforced by ten acres of sand, all green surfaces should roll like the ocean and he should be provided with a five acre plot for a ten-bedroomed villa by the first tee.

He then flies off to sunnier climes but will appear twice more to provide an opportunity for the golfing press to be

briefed on progress and to dazzle them with the vast sums that are being spent.

Now that is all very well in a big country and in the parts of that country where even the Red Indians never penetrated but it is not right for us. The number of so-called prestige developments that we can take are strictly limited commercially and there are other dangers.

Firstly, in order to achieve this transfiguration (it's all right — I looked it up) there is an unfortunate tendency to strip the top soil off upwards of fifty acres, remodel the contours in a way that is foreign to the district, plant trees which are unsuitable, drain marshes, dig lakes, and generally cause hackles to rise among the neighbours unless they are golfers (and probably on *them* too).

The old idea of using the natural feature God gives you has gone — you produce your own. In the old days, they used to give exaggerated names to holes from some local feature. 'The Himalayas' were some modest sand hills at Sandwich. Nowadays a name like that would be 'for real'.

So the new approach upsets the whole ecology of the site and the insensitive treatment produces an unpleasant 'them and us' atmosphere in the district.

This will not be a very happy situation for you gentlemen as you laboriously try to recreate what has been destroyed. And what staff will be required to deal with the maintenance.

All I can tell you is that the number employed on the Muirfield Village golf course earlier this year was a modest 43. Yes you heard it right — 43 and the annual cost amounts to about £500,000.

This is one time you *can* believe what you read in the papers. Donald Steel was there and he is currently Chairman of the British Association of Golf Course Architects.

I therefore ask you to assess the consequences of

the new golf course architecture chiefly practised by professional golfers. Planning authorities will become suspicious of new golf courses if they have seen or heard how others have turned landscape inside out.

The community spirit on which many golf courses thrive will disappear. Nobody will be able to afford to play on them because the constructional costs and maintenance costs on top can only lead to a prohibitive green fee. And the men in the white coats will be coming to take away the head greenkeeper for a session with his psychiatrist on a regular basis.

Now you are part of a big organisation now speaking with one voice. We have not heard it much yet but you can speak up for the future of golf in the way you work and proclaim the old virtues of your profession.

Dr. Mackenzie produced a list of 13 points for the ideal golf course. No. 7 reads as follows:—

'The course should have beautiful surroundings and all the artificial features should have so natural an appearance that a stranger is unable to distinguish them from nature itself.' Well the good golf course architect should have achieved the right shapes for you to work on.

Henceforward you will find that if your maintenance only emphasises that natural appearance, conservation will follow as the night, the day.

If you asked me to summarise all that in one paragraph I expect that it would read something like this.

Conservation is here to stay and its proponents will not get any quieter as population, money and other pollutants increase.

Both golf course architects and greenkeepers had better listen to these strident voices and have an answer ready. The answer for architects is certainly not standing the whole site on its head.

A traditional golf course will

fit into the natural pattern and suit both site and golfer best of all. The bizarre productions of recent years come from the need for publicity, instant fame, and instant fortune. They also make it impossible for you to maintain except in a bizarre, immaculate artificial fashion, the sort of style which public parks used to demonstrate but happily no longer.

Your technique will best steer a way between the demands of golfers and of conservationists if you plant your feet firmly in tradition (and the greenkeepers of this kingdom are more familiar with golf's tradition than most).

To comfort you, I think we can all expect things to get easier. The World Wild Life Fund has just given up pure conservation in favour of a policy which takes account of human needs. Mankind is now an endangered species. Just work on that thought, otherwise, oddly enough, you may conserve yourself out of a job.

And further comfort comes from Sir David Attenborough "Golf Courses," he is quoted as saying, not quite grammatically, "have always and will always provide splendid wild life habitats for whatever reason they are conserved."

So next year the British Wildlife Appeal and the Royal Society for Nature Conservancy combine in organising the British Wildlife World Classic.

Competitions on your courses will precede regional finals. Two thirds of your course is probably rough. That's where the habitats are, mostly. You had better start thinking about what you are going to do with it.

We seem to have got it right between us so far but it is up to the greenkeeper in the end.