

# Reflections from The Bridge Of Sighs

ONE factor for success clearly emerged from experiences at *Golf Course '84*—namely, audience participation. By far the most successful talks were those where adequate time was given for discussion.

In no way do I wish to be thought less than welcoming to the American visitors—indeed, their contributions were practised, competent and often very entertaining—but totally irrelevant to UK greenkeeping.

It was not just the vast difference in budgets—slides of some 14 triplex mowers mowing in echelon across fairways, echoing combine harvesters in limitless prairies are impressive, but unreal! Neither was it the hordes of pests and diseases, which have to be tackled with speed and determination if disaster is not to overtake the courses, but their basic greenkeeping, which is, to my mind, quite wrong for us.

It seems geared to producing more lush conditions than we would tolerate or could afford and though there is a swing towards 'Scottish' greenkeeping—i.e. a more austere, less wall-to-wall presentation—this is the exception rather than the rule and I suspect it is motivated more by financial cramps than full appreciation of traditional greenkeeping.

Perhaps the most telling US question (?)—really a statement—was the one suggesting that a pH of 6.2 was an essential aim in controlling thatch. It may be in the States, but it certainly is not here! We have excellent thatch-free greens from pH 4.5 to 8.5 and awful thatchy bogs in the same range.

Our ideas of regular routine deep aeration must seem as strange to American superintendents as their ideas of intensive aeration (twice a year with shallow hollow tining) is to me!

One problem of seminars is that statements are made by pundits which are never publicly challenged. I welcome being challenged as it gives another opportunity for discussion and explanation!

A brave attempt was made to defend annual meadow grass greens by Alan McDougall (Eastwood GC). I see his problems and do not at all disagree with him that if he manages his annual meadow grass greens properly by deep aeration (when it suits him, not on a set 'every Monday morning' routine), using limited irrigation and nitrogenous fertilisers,

By Jim Arthur

he will get quite good greens, but what he does not yet realise is that he will slowly, but surely, get *Agrostis* greens!

No-one ever wants to see scarred and devastated greens in the interests of a rapid change over in grass type. I have never said 'no water and no fertiliser'. But I am vulnerable to those who see my reports at another club and think that, irrespective of different conditions, they can adopt an identical programme with instant success!

However, I would contest one statement made at *Golf Course '84*—that all research is valuable. This certainly needs qualifying! Even if such research is wrong, it may be helpful in clarifying issues, but the problem lies not with the research, but in its application and interpretation.

Comments that research proves the best way to use pop-ups is to water heavily once a week and to let the greens dry out are almost criminally irresponsible. How can any normal green take such monsoon type applications of say 20 to 30 minutes at one flood? How can a course be presented with soaking bogs one day, progressively drying out to rock hard conditions by the end of the week? How can such greens ever be made permeable enough, once they have got so dry, to take even modest

watering without massive run off and surface waterlogged conditions and, so, thatch? How do you syringe greens "for 30 seconds" with pop-ups? It needs probably two or three minutes to ensure a complete coverage on a normal cycle! Practical greenkeepers will share my derision of such research!

We are also told that the only way to get soils uniformly wet is to saturate them. What about aeration and detergents? Far too little mention was made of the fact that sound greenkeeping is not based on some narrow aspects of research into one factor only, but must be an inter-related study of everything. To talk of irrigation without mentioning aeration is, at least, irresponsible.

Too many American influenced 'authorities' seem to think all our problems can be solved by installing a computer and too few accept that the best computer exists between most people's ears!

However, it was an excellently run conference, in superb surroundings and with impeccable organisation, even extending to the weather. As always, it is in the discussion between 'lectures' that most is gained. Perhaps too much was crowded into too short a space of time and too little time allowed for questions and answers, but the good outweighed the bad and we can always learn from such experiences.

Whatever else, I felt it was interesting and entertaining, but sometimes less than related to our UK problems.



SIGGA's Alan McDougall expressed an acceptance of annual meadow grass.