

Bingley and Jim Arthur join forces

A three-year courtship between Sports Turf Research Institute old boy Jim Arthur and Dr Peter Hayes, Director of the STRI at Bingley, has resulted in the golf course advisory profession's two leading names forming a closer working liaison for the game's future good.

By the editor

Starting from the New Year, Jim will hand over a number of clubs he advises to the STRI. "I stress there's no financial gain for Jim in this move," Dr Hayes said. "We are not paying a fee or a premium for Jim's contact list. On the contrary, it is a very generous gesture on his part."

Anyone who has ever come into contact with Jim Arthur knows that he thrives on a phenomenal work-load and it's also no news that the man is fervent in his beliefs. So, what had prompted him to set up shop with Bingley?

"The main reason was, quite simply, that Bingley changed its attitude and policies. Therefore, I changed my views towards the Institute. Even before Peter was appointed Director, I had spoken to him and realised he was a kindred spirit," Jim said.

Plainly, any such partnership needs compatibility and it was refreshing to hear the two sides talking along similar lines throughout the interview. Too often, we hear the cry 'let's rally round and join forces', but so little ever seems to come of it.

The seeds of the idea were planted at a series of meetings between Jim Arthur and Dr Hayes. In the summer, Jim was invited to address the STRI board. "It was then, I feel, that he became convinced that our approach, our views on research and our testing facilities could enable us to become a strong, combined force," Dr Hayes said.

I fancy a glance at his diary for the rest of 1984 might have finally tipped the balance for Jim. Although it's physically possible, I suppose, nobody can enjoy working seven days a week constantly, getting up before *Breakfast Time* starts and rarely putting the pen down on report writing before *The Nine O'Clock News*, as well as visiting an average of eight to ten clubs a week.

In fact, Jim told me he totalled 340 visits in 1983 and by the time Windsor had come and gone this year, he was already way past the 200 mark. The STRI, on the other hand, is called in by some 400 clubs annually. Jointly, both Jim and the STRI have about 1,300 golf clubs on their books. Lately, the two have enjoyed some joint walks over such prestigious courses as Royal Birkdale (Jim's) and Ganton (the STRI's).

The Institute has 14 advisory officers, handling all sports, but now aims to form a specialist golf unit of four, including Dr Hayes. Additionally, the R&A has given a substantial sum to Bingley for research into golf, ensuring—along with Sports Council support—that the STRI will remain on a sound footing for the foreseeable future.

Certainly, such an injection of cash by the R&A is to be applauded and can only serve to stem the tide of

worsening conditions on our golf courses.

"Overall, there are more problems than praise for our golf courses and I don't have to tell the readership of *Greenkeeper* that this is due largely to increased wear and tear," Dr Hayes said. "It's no good having a course in superb condition from May until September and then closed from November to April. Golfers expect it to be in perfect condition for the day they want to play their match.

"A lot of what Jim says centres around the basic principles of golf greenkeeping. His beliefs are definitely not gimmicky—they're really what he was taught at Bingley when he worked there."

Did Jim, I wondered, sense the irony of linking up again with Bingley? "No, not really," the smile widened. "One of the reasons I left in 1952 was because they wouldn't set up a specialist golf unit. It has always been one of my ambitions to see the Institute running such a division.

"Indeed, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have Bingley established as the centre of greenkeeper training," he added.

Dr Hayes confirmed that there will be three courses for greenkeeper training in the spring and three more in the autumn. In fact, Bingley first started educating greenkeepers in the art of fine turf management nearly 40 years ago. Today, the emphasis is switching to management techniques, as well as encouraging students to get to grips with the profession's technology.

Apart from the STRI enjoying the benefits of a far greater back up, both parties operate advisory visits in a similar way. The Institute plans 'tours' for its officers. That's to say if someone is going to London, they try to fit in as many courses as humanly possible in, say, a week. This is followed by report writing back at Bingley.

"Annual visits are preferred, unless a course has major problems necessitating a drastic maintenance procedure. We then like to go in more regularly. There is a place for monthly visits in really bad situations. Equally, when a course is on the right track, there's no need to call more than once every two years," Dr Hayes said.

But the 64,000 dollar question remained... How would it

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Dr Peter Hayes discusses a cross-section of a green with a head greenkeeper.

Bingley and Jim Arthur join forces Continued...

be decided who would handle which clubs? Both Jim Arthur and Dr Hayes agreed that under the new regime there could be problems with golf clubs not wanting the STRI, insisting on Jim or, equally, vice versa.

"No club will be made to feel it's been sold down the river, but what I will have to do is place a premium on my services to discourage clubs from specifying that I go in when, in fact, it's not necessary for me to go to that particular club personally," Jim said.

"All clubs will have the facility and right to come back to me with problems. It is a joint venture. There will be joint visits, free access to my past records and, in some cases, joint consultation before reports are written.

"Obviously, if I am going to shed some of the work, there has to be an incentive for me to do so. I have to group my visits around the clubs on the R&A rosta. The Royal and Ancient's Championship Committee has agreed that I will continue to do its advisory visits for the next five years at least.

"But it's an interesting problem! Do you drop the clubs that deviate from the agreed policy or seek advice from second opinions without reference to me? Yes! Do you get rid of the clubs that need you, but have little money? No. Do you pass on the prestigious clubs? Probably not. Each will be viewed on its merit."

When pressed, both estimated that some 150 clubs could find themselves 'transferred', and apart from the obvious—such as Jim sticking to his R&A work—the most common determining factor will be the club's geographical location. There'd be little point in Jim hurtling up motorways to see a typical club in Lancashire or Yorkshire right on the doorstep of Bingley. Hopefully, with occasional forums leading to a common language being spoken and an increase in the number of joint visits, the need will be totally obviated in time.

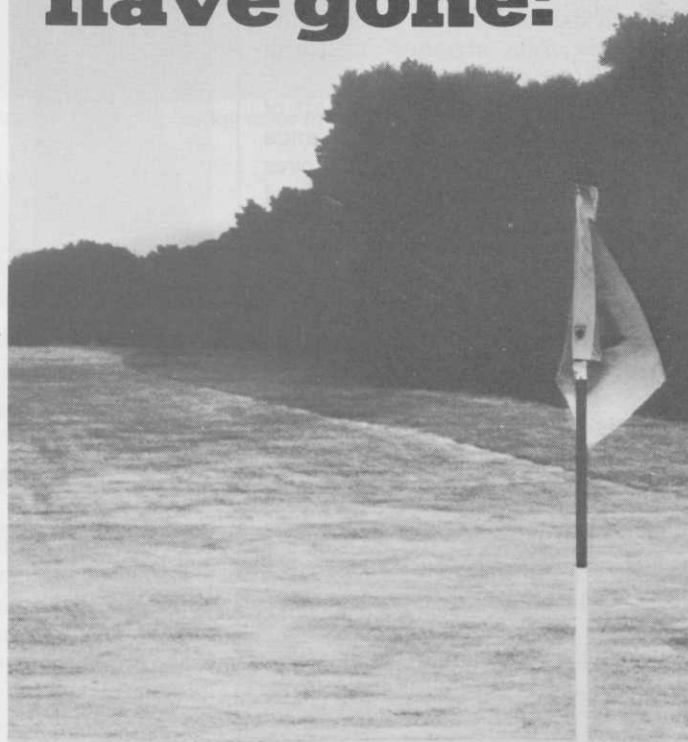
I left the final words to Jim. "In no way am I retiring but, equally, I can't go on for ever. My main concern is that the moment I stop advising, all the things I've worked for over the years could be reversed. Continuity is the key—similar to setting up a constitution, it was necessary to have an institution as a partner rather than an individual."

Hopefully, more clubs will see the sense in responding willingly to the sound advice of this new 'institution' than to the conflicting words of the plethora of individuals now doing the advisory rounds.



Not Jim about to garrotte a stray voice, but "dowsing with bent wire for irrigation pipes in Scotland."

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