

This issue

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Front cover: Royal Dornoch is on the south-east coast of Sutherland. The golf club was formed in 1877 and, soon after, Old Tom Morris was commissioned to lay out the first official nine holes—it is thought that various forms of golf were played on the same site as long ago as the mid-17th century. Today, Royal Dornoch still embraces all that is good in traditional links golf.

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Things ain't what they used to be!

I RECENTLY played a round of golf at a club in East Anglia. It was my first visit there for some ten years, but it had changed out of all recognition. To be fair, in early December it was not a mud bath but, although a sunny shirt and sweater day, the greens were soft and spongy, with thatch to a depth of four inches. The fairways were mown like fluffy motorways, straight down each side, and a collar of 'semi' surrounded each green, even between the putting surface and greenside bunkers.

Bunkers were only partially raked; all the greens were the same oval shape with a second hole cut in the front of each, as well as signs of the temporaries to come. This was definitely not the course I had enjoyed before and, with the customary reaction of someone who likes to think he has a little knowledge of the subject (a highly dangerous state), I dismissed the greenkeeper as being less than perfect.

A greater shock awaited me when I walked into the bar, where a prize-giving ceremony was in progress. The captain, after complimenting himself on the weather, went on to say how marvellous the course was and asked that the chairman of the greens committee pass on the club's thanks for the course's condition to those responsible. I could not believe my ears—he must have played a different 18 holes.

I was so appalled I did a little digging and asked my host his opinion. "Well," he said, "golf really boomed here in the early 1970s and, while this is a club with traditions, nearing its centenary, equally there was an influx in our membership of mainly middle-aged men, who had not played the game before.

"Although the majority are as keen as mustard, they have not been brought up on golf and they do not have a feel for the game or course. They rarely play away from home, apart from trying some of the overplayed 'hotel' courses, and would certainly never venture on to any of the 'championship' courses."

With a sigh, my friend added: "They have seen it all on TV and listened to the commentators—now a medal round takes four hours and if the captain (18 handicap) can't stop his four-wood in the middle of the green in August, questions are asked! God forbid if a green ever turns brown."

Apparently, few members complain and view the clubhouse being decorated annually as a priority. The better golfers hibernate to other courses during the winter months if the going gets heavy.

I asked about the head greenkeeper—a nice chap, who has been there ages and doesn't want to move and equally doesn't want to lose his job, preferring to give the majority what is wanted.

Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that there must be many such clubs and I pity the poor greenkeepers who have to work at such places. Maybe what this magazine strives for is not applicable to some clubs, but I pray that *Greenkeeper* devotees are still in the majority. For the life of me, I fail to see the logic of golfers who pay for and demand playing conditions that will not, in most years, give them golf all the year round.

The Editor