

# My patience is exhausted—

*says Jim Arthur*

THE silly season is upon us! It always seems to coincide with the US Masters at Augusta and with adverse comments by club members at the end of a very long winter on the state of their greens, upon which they have played almost continuously (barring times when snow closed the course), making invidious comparisons with neighbouring clubs where the greens have been out of play continuously all winter and where members played to temporaries until Easter.

It is an example of the old greenkeeper's comment: "If we could only keep the dratted golfers off the course altogether, we could always have it in perfect condition!"

"Why can't we have the greens as good as Augusta's?" I was asked by one man who had just returned from Georgia. But you can, I replied, if your winter temperatures rarely fall below 50°, the course is shut for far more than half the year and, in the words of a regular visitor to Augusta, "It is probably the most underplayed major course in the world—a rich man's plaything."

Oh, of course, in addition you need money. Maintenance budgets well in excess of a million dollars a year are not exceptional.

We cannot even get many of our clubs to pay modest fees for their greenkeepers to attend seminars, such as the excellent EIGGA one at Warwick recently—culprits, please note that the weekend is to be repeated next year, so no excuses then. Many of these same clubs also begrudge the cost of residential courses at £80 for three weeks, including board, for greenkeeper-training courses. Words fail me! All other industries gladly pay vastly greater sums to keep executives up to date.

## Attacks

I am getting increasingly tired of the thinly veiled attacks in talks and articles by Mr Jones on my advice. I have refrained from criticising him because the job has been done for me so much better by experienced greenkeepers.

I must, however, specifically refute some of the contentions made recently in a magazine in which he decries traditional greenkeeping and basic principles, dismissing them as:

"Mere theories by extreme protagonists."

We are asked to consider how many of the practices, claimed as traditional, have been continuously practised for 30 years. Such comments are particularly unhelpful at the very time when the majority of advisory work is becoming more and more unanimous. It is confusing to less-informed greenkeepers and even less well-informed committees and secretaries to listen to a minority view, however plausibly expounded, when it criticises basics that should be above argument. No one disagrees with the fact that details and even methods are a matter for personal choice and debate.

Let us look at these basics, which he decries as individual theories. I have preached and practised them for nigh on 40 years, as can be proved from my reports to golf clubs in the 1940s. I was taught them by, among others, old greenkeepers as well as botanists who had, in their turn, been taught them by their elders. There was, therefore, nothing new about them then and they were established practice by the better greenkeepers.

One basic principle, which I have consistently advised, is the elimination of phosphates (and, generally, potash) from fertiliser mixtures. The link between phosphates and annual meadow grass invasion and dominance was first published as a research paper by Dr C.M. Murray in 1903. Surely, this makes it traditional? Even Mr Jones must approve, I hope, of that, especially as the research was confirmed in America by the Washington State University trials of 1966-74.

We can discuss how to aerate greens, etc, forever—specific problems demanding specific methods. But the need for aeration, while never greater than it is today, was still urgent 40 years ago. I have reports from that same period stressing that: 'Aeration is the most important routine treatment for all golf greens and it must be intensified. Once a year is not enough!'

SISIS, the pioneers of turf aeration machinery, with which I have worked in harmony and without personal reward, for 40 years, started in the slump of the 1930s and would never

have succeeded if the company had not been filling a need to replace a man with a fork by a machine to enable more aeration to be carried out. SISIS was criticised before the war for not making a machine that would go as deep as a man could pierce (thus stressing that depth was even then regarded as vital), but the fault again lay with parsimonious committees refusing to pay the cost of heavier motorised machines which, today, we all take for granted.

Even the Verti-Drain—in danger of becoming the latest fad, invaluable in the right conditions, but capable of causing problems in the wrong ones—is nothing new. It merely mechanises the old-fashioned traditional break forking, commonly practised long before the war.

Of course, we need to aerate more, since we play much more golf and especially on wet soils in winter with consequently greater resultant compaction problems.

I read in more than one article or report that, according to Mr Jones, soils should never be aerated unless they are absolutely dry as this damages them. Even fairway spiking is advised for the summer months only. When, in the name of heaven, are soils under British greens dry? Even in the worst drought we are irrigating them. In fact, we stop slitting greens in the early spring when slits may open in dry weather, but it is too soon to start watering—when, no doubt, Mr Jones would regard conditions as being ideal.

A moment's thought will show the fallacy of such theories. In summer, soils on fairways are often far too hard to penetrate; tractors and staff are tied-up with gang mowing, etc; disturbance and slits opening will inevitably be greater than in winter and healing is at a minimum just when play is at its greatest. If this were done, members would be in instant revolt against all aeration.

It has long been a fundamental basis of greenkeeping that we cannot live with casting earthworms. This dates back to the early 1920s. Yet, Mr Jones professes to love some earthworms, as if we can distinguish between casting and non-casting species. In his article, he condemns the use of mowrah meal as it

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encouraged the worms to return. Precisely! Bingley was making the point emphatically in the early 1930s, advocating instead the use of lead arsenate. Now we use chlordane and this proves that earthworm control has been continuous in one form or another for 60 and more years.

### **Misguided**

Irrigation is another case of the advocacy of demonstrably misguided theories. Before the war, irrigation was limited by either the absence of any facilities or by restraints of men and time. Yet, I was advocating 40 years ago what was then old-fashioned, old-established practice—namely, that areas requiring water should be given individual treatment by hand-held open hose rather than leaving sprinklers on all night and flooding greens. This was long before pop-ups were being used, even in the States.

Mr Jones advocates, in my hearing, the use of pop-ups for long periods at widely spaced intervals, letting the greens dry out thoroughly before watering them again! Quite apart from the practical problem that if we apply once a week the total amount given in minimal daily irrigation then we shall be watering for 18 to 22 hours a day, when do we find time to play golf? Also, how do we get that amount of water to penetrate without flooding bunkers, how do we play a course with soggy bogs at the start of the week, drying out to rock-hard greens

at the end, and how do we get the water to penetrate such dry areas anyway?

All those who have given the matter thought will, I am sure, agree that we ought to aim at—even if we do not always succeed—producing fine-textured, wiry *Agrostis* and fine fescue turf if we are to play our traditional pitch and run-up game as opposed to target golf. Most, including many American superintendents, would agree that annual meadow grass is our main enemy, responsible for most greenkeeping problems. Mr Jones claims that, at one course he advises, while in response to gross sanding of greens, the grass is now 100 per cent annual meadow grass, which "does not matter."

I have never decried American greenkeeping—if it is kept to America. Equally, most of the traditional principles here would not transplant save for those few areas in the States where soil and climatic conditions are equivalent to those in Europe.

### **Pattern**

There has always been a cyclic pattern, since greenkeeping began, of 'farmers', who know all about growing the wrong grass, destroying our courses and their being brought back, from the very brink, laboriously by 'greenkeepers', only to be thrown out by members who want to see more grass on the course and extolling the 'beautifully lush' turf of

other ruined courses. But remember that the initial impetus for the establishment of the Board of Greenkeeping Research (as Bingley was known) came from Norman Hackett, who was advising Yorkshire courses in the early 1920s on exactly the same basic lines as I do today!

With Bingley now preaching the same gospel, backed by the Royal and Ancient, we could be thinking seriously of the feasibility of establishing an advisory body based there, with the same power and influence as the USGA's Green Section wields in the States.

Naturally, course conditions were not perfect by today's standards 50 to 80 years ago. Neither was household plumbing! But, by the standard then accepted, conditions were as good as the equipment could make them and better golfers were turning in scores as low as any today, playing on fine perennial grasses, not annual meadow grass, and using less efficient clubs and golf balls.

Even that pioneer of agricultural grassland research, Professor W.B. Stapledon at Aberystwyth, said in the 1930s: "I would rather putt on poor fescue greens than on lush annual meadow grass ones."

No one pretends that every course was in good condition then, not that we would accept for one moment today what, by their standards, was good presentation, even for a championship, before the war.

Lindrick's detailed records show a cyclic repetition of traditionalists unseating the farmers—who were at the root of all their problems—only for the farmers, in turn, to win in response to ignorant golfers demanding more grass on the course.

The swings and roundabouts still operate, invariably triggered off by some half-thought-out theories on the grounds that to be noticed one has to be outrageously different!

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