

GOLF COURSES – THEIR POTENTIAL AND ARCHITECTURE

I WANT to turn your attention to the task of taking a much wider view of our golf courses, writes *Eddie Park*... We live in an age of equality, but not all golf course sites are of equal potential – most greenkeepers would readily agree with that statement.

In fact, the nearer you are to the 'sharp end', the more likely you are to recognise the limitations under which you have to operate. But that is certainly not true of most *golfers* who have convinced themselves that, with just a little more effort, their course is the equal of any in the world. Here, then, is another subject to be studied in depth.

The most important factors in site potential are the turf and the terrain. If the turf is now good (ie bents and fescues), or if it was good before 'improvement', then it probably has the potential to be good again if treated correctly. Again, the terrain may have been good naturally or it may have been modified by a course builder as instructed by his architect.

A study of golf courses in literature helps to clear the mind. Any book that gives a picture of courses we know today as they existed under different management regimes will be of great service.

Classic books by writers who had an eye for good golfing country are fascinating. Horace Hutchinson wrote *Famous Golf Links* (1891) and *British Golf Links* (1897). Bernard Darwin produced *The Golf Courses Of The British Isles* (1910) with water colour illustrations by Harry Rountree.

More recent examples would be *A Round Of Golf Courses* (1951) by P. Dickinson, *Go Golfing In Britain* (1961) by L. Claughton Derbyshire and *Golfers Companion* (1962) by J.J.F. Pennink.

Looking further afield, a large Australian reference book *Golf* (1978) was edited by Tom Bradley and has excellent pictures and descriptions of courses right across the world.

We must not forget all the handbooks published annually, but none of them can compare with a book I have mentioned in a previous article, *Nisbet's Golf Yearbook* (c1903-1912), edited by John L. Low. Not only does it list all the clubs, but also provides a description of the type and standard of their courses (I wonder if we should start it up again? Perhaps that would be a bit too cruel!). The many clubs in London and the Home Counties are accompanied by maps showing the soils on which they lie.

This sort of information brings it home to me how clever our predecessors were at spotting the best sites for golf. Next time you drive through unfamiliar countryside, try and guess, as they did from the topography and existing vegetation, where you will find the best local course. Only too often nowadays, golf courses advertise their presence by those ghastly parallel rows of stunted trees, so that spoils the game.

Rapid expansion

Most architects seem to have eventually felt the need to write and there are plenty of books to study. In the days of the rapid expansion of golf – say 1885 to 1925 – it was relatively easy to lay out a good course on the many good sites still available and near enough to centres of population.

Ex-professionals, such as Willie Park, James Braid and J.H. Taylor, were very successful and were followed by some gifted amateurs who became very expert, indeed. H.S. Colt and his partner Charles Allison became internationally famous and published *Some Essays In Golf Course Architecture* (1920).

There are many who would argue that the greatest architect of them all was the Leeds doctor Alister Mackenzie with courses such as Moortown and Alwoodley at home and Royal Melbourne, Cypress Point and

Augusta (collaborating with Bobby Jones) abroad.

Mackenzie had made a great reputation during the First World War by using his landscaping skills to camouflage artillery positions. He not only designed many new courses, but also tidied up many poor designs on older courses. His only book is now widely regarded as a classic. *Golf Architecture* (1920) is a slim volume, but now commands a high price. It has been republished in a luxury edition in recent years.

M.F. Sutton gave us *Design Construction And Upkeep* (1933) and a good book often found at a reasonable price is *Design For Golf* (1952) by H.N. Wethered and the inimitable Tom Simpson. Wethered had earlier written *The Architectural Side of Golf* (1929).

Coming up to modern times, Fred Hawtrey, known to many greenkeepers, put together *Golf Course Planning Design And Maintenance* (1983). A beautiful book is *Golf Course Design* by Geoffrey Cornish, who gave such a fascinating review of the subject at the Cambridge EIGGA conference in 1984.

So we have looked at quite a wide cross-section of books on these subjects. I, for one, am struck by the fact that the most successful architect was the man who picked the best site and I believe that is still true today.

It is all very well to move mountains with bulldozers to achieve the greatest degree of scenic beauty, but recouping the cost and probably meeting heavy maintenance charges may cause the project to be of doubtful viability. The present era of these huge projects could, in future, be seen as just another blind alley.

This wide subject of the potential, both in terms of turf quality and amendment of terrain, is increasingly being perceived by many greenkeepers as of paramount importance to their wellbeing.

Next time, I want to look at books of a technological nature.