Prevention, they say, is always better than cure. It is certainly cheaper! Never is this adage better confirmed than in early autumn when preparing a course for winter. My comments are based on the knowledge gleaned over more than four decades from practical men, who in turn probably learned that skills not derived from the hard world of experience but from their elders, so that some of this lore may well go back in direct line to the early years of this century.

Early in my advisory career I was taught much of my practical greenkeeping by a quiet and immensely wise Aberdonian greenkeeper, Frank Smith, who in the early thirties left Cruden Bay Research Station at St. Ives, Bingley. He it was who, with immense patience, corrected not just my enthusiasms and follies but in later years those of my fellow advisers — if they would listen — passing on his unique knowledge of seaside grasses and golf course management. Never was he more needed than today.

Recording such comments is meant in no way to try and teach experienced men how to suck eggs, but it may be useful, both to guide those starting and also to remind others of facts which may have been forgotten. If it proves anything, it is firstly that nothing basically changes in sound greenkeeping, since the grasses and their needs do not change, and furthermore that there are no instant cures, but plenty of instant problems.

It was Frank Smith who impressed on me that 'you don't apply fertilisers after the end of July'. He believed that the 'management' (i.e. removal) of shading vegetation — especially when allied to clearance — is firstly that nothing basically changes in sound greenkeeping, since the grasses and their needs do not change, and furthermore that there are no instant cures, but plenty of instant problems.

Another precaution that can be very effective is also linked with keeping surface humidity low, and that is to avoid smothering the turf. Sometimes smothering is inevitable — as with snow — but some can be prevented, notably in avoiding top dressing — especially heavily — when there is no growth for the turf to absorb it. In my early advisory work it was common practice, as soon as winter came — and that meant the cessation of almost all play save for a handful of expatriate Scotsmen — to go onto winter greens and literally smother the main greens with one heavy application of 'compost', burying the grass so completely that it took a week or so for it to show through.

Today, not least because winter play is almost as heavy as in summer, we adopt a 'little and often' procedure, in the growing season so that the fine screened top dressing is absorbed, almost within hours rather than days, by the growing grass.

Something else can be done to help greens stand up to a sustained winter assault and that is to leave plenty of grass on them! The vogue for shaving to produce faster greens (which has already ruined the greens on some of our famous courses) seems to be waning, but if you are unlucky enough to have one of these shaving fanatics in charge, you are going to have a battle. I personally would never now clip closer than 3/16th, (though I might allow a dispensation for seven of them, but that is another story for another day).

The greatest influence on speed. Certainly we should never cut closer than 3/16ths in September or October and raise the height, as well as lengthen the interval between cuts to help the grass put something back into the roots while soil temperatures are still high enough.

Severe scarification thinly to be a routine autumn task, but again this has always been condemned by experienced men, on the grounds that one should never tear the hell out of turf unless it was growing actively and could quickly recover. The advent of power scarifiers made it that much easier to remove huge quantities of thatch in a single operation, and the greatest influence on speed. Certainly we should never cut closer than 3/16ths in September or October and raise the height, as well as lengthen the interval between cuts to help the grass put something back into the roots while soil temperatures are still high enough.

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