I seem to recollect a couple of years ago receiving a call from Old Archibald, my counterpart at Sleepwell on the Weald GC, the club that time forgot. "Sandy" he said with more than a hint of desperation in his voice, "I've got some horrible disease all over my greens, it's all green and furry, you must come over and help me". "Do not panic Archie," I said, "I'm on my way". As I drove over, it did occur to me that the unreasonably wet and mild weather could have been the catalyst to all sorts of mysterious new pathogens, many of which poor Archie would not be overly familiar with. But as I had over the years got to know his greens almost as well as my own, I felt confident that I could come up with something approaching the correct diagnosis.

I met him on his 18th green as he was bent over looking at this horrible affliction. "What on earth is it?" he asked me, with the look of a man in the final throws of a nervous breakdown. I too peered at his turf and did indeed notice something that I had never seen on his immaculate surfaces before. "Archie" I said, "what you have, is grass!"

Now, you have probably deduced from the above, that Old Archibald's approach to turf management leans towards the traditional. You may also conclude that he is a species of greenkeeping dinosaur that cannot attain the status of extinction rapidly enough.

Well yes in certain respects you are probably correct. After all, ask him what a risk assessment is and he would probably describe it as an extremely useless decision making tool to be utilised when faced with the dilemma of staying for another pint, weighed up against the possible long term physical damage inflicted to his ear drums during the wife's welcome home speech.

But despite this I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

in the final throws of a nervous breakdown. I too peered at his turf and did indeed notice something that I had never seen on his immaculate surfaces before. "Archie" I said, "what you have, is grass!"

Now, you have probably deduced from the above, that Old Archibald's approach to turf management leans towards the traditional. You may also conclude that he is a species of greenkeeping dinosaur that cannot attain the status of extinction rapidly enough.

Well yes in certain respects you are probably correct. After all, ask him what a risk assessment is and he would probably describe it as an extremely useless decision making tool to be utilised when faced with the dilemma of staying for another pint, weighed up against the possible long term physical damage inflicted to his ear drums during the wife's welcome home speech.

But despite this I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?

I wonder how many of you have ever actually appreciated the true delights of Old Archibald's traditional bent/fescue dominated sward. Have you ever played on a green with the texture of tarmac, the look of rusty brillo and the wear resistance of kevlar?
before they aimlessly muller their drives in the rough vicinity of the fairway. Failure to do so could result in them leaving a bunker betwixt ball and green, which on Archibald's surfaces would mean they are all but stifled.

2. Then there is the problem that the normally innocuous disease known as fairy ring will blend into your greens about as well as Osama Bin Laden at a George Bush tea party.

3. Pitch marks that have not been repaired or improperly repaired can take anything up to a year to fully recover, thereby necessitating the use of fortnightly top dressings.

4. Then there is moss and sometimes clover, which in the absence of competition from grasses can run riot if you let it.

5. It only takes a couple of inconvenient ducks to walk over your greens and you end up with unsightly green patches all over them.

6. No dew to help guide you when mowing? Then you had better use greenkeepers intuition, as that's the only way you're going to see your last line.

7. Also, you had better review your verticuting policy. Carry on doing that once a week and by June you'll have nothing left.

By and large though, in my own opinion, these are problems of mere nuisance value when compared to all the benefits one can enjoy. I should of course point out that I am not for one minute suggesting that we all regress to the days of Old Tom Morris. It is just that the traditional approach allied to more modern day techniques should be considered as a potential option and by traditional I do not mean just stepping up the aeration programme and easing back on the phosphate a bit.

Not long ago I took the Sludgecombe team on a pilgrimage to an old links course that I remembered had managed to maintain greens the way I like them. To me they were ideal. Not only were there no holes with the odd bit of clover in them perhaps, decidedly off colour certainly, but always incredibly firm, lightening fast and as true to putt on as any in the world. Yet when we played them, they were not as I had remembered. They were still good but somehow the poa annua had become dominant and they were a bit softer than I recalled and they were greener and the grass appeared to be not so fine. They simply were not the same. So I contacted the greenkeeper in question, who had only been there for a few years and asked of his management policies. The answer when it came was as I had feared. They were hollow tining a couple of times a year and they fed them around 120 Kg of nitrogen and they did this and that to them and somehow they had lost what they had. I am not saying he had done things incorrectly because at the end of the day I don't know what his circumstances were. Maybe he had been directed by his committee to change the character of the greens, but they were just not as I remembered and I think that that is great pity.

So if I have by some miracle persuaded you that there could be something in old Archibald's turf management philosophies, how best can they be put into practice?

Well I believe it all comes down to getting your head around the fundamental principle that the least thing one wants is for the grass to actually grow. A tough one that I know but let me try to convince you. To help, let me list the common pitfalls associated with excessive applications of nitrogen and therefore grass growth. They are according to Dr Beard, poor surface quality, thatch accumulation, poor root growth, reduced tolerance to environmental stresses, decreased wear tolerance, higher evapotranspiration rates and greater susceptibility to disease.

In short if you over do it, your greens will be knackered. One then has to ask the question, why do we lob on loads of fertiliser to create all this grass and then spend the rest of the time trying to groom, brush, verticut, hollow core and scarify it all away again. It just doesn't make sense. You could argue that all these operations are carried out so as to avoid the pitfalls, but why not just stop applying nitrogen. That way you will automatically avoid thatch build up, achieve good root growth, create higher tolerance to environmental stresses, improve the wear resistance, have less need for irrigation and have little disease to worry about.

So what do I perceive to be the correct annual levels of applied nitrogen. Well I would say about 20 to 30 Kg per hectare, or to put it another way about 10% of what the fertiliser companies recommend. In my humble opinion, that should be more than sufficient on most established greens. If you are getting too much moss and turf thinning, add a bit more, while if you are not getting any, cut the nitrogen down. Now I know what you are all saying and the word begins with "B" and I don't mean balderdash, but it has been done many times before and on all types of greens. Of course I do recognise that I am in no way aware of your own political situation with your members, but it does disappoint me when people simply dismiss the true traditional greenkeeping alternative as not being an option. I am telling you, it can work if the communication channels are in place and it is done properly.

To finish my argument, let me relay an account of a conversation I had with a fellow greenkeeper many moons ago who had two courses to look after. One of them, for one reason or another, was subject to prohibitive laws and regulations that meant he could do nothing to these greens without a visit to the planning department and a lengthy and degrading bout of growing. The other course was basically a bog standard parkland layout owned and run by the members. He explained that his greens on the first course were in excellent condition and a pleasure to put on and that they basically looked after themselves. However, his greens on the parkland course were showing all sorts of problems to the point where he had to constantly hollow core, overseed, topdress, scarify, vertidrain and most importantly of all, feed them on a regular basis. On the first course he had a bent fescue sward while on the other, despite all his work he had a predominance of poa annua and a heap of problems.

I leave the conclusions to yourselves.

Sandy McDivot, Head Greenkeeper, Sludgecombe Pay and Play.