

ASPECTS OF DESIGN

SOME ESSAYS ON GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE 1920

WE can finally ease out of the rut I had got you into and leap boldly forward into the Twenties. I shall throw in the Thirties for good measure but we are unlikely to get that for this month.

I therefore hasten to remind you that we had just won the First World War with the aid of Dr Mackenzie and the greenkeepers. The time is now 1920; the place, East Hendred; the characters, Colt, Alison and Mackenzie. They have reassembled after a war spent sewing up food parcels, ciphers and the wounded respectively.

After comparing their gruelling war-time experiences, the talk turned to business and how to publicise the new partnership. Colt told them of his plan. He had already written to all his old customers to tell them that if they would like to repeat the experience, C.A. & M. would be happy to deal with the order.

A postcard would do. If he selected the best replies, especially those from abroad, and added a few chapters of his own on the fundamentals of golf course architecture he had the makings of a nice little book. However, being of a generous nature, he was prepared to give the two youngsters a chapter each and suggested Alison should start (as the A's always did) and Mackenzie should finish. A.C. & M. would be easier to index in an orderly manner.

Moreover, his old friend, Bernard Darwin, was knocking out an article for County Life every week and would be able to persuade that outfit to publish the slim volume and would doubtless give it a boost in a future review. Alison and Mackenzie looked at each other and winked. The old man had lost none of his cunning because of the rationing. It had certainly been a good day's work when they hitched their stars to his De Dion Bouton.

It was only in the train going back to Leeds to see his father, that Mackenzie remembered those lectures, which he gave in 1912 to the Northern section of the Golf Greenkeepers Association. They wouldn't make a bad little book, he mused. He would call it "Golf Architecture".

To give the text a little more body, he



Harry S. Colt (in Homburg) at St Cloud, France.

would get Colt to write a preface. He had better do that in any case, otherwise the old man might get shirty over Mackenzie having a chapter in "The Essays" and then, dammit! producing another book of his own. He returned to the Lancet and lit up the seventeenth Gold Flake of the day. He was a great health fanatic.

And so it came about that these two books were published in the same year and their authors set about making some of the finest golf courses that could be imagined, always respecting the theories which they had set out in their writings.

Architects today tend to do the job first and write about them afterwards to explain why it is so good even if nobody likes it. These three wrote first and practiced what they preached. They had of course, operated earlier but never on the scale which now developed.

Alison went off to North America and produced 20 new layouts in U.S.A. and Canada, finishing off the last four holes at Pine Valley which Colt had planned previously. Mackenzie followed a year or two later, did 20 new ones in California alone, some being everlasting memorials. Colt was doing Wentworth, Sunningdale "New", Brancepeth Castle, Brockenhurst Manor, Calcot Park, Camberley Heath, Churston, Moor Park, Prestbury, Effingham, Tandridge, Teignmouth, Trevose — I could go on but already feel hot breath down my neck.

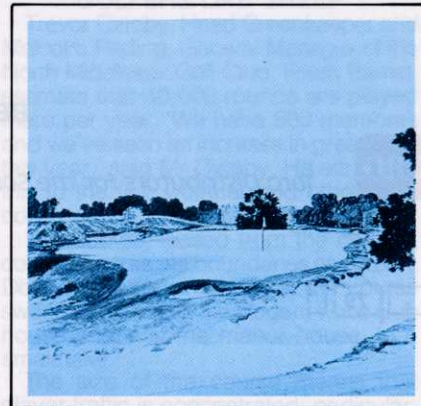
There has been growing interest in Alison recently. He seems to have been perfectly happy to play second fiddle to Colt (whom he greatly admired) in spite of having total responsibility for layout of his own thousands of miles from base in America and later Japan. His deep, greenside bunkers are legendary. They were heartily recommended by Horace G. Hutchinson in his long letter for "The Essays" and Alison, always a traditionalist, made them hurt.

Last month the Burning Tree Club in Maryland wrote to ask for any personal notes about Alison which I might have, and when replying I asked if they had any of these deep bunkers. Indeed they still had though one in particular had disappeared "to the regret" as the writer nicely put it, "of many, but to the relief of some".

On the day of the Emperor Hirohito's funeral, a Japanese journalist came to see me at Woodstock with two young women, a photographer and an entrancing interpreter, whose slave I immediately became. I had debated whether to wear a black tie in view of the solemnity of the day but finally settled for a more casual style with a snazzy little red cravat and a - there's that hot breath again, so no matter.

Relaxed over lunch and wishing to establish a firm rapport with the interpreter, I mentioned my dilemma that morning when sorting out the correct rig for meeting Japanese citizens on the day their Emperor is laid to rest. Would it, I asked have been better to wear black? They rocked with laughter as only Japanese can.

Come to think of it, the question was pretty silly in view of the moderately slinky suiting encasing the writer, and the bomber jacket and jeans adopted by the camera woman. Nakoro, as I was pleased to be calling the interpreter by this time, was stylish, restrained yet colourful and quite adorable.



The 10th Green at Pine Valley.

Emboldened by my success with the black-tie story, I let slip the news that I had actually been a sort of guest of Hirohito for 3½ years during the war. They thought this was even funnier, I suppose, in a way, it was.

They got all the information I could give them about Alison and then departed for a week-end at Westward Ho! which I had recommended as the nearest thing to traditional golf they would find in the south. On Sunday they rang up again. They would call on Monday and take me out to lunch. This is one lunch I cannot, alas!, repay to Alison who really earned it for me but it reduced the lunches which Hirohito owes me from 1,280 to 1,279.

Nakoro lives in London but I shall not say where. In the last letter she wrote, she revealed that she was not an interpreter at all but an actress. If you saw a play called "The Ginger Tree" on BBC 1 during November, you will, understand why I was glued to the box, taping it, locking it up in the safe and wondering if there will be a walk-on part for an old Java hand in the sequel.

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