

'Been to Boston'

by

Gordon Young

FIFTY-FOUR MEMBERS of the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association flew into Boston, Massachusetts, to attend the 44th Annual International Turf Grass Conference and Show organised by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

All knew that Boston had some connection with baked beans and a Tea Party: a few knew that Boston bore the title 'The Birthplace of American Freedom' for its unique role in the war for American Independence. Thirty-eight miles south of Boston lies Plymouth where it all began with the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620. For over 150 years the American Colonies tolerated rule from the Old Country and Boston was always foremost in protesting at what they considered to be the tyranny of the British Crown. It was a Boston man, Joseph Warren who, on April 18th, 1775, sent out the call to action which Paul Revere, and others, carried.

The British departed in 1776. Since then, Boston has become a prosperous city with a population of three million; one of the country's largest wool markets; the centre of the North-East's fishing industry and one of the major seaports on the Atlantic coast. The clever ones in the party knew all this already; the rest of us gleaned it later from the guide books.

Boston is a city of great contrasts; charming 17th and 18th century buildings, modern architecture and, of course, skyscrapers; narrow cowpath alleys and sweeping super-highways. A city of scholars and sailors with modern dockyards, universities, theatres and concert halls. We were told that 'January in Boston is likely to be chilly with the average daily temperature ranging from a low of 23°F to a high 37°F'. For once the Americans were guilty of understatement. The day after we arrived, the National Weather Bureau registered a low of 1°F in the early morning and a high of only 16°F in the afternoon. (The Americans do not wish to know about degrees Centigrade.)

The Boston Globe reported that 'Traffic cop Walter Fahey wore beneath his uniform, thermal long-johns, two sweaters and a nylon pile parka, and still felt frozen'. A foolhardy few of us, who walked from our hotel to the conference registration centre, arrived with aching brows and frost-nipped noses and ears. We considered ourselves lucky to still be intact inside our St. Michael string underwear. We thought of investing in thermal long-johns but felt it might cause comment and embarrassment if we had to take them off everytime we entered an over-heated interior.

Inside the John B. Hynes Civic Auditorium all was warm, very warm, despite its vastness. We presented our credentials to the charming receptionists and received a plastic covered identity card for insertion in the breast pocket. If hitherto we had not been easily recognisable by the natty cut of our immaculate suitings, we were now clearly labelled as British. Our hosts were perhaps disappointed that we were not wearing bowler hats but so was I when the label identifying an Oriental gentleman did not read 'Made in Hong Kong'.

The first of twenty-five lectures and discussions began that afternoon in the ballroom of the adjacent Boston-Sheraton Hotel. The general theme for the conference was 'Time for a Change' and the three morning and three afternoon sessions were sub-divided into the following themes:

- Legislative Changes and the Golf Course Superintendent.
- Changes in Putting Green Construction Concepts.
- Changes Affecting Turf Management Practices.
- Changes in Automatic Irrigation Concepts.
- Changes in the Demand for Superintendents.
- Changes and the Thinking Superintendents.

On the Tuesday the exhibition was opened. Over 140 exhibitors – dominated by Hahn, Toro-Jacobson – had reserved booth space in the show which was housed on two floors of the Hynes Auditorium. It remained open for three days allowing everybody to visit every stand, if they felt so inclined. Quite a few of the British contingent must have done just that, judging by the sacks of free samples that were carried on to the plane for the return journey.

The American Golf Superintendents are masters of presentation and they are allocated enormous annual budgets to spend on the upkeep of their courses. Having attended most of their lectures and seen their exhibits, it was gratifying to realise that their techniques and equipment were similar but not superior to those used by the British Golf Greenkeeper. Most of our party made friends with and were generously entertained by some of our American counterparts and their wives. Quite a lot of 'shop' was talked, opinions and advice were exchanged and a considerable amount of Bourbon was consumed. Some have already started corresponding and hope to entertain each other again, either in this country or the USA.

There were, of course, social events organised by the GCSAA. We were their guests at a buffet and dance aptly named the 'Boston Tee Party' and at a banquet and dance, on the last night, at the Sheraton-Boston Hotel. During this last event, Fred Hawtree made a brief but very apt, and much appreciated speech before presenting to Bob Mitchell, President of the GCSAA, a Testimonial of Appreciation and an inscribed silver pencil.

We also went on coach trips one of which took us to the Brookline Country Club in the Boston suburbs. This beautiful and 'legendary' club was founded way back in 1892. It will be the venue this year for the Walker Cup on August 14th-15th.

The Superintendent at this club has 27 interesting and exacting holes in his charge. He also supervises the conditioning of the bowling greens, three paddle or platform tennis courts, two indoor tennis courts, one squash court and a skating pond of five acres. When we visited Brookline the ground was frozen solid and all outdoor activities had been suspended, as they are for most of the winter in New England.

However, we were able to watch the ladies playing a match against Canada on the indoor curling rinks. The Superintendent said he did not have to worry about these. 'They've had the same man taking care of them for years. I guess they don't trust me with them'.

He said that his biggest worry was thatch but poa annua is probably the most prevailing problem to plague golf courses in the Boston area.

'What do you think of America?' countless people have asked me since I returned. 'Well, I was only there for five days and then only in Boston', I say. I advise them to listen to Alistair Cooke who has been out there longer than I have. If they want to know what Boston looks like, they should see the film 'Fuzz' which was shot entirely in that city and is also exciting and very amusing.

One thing that impressed me was the politeness of the people and the trouble they will go to if help is required. We all agreed on this, just as we did, before we went our various ways from Heathrow on Saturday 13th January, that we had had an experience that we would not have missed for anything.

In response to numerous enquiries we can now reveal that the anonymous author of 'Boston Re-Invasion' was none other than one A. Harrison, General Sales Manager of Sisis Equipment (Macclesfield) Ltd.

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