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THE BRITISH GOLF

GREENKEEPER

HON. EDITOR: F. W. HAWTREE.



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The Association is affiliated to the English and Welsh Golf Unions.

No. 205 New Series

APRIL 1962

*It's sweet to be remembered
but it's often cheaper to be
forgotten.*

Kin Hubbard.

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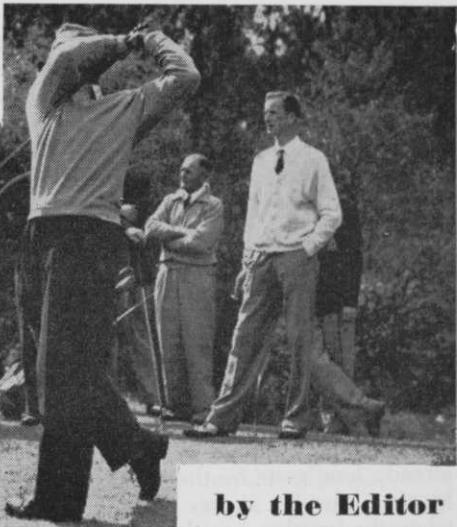
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TEE SHOTS



by the Editor

CURIOUS the messages that came through on the tape in our news-room on 1st April!

★ ★ ★

The official opening by the Minister of Agriculture of the Greenkeepers' Association headquarters on the Embankment was well covered, especially his compliments to the B.G.G.A. on its gift of the fourteenth floor and a typing pool to the English Golf Union, and his promise of unlimited subsidies for greenkeeping which he described wittily as "intensive grazing".

The larger ball announced by the R. & A. after the five-year trial period will also be widely approved. Questioned, the L.G.U. anticipated difficulty in lifting it, but the Lechford Engineering Co. report early production of a trailer attachment for trollies to move it from hole to hole (£67 14s. 2d., inc. P.T.). There can be no doubt that the problem of lengthening courses is finally resolved.

The simultaneous announcement that the legal limit of clubs carried will be reduced from fourteen to thirteen was long overdue. Golfers need no longer blame themselves, as they are apt to do, for bad luck during their round.

Messrs. Glesher and Threnny's new tie, embroidered with a plan of the Burma Road and the motto "Et tu, Brute!", led to proceedings for infringement of copyright. "Shakespeare's or mine?", Mr. Justice Wentworth was reported as enquiring on the fourth day of the case. Only last year this prominent member of the Judicial & Private-Eye Golf Match Club caused a sensation at the Captain's driving-in ceremony at St. Andrews when he appeared in wig, robes and knee breeches under the impression that he was to be elected Chairman of the Rules Committee.

The choice of a nine-hole course for next year's Walker Cup match came as a shock but statistics prepared by golf writers prove conclusively that the last three home fixtures have all been lost by weak finishing over eighteen. There is quiet confidence that the shorter round will end each game when the British player is in the lead.

The saddest item was the voluntary winding-up of the Golf Foundation due to popular agitation following that black Sunday in March when play on every golf course in the country ground slowly to a halt. Many who abandoned their clubs were passed over the heads of the crowds and managed to regain the club-house by night-fall, but others who refused to let anyone through until the match in front was at arm's length were marooned until Monday morning.

★ ★ ★

However, things are now back to normal.

ON 7th March the Chiltern Hills were still frozen along the top, like icing on a cake, when the Herts. Amateurs played the Herts. Professionals at Berkhamsted. It was abominably cold; with a sear east wind chasing across the top of the wide open common-land where the course lies. But the greens, though frozen like boards at first, were true; and putting—if fast—was fair enough.

With the club's main event of the year, the 36-hole open scratch amateur Berkhamsted Trophy due on the 10th, though, all plans for removing moss, treating and truing the greens, had already long gone by the board. Green-keeping can be a very frustrating life, when the weather goes hard against you. The moss killer which Head Greenkeeper R. Lewis had put down five weeks before had still had no rain to wash it in, and in fact all Lewis and his men were able to do was to whalebone brush on the Thursday and mow the greens lightly when they thawed on the Friday; and then hope for the best.

On Friday night it rained buckets, and up came all the turf, expanding like a sponge after weeks of dry frost—not exactly what a greenkeeper wants on the night before an event for which he has planned to have his greens at their best.

In fact, they got by: well enough for Eric Holt of Herts. to run off a 71 in the afternoon, and for the main event to go to the English International David Neech, with a fair enough score of 76, 73: 149—though the number of scratch men scoring in the 80's all day surprised them all.

Hertfordshire Relish

It did not, though, surprise the members of Berkhamsted, who have always sat back with a certain anticipatory relish when good players from elsewhere are expected upon their course. Even when the greens are perfect—as they were for 30 years up to the war and look like being again from now onwards—Berkhamsted is one of those courses which astound golfers, particularly amateurs accustomed to having a very fair opinion of themselves. It is, in fact, almost unmatched as a course

BERKHAMSTED

IS NEVER

EASY

says John Stobbs

The first of a series of articles specially written for The Greenkeeper by The Observer's Golf Correspondent reporting points of interest from courses and tournaments he will be seeing during the 1962 season

for cutting ambitious young players down to size.

Why exactly it can do this, on a mere 6,500 odd yards from the back tees, makes an interesting study in course value and design. It is not easy to put a finger precisely upon the source of Berkhamsted's formidable powers of intimidation. Examine any hole, and, looked at simply in plan and dimensions of fairway, etc., it looks a perfectly straightforward challenge.

The men who made Berkhamsted, though, sensed the value of the ground they had, and the course's toughness lies in their use of it. Two men were mainly responsible, a local amateur and lover of the game and the common, C. J. Gilbert, who laid out most of the present course, and James Braid, who extended it and brought in four new holes in 1927.

Between them they have left us a course where the ground is used without ostentation or any unusual or apparent trickery; but where the natural hazards of the country are left alive and primeval

to do their omnivorous worst. The ground is gently sloping hilltop heath, naturally harbouring gorse, bracken and fine fescues. Centuries of rabbits have fed on the lush parts of the rough, depositing the results all over the fairways and giving, where trolleys still leave a patch unworn here and there, a beautifully thick, springy turf. Mow the common and you have a fairway: mow the heathery rough too tight and you have a fairway, too.

Nowadays this has been done to such an extent, the edge of the real tiger country pushed back so far on most of the holes, and the thick heather cut so low and regularly, that the pre-war Berkhamsted man can hardly recognise his course.

In those days you drove over up to 100 yards of 8-foot high gorse, to a fairway seldom more than 40 yards across, tacking through further banks of gorse, and over cross-barriers of gorse as well on many holes, to the green. It was a veritable terror then, indeed.

No Sand

Today, even with the whole course vastly more open, the visiting scratch man still seems unable to play to the par of 72. The reason lies somewhere in the naturalness of the terrain and course architecture. There are no sand bunkers whatsoever; and although this means that you never need have anything worse to play out of than a grassy hollow or mound, it also makes the shots to the greens that much more deceptive to the eye and instinct. Grassy humps and hollows can be one of the subtlest of all forms of visual architecture. There is one short hole, the 5th, where from any of the forward tees nearly everybody misses the green on the left—and nobody quite knows why: it is something to do with the look of the humps and hollows before and around it. There are many shots on the course where this sort of thing happens.

Then there are the one or two deep grassy dells, old chalk pits or Roman horse-ponds. One before the green at the long 7th makes all the difference between its 500 yards being a straight-forward long-hitter's 4 and a very tight

one; another just short of and to the left of the green at the 400 yards 12th has a positively mesmeric effect on the average player.

Braid sited his new 16th green between a May tree and a particularly steep deep pit, cutting into the back-right of the green: their joint effect is to make at least eight out of every ten iron shots to that green drop short!

May trees, in fact, are used at several holes: notably the 2nd and 3rd, to tempt the player—by simple visual intimidation—to funk the par-man's line. The 13th uses one in a cross rough before the green to lend a note of definite uncertainty to what would otherwise be a comparatively simple pitch. And although the placing of the grassy mounds before the greens (rather "one right—one left", though sometimes staggered) is old-fashioned and lacks subtlety, the ease with which a loose shot can run off most of the greens—noticeably the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, 14th and 17th!—begins in time to frighten the suffering tiger. Not that the greens are in any way unfair—they simply find out the unworthy shot into them nearly every time.

Cheeky

There is lots more that goes to make up Berkhamsted's challenge: the odd gorse bush left standing with an evil little leer not quite on the line of a long second; the unobtrusive patches of just-dead ground before a green here and there; the impertinent use of Grims Dyke to hide the bottom of two or three flag sticks from the fairway; the sudden patches of heather left calculatedly in its prime full-bushiness; the birch tree commanding the inside of a dog-leg; the sudden narrowing of fairways on the most thoughtless line from the tee.

For anyone at all interested in how to add to a course's playing value with the minimum of upkeep costs, Berkhamsted is always well worth a study. Old-fashioned it may seem at first glance: but it stands the test of time: and never for a moment do you feel you are playing on anything except what has been left lying around for you by divine providence—and, of course, the rabbits.

FORE!

SOME thoughts on golf, up which I have just taken again. A fondness for it was part of the set of instructions fed into my soul-computer by parents; though I keep giving it up I'm always coming back to it.

At one time after the war I followed the tournaments for a newspaper, the only golf writer never to refer to Dai Rees as "the little Welshman"; a modest distinction, but I claim it.

PETER BLACK has taken up that game again

I switched to television because vacancies for golf correspondents among the top papers are as rare as total eclipses. The job is so healthy that they are invariably still at it in their 80's.

The feuds

The fascination of golf is, of course, a very mysterious thing. It has so many unattractive aspects; other golfers, noticeably.

All clubs are by definition discriminatory, but golf club discrimination is nastier than most, frozen in a kind of adolescence.

Male golfers hate female golfers. They write "Jew boy" on each other's lockers. They tell dirty stories in the changing rooms, in whispers as guilty and conspiratorial as though they were back in the school lavatories.

Golf clubs seethe with secret feuds, adulterous intrigues, poisoned-pen campaigns.

The game is absurdly difficult. Really, one might as well never begin.

But here I come to a discovery about golf. It isn't a game, it's an art.

A game would be played with one club. An art needs 14, each designed

for a special job and as important to it as a painter's brushes.

The art

That golf is a work of art is seen clearly by the best players, who are not necessarily the most skilful. They have the correct prophetic vision of a round of golf while they are walking to the first tee; it's already achieved, finished, perfect.

The picture is traced in the mind, and the faltering hand sets out to fill it in, as alone and beyond outside help as any writer or composer.

Every bad stroke is like a blot, but no round is without some stroke that corresponded to the pre-shot vision of it.

It's because it's an art and not a game that it is so difficult to keep calm about it. The afterglow of a good round lives for weeks. A bad shot seems like a deliberate act of wickedness.

My soul is still scarred a bit by a finish I put up in a competition when I was about 19. I badly wanted to win, because I needed the money, and knew that two fours and a five on the last three holes would put me beyond reach on handicap.

I finished like a yellow dog with two sixes and a seven. It was years before I could pass the 16th tee without sweating like a horse at a crossroads where someone was murdered.

And though it must be getting on for 100 years since it happened, I can't recall it without burning. I've often wondered how much this wound contributes to the diffidence and anxiety that get into my pieces about television.

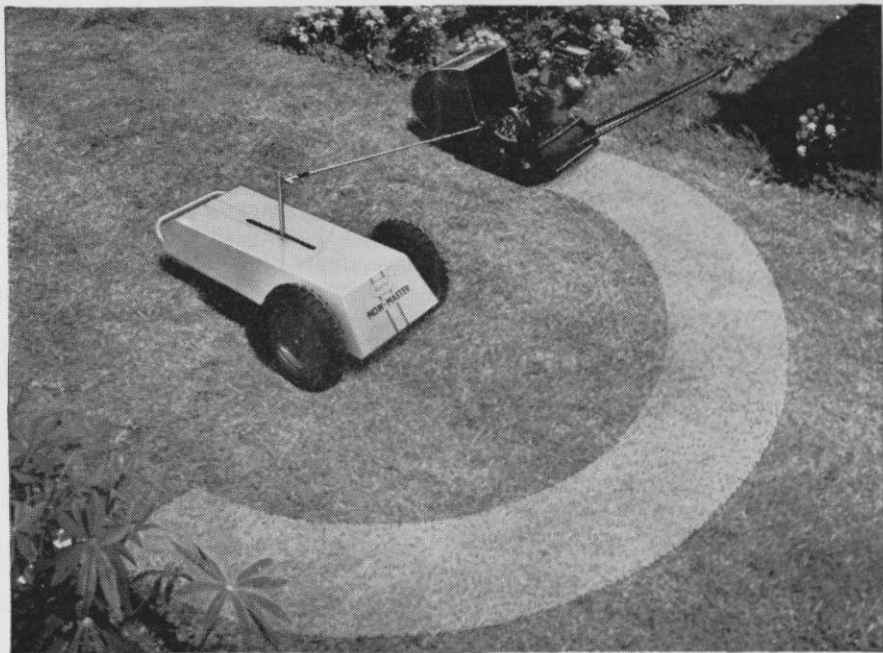
The zeal

But one unchallengeably good thing about golf is that it is still, in 1962, a fortress of privilege.

One hears stories about chaps who play with their trousers rolled into their socks and call each other mister; but they have far from taken over golf.



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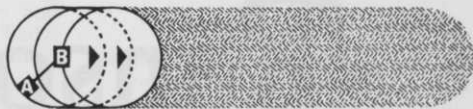
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Quite right, too. I believe down to the very roots of conviction that divisions of people according to primitive conventions are the curse of this country.

But that doesn't mean that everything should be adjusted to a common level of cheap and nasty taste, a fish-and-chips culture that everyone can have and nobody really enjoys.

A good golf club preserves its idea of amenities with the zeal of monasteries in the Dark Ages. One day this week I went to a rich and famous club in the James Bond part of Surrey: pine trees, sand, heather, two courses, American cars, electric trolleys, Spanish chef, Scottish professional.

"May I have a green fee, please?"

"Are you playing with a member?" asked the nice girl in the secretary's office.

"I'm afraid not."

"May I see your letter of introduction?"

"I'm afraid I haven't got one."

"Oh, dear. Do you know anyone

who's a member?"

"I once bought Henry Longhurst a Tio Pepe."

"I see."

"I have a set of Peter Thompson's, and a convertible with whitewall tyres."

"Oh, well, it doesn't really matter on a weekday," said this girl, deliciously snooty to the last. "But we do like to have a letter."

I felt that here the defences were lying oiled, wrapped and ready for the day when the fruit gums brigade, the corned-beef eaters who can't tell marga from butter, should come charging up the drive under the flag of Masstopia.

Here were the smells of money, luxury, privilege, and I sniffed them up with gusto. Why not? Civilisation must consist in part of selling things worth buying.

*With grateful acknowledgments to
The Daily Mail.*

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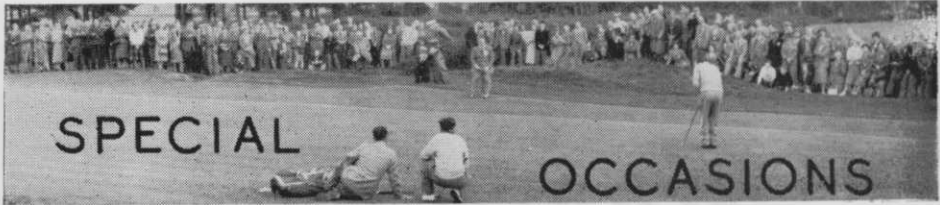
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APRIL

26th Northern Section, Spring Tournament, Otley Golf Club.

MAY

1st Midland Section, Spring Tournament, Tamworth Golf Club.

2nd North West Section, Spring Tournament, Bramhall Golf Club.

9th East Midland Section, Spring Tournament, Sherwood Forest Golf Club, Mansfield.

16th Southern Section, Spring Tournament, Finchley Golf Club.

JUNE

7th Midland Section, President's Match, Handsworth Golf Club.

7th North West Section, Annual General Meeting.

AUGUST

13th, 14th and 15th B.G.G.A., A.G.M. and Annual Tournament, Pyle and Kenfig Golf Club.

NOVEMBER

28th Midland Section, Visit to Messrs. Massey Ferguson.

NOT FORGETTING

23rd April



SITUATIONS VACANT

HEAD GREENKEEPER/CLUBMASTER with WIFE to take charge of catering required for Cochrane Castle Golf Club, Johnstone; attractive accommodation with free heating and lighting together with profits from catering and golf shop. Applications, giving full particulars, including salary desired, to the Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, A. S. Holms, Holmcroft, Lady-smith Avenue, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire.

HEAD GREENKEEPER required for N.E. Scotland. Championship Course (18 holes and 9 holes). Normal staff, 3-4. House available. Salary according to qualifications. Commencing 1st June, 1962. Apply Box No. 462, "British Golf Greenkeeper".

WANTED ASSISTANT GREENKEEPER. Good prospects for experienced person. No accommodation. Apply: Hon. Secretary, Moor Allerton Golf Club, Nursery Lane, Leeds, 17.

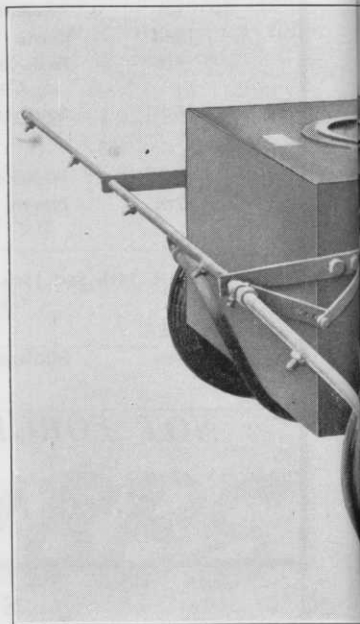
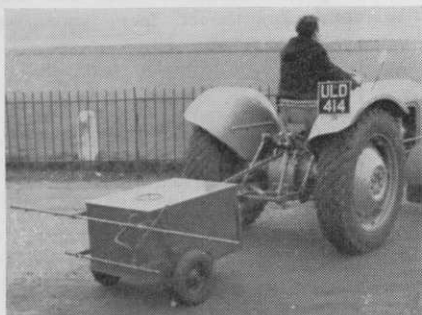
WANTED ASSISTANT GREENKEEPER to take over post of Head Greenkeeper after 12 months satisfactory probation service. Application Forms on request to the Hon. Secretary, Newport Golf Club, Rogerstone, Mon.

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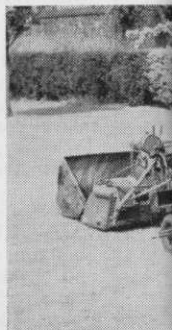


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