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Those Sixty Years

by

Stan Morton

LITTLE DID I THINK when I joined the Association 58 years ago that I would have the pleasure of attending the Diamond Jubilee Dinner at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool, with so many fellow Greenkeepers, their wives, friends and guests.

The Association had only just got started when World War I began. A lot of us had to go, and some had to start again, more or less from scratch. This is where I feel I must mention a few names – most of them are 'The late' – F. G. Hawtree, Senior, A. Whittal, Chairman for many years, W. Smithers, Hon. Secretary from the revival of the Association, Tom Bridges, Tom Mason, and, from the North, W. Woods and G. McNieve, to mention a few. These stalwarts did most of the spade work.

Between the wars, membership was growing all the time. Wages began to improve, and well they might, for I remember going cap in hand to get my men a 2/- rise. This, I am glad to say, is not now the case.

I have seen a lot of changes, most of them for the better. For instance, we used to have essay competitions, prizes given by firms. These were all very well, but there were many Greenkeepers who could do their job on the course, but found it hard to put it on paper. This was overcome when the different sections were formed and were able to arrange their own lectures and meetings.

On the other hand, when other sections were formed we saw a great difference in the annual Tournament. Numbers started to drop and have never got back. In the early days it was common to have 120 to 140 entries for four days. Also in those days there was a lot more enjoyment, somehow. Where the most progress was made, I think, was in the 'Thirties'.

We had the Association's 21st Dinner at the Hendon Golf Club, with about 150 members and guests. Also, the first edition of the British Golf Greenkeeper came out in July 1936. At first it was issued once a quarter. The great favourite for years were articles by Harry Fulford. He was a great friend to Greenkeepers, and the wives loved to read his piece each time it arrived.

Also in the early 'Thirties', the Committee decided we should make ourselves known from the playing side. I was given the job to get a team of Greenkeepers to play anyone who would take us on. Around about that time I was able to call on about half-a-dozen Scratch men and make a team of 12 and 14 of 5 handicap and below. That great friend, Henry Longhurst, gave me a great start by arranging a fixture with Cambridge and Oxford, also the Pro's: the Stewards, Police and Secretaries followed and we were always able to give a very good account of ourselves. About this time we had started our own research and trial plots on half-a dozen courses under the leadership of Tom Mason.

The Benevolent Fund has always been a great concern of the Association. We have never been flush. I have always felt our partners at the Club, the Pro's, could help. Half-a-dozen Exhibition Matches up and down the country could have swelled our funds. After all, the better the course is in condition, the more trade the Pro is going to do.

Perhaps there is some other member who could fill the gaps I have left in these 60 years, so I would like to conclude on a personal note. Since starting as a boy at Camberley Heath, I have enjoyed every game of golf, visits to all Tournaments, Lectures and visits to firms in the trade, which have been most interesting. Having made a rough total, I have played, in the four Countries, over 300 Courses and only once was I asked for a green fee. That was last year at Flackwell Heath after having been given permission from the Head Greenkeeper to go ahead. I was later informed by the Secretary that no one

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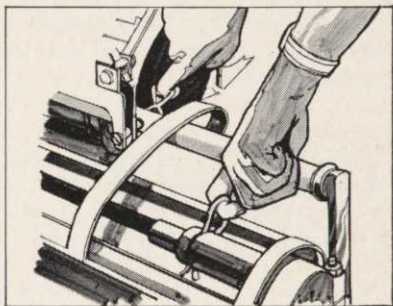


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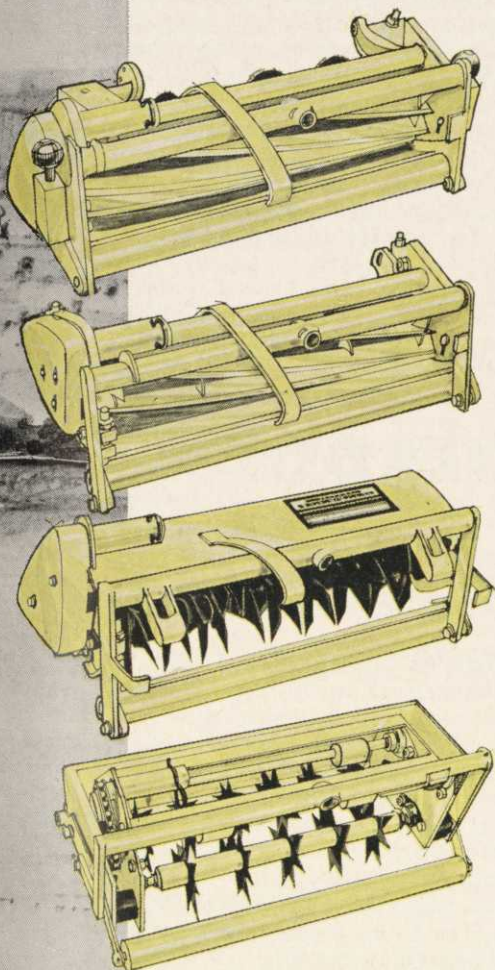
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played there before a green fee is paid. So, away we went to Temple where we had a welcome, fit for anyone, from the Secretary, Steward, and my very old friend and Greenkeeper Jim Rosier. We had drinks half way round and were met by the Captain and his wife as we came off the last green, with an invitation to come again.

Having enjoyed the Dinner at the 21st year, also the Diamond Jubilee, I may not be about at the Centenary; but I hope the powers that be at the time will take the Tournament to St. Andrews.

The Funny Side of Greenkeeping

The late Harry Fulford, a former professional golfer and humorist, wrote this piece for our magazine 25 years ago. Its philosophy will still appeal to many.

AND WHAT I KNOW about greenkeeping could be written on a postage stamp. At the same time I am going to place on record – listen to this, Freddy Hawtree – that I was once in a job where I was responsible for the upkeep of the course. Never mind where it was, but it was not a hundred miles from the Research Station at Bingley, Yorks.

At that time amongst my members was one reigning Amateur Champion, a Captain of the victorious Cambridge team of that year, and many times Open and Amateur Champion of Australia.

And the Club, fed up with the Green Committee, composed of Doctors, Chartered Accountants, Solicitors and Mill Owners, decided that the poor dam pro. was the only man who could make a silk purse out of a sow's ear! In plain English, I was the cat's whiskers so far as the course was concerned.

My first job of reconstruction was to clear the ninth green of worms. The subsoil would have delighted the heart of a potter. All day long you could see the worms forming fours on its surface. A very keen member of the Club said: 'Destroy the worms and you do away with Nature's natural ventilation and drainage.' (Incidentally from a putting standpoint I prefer a green with wormcasts, for they often deflect my ball towards the hole!)

However, let me go back to the ninth. From information received I ordered one hundredweight of steel filings from Sheffield. We covered the green with them, and a week later that green went Bolshevik. It resembled the bottom of a tanker that had been six months at sea!

We wrestled with the problem, and giving it up, I constructed a new green some forty yards farther on, and placed a 'Ground under Repair' board on the 20ft by 10ft that marked the site of what had been. As a Bug Blinder, steel filings were napoo. That taught me something.

The era of rule of thumb greenkeeping has long since passed. When I find myself to-day in the presence of the modern greenkeeper I merely listen. Not for me to butt in where angels fear to tread. I am quite conscious of my own limitations.

If Mr Hawtree tried to tell me how to make a golf club it would be seconds out of the ring. If he showed me a hefty divot and explained that it was deficient in lime, or its surface was not Poa something, I should listen and then still understand nothing.

I am not trying to throw bouquets at the greenkeepers, but I have always held the opinion that the most important servant on the golf club staff is not the steak and kidney provider, despite the fact that he generally gets the lion's portion out of the poor box at Christmas, not is it the professional whose profits go in penny stamps for A/c's rendered, but it certainly is the greenkeeper who, if he did not produce the goods, would put the caterer out of work, and the pro. a shade nearer the workhouse.

In the inauguration of Associations connected with the workers, pride of seniority is held by the professionals, who in 1901 formed themselves into the PGA. Next, I believe, came the disciples of Mrs. Beeton, the thirst-quenchers of the nineteenth hole; and then arose the greenkeepers.

I have heard rumours of a caddies' Union, but so far they lack a leader. It will come, but meanwhile there is more or less cohesion amongst those who administer to the requirements of a class of individual who claim to know more about our jobs than we do ourselves!

We are all by way of being specialists. I can imagine a member of the Greenkeepers' Association deeply immersed in a book entitled, 'The Love Story of a Leatherjacket'; and a steward, 'Ten ways of dealing with Hen fruit'. As for the pro., apart from the book he has written himself, he can only criticise the various short cuts to proficiency that seem to be a feature of our daily Press to-day.

Where does it all lead us? Unity is no doubt a fine thing. Why should not the greenkeepers have a confidential journal of their own? I see no reason why not.

By the way, I should like to get to the bottom of a mystery that has got me beat. Some few weeks ago I prepared the ground for a small lawn in my garden, on which a grandchild could play in the summer – which, by the look of things, will never arrive. I turned over the soil to the depth of a foot, prepared a level surface, and bit the ear of a friendly greenkeeper for sufficient of his four and sixpence per lb. seed. I told myself that I should get a lawn that no green could surpass. The seed struck, came up, but the winner proved to be a couple of sticks of rhubarb that now resemble a sheltering palm!

Every greenkeeper has his own problems. He of Slotpton-on-Mud is faced with a clay subsoil wherein worms make nightly whoopee. At St. Andrews an aerial torpedo would never produce signs of life in the basement.

On public courses where the non-golfing public can roam at will, the remains of ham sandwiches, paper bags, fruit and broken glass, shorten the greenkeeper's life. But has any reader even suffered from a visitation of magpies?

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'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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