

I THINK the most important thing about golf I have noticed is that little things mean a lot. If a club pays attention to the small things on a course then it will have a good future.

Many people think Carnoustie was taken off the championship circuit because of the lack of accommodation and facilities, but this was not the case. It was because the course was not good enough in terms of its general condition. The Scottish Amateur Championship was held there four years ago and the course was desperate because no-one seemed to care. It had been a wonderful links course, but everything had gone to rack and ruin. It was not tidy and the greens were not as they should have been.

As a result the person responsible was removed and the number two greenkeeper from St. Andrews took over three years ago. The Youth Championship was held at Carnoustie in August last year and Michael Bonallack, who has played all over the world, said it was the best condition course he had ever seen.

This was due to the greenkeeper being able to generate enthusiasm in his staff and the people he worked for. In two years all the little things had been sorted out.

At Pinehurst in North Carolina there are six courses and hundreds of people working there. No expense is spared and the courses are in tremendous condition. In August the grass dies every year and is re-seeded and the greens are out of this world.

At Bradford Golf Club many years ago, Gilbert Kendall, the greenkeeper, had only a little old tank which he used to hitch up to the back of a tractor in order to water the greens. In July and August the members expected the greens to be hard, fast and true. It was a sterner test of golf and there was a greater differential between the better and poorer players.

I believe this is the way it should be and that there is no harm in it. I do not think the

arguments for automatic water sprinklers are valid. British golf should not be compared to American golf because the climate, terrain and sub-soil are all different.

When Tom Watson came to play in the Open at Sandwich in 1981, where they have water on all the fairways, he was not very pleased with the course and was overheard saying, "There is no point in me coming to Britain to play on a links course if it is going to be like this. I can play every day in America where the ball goes from A to B, and that is not what I want out of the game".

Championship links courses are made so that in the summer the ball is expected to run for ever and ever. That is the way I think golf courses should be. I am certainly against watering and feel our courses should be natural. Inland courses are different: The bounce is much more severe and more frustrating.

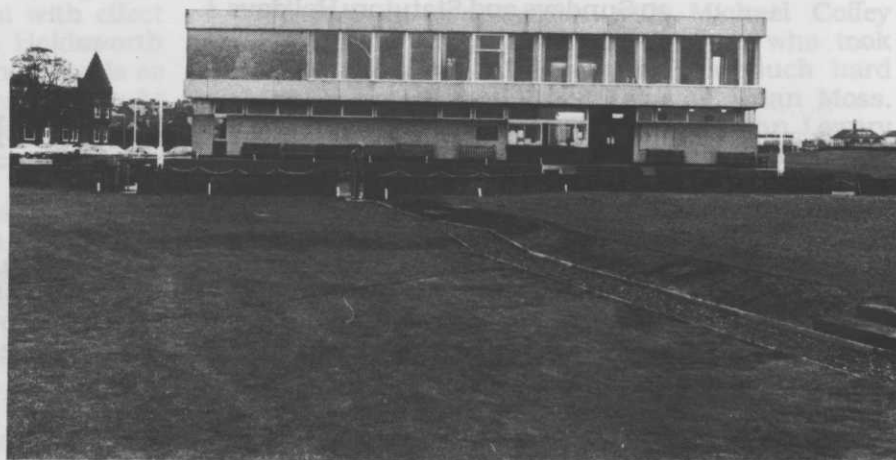
I like to see trees on inland courses, but trees that are kept under control. There is no use having a nice little copse which is so thick that it cannot be played out of. You have to have trees on an inland course from an aesthetic point of view as well as a test of skill, but they must be kept in trim so a golfer has a sporting chance to play

FACE TO FACE

**An extract
from a talk
given by
Rodney Foster
to members
of the BGA
in 1986**

out of them.

Golf overseas is a totally different game, mainly due to the climate. Some people say golf is a climate game and certainly the players from warmer countries seem to perform better than we do. You can only play sensible golf here for a maximum of six months of the year. If you get a bad start to the golfing year in terms of weather, it ruins the amateur golfer's season because he cannot put the work in. I am sure the same thing is true of greenkeeping.



A modern clubhouse overlooks the 1st tee on Carnoustie's championship course.

There is something else missing in this country which seems to be present abroad, and that is money, in the form of machinery and men. I think everything should be done to give greenkeepers a chance to attend to the little things to get the general standard of housekeeping up to scratch. Abroad, this seems to be done with out financial restraints.

If you go to Ganton, which I think gets as many golfers as other clubs and a tremendous number of visitors, you will see that they do tend to be lucky because when they sand and seed tees, they do seem to germinate quickly. On inland courses this takes more time. One article I read asked why tees could not be just like greens but a little longer. On a short hole, of course, it is not possible, but on a driving hole I cannot see why the tee cannot be presentable and attractive.

On links courses the formation of bunkers is easy: you dig a hole and it is there, but you then have the construction to look at. It is turved down the face or open? I prefer to see them open, but I appreciate that on a links course turved faces are very attractive, but I would have thought that the maintenance was a little harder.

With inland courses the trap that is often fallen into is to try to make the bunkers like those on seaside courses and you cannot do it. You cannot have a seaside bunker on an inland course. It does not work.

This lovely white sand is so attractive until you get in it!

Your foot goes in, you have maybe a couple of shots and then you look behind you at the mess and then have to spend five minutes with a rake tidying it up to make it presentable again. On inland course bunkers are in a worse condition, not through the fault of the greenkeeper, but, in most cases through frustrated golfers.

I would rather see the gritty, darker, firmer sand. Let's not make pretensions that our inland courses are like the ones at the seaside. They may be bowls of dirt to some people, but they are eminently more playable and they are easier to keep in good condition.

I think one could be more daring in the terms of the shape of bunkers. At my own club they have tended to be oval with a straight line at the front. I think this is a bit unimaginative and I think it is the same with fairways. I think it is nice to see a bit of shape to a fairway, whether on a championship course or an exciting local course. This is something which can be done with very little effort and the beauty of it is that it is not irreversible. If you decide it does not look right you just let the grass grow.

These are the sort of steps I would much rather see greens committees take with the connivance of the greens staff before they start altering the basic design of the course. I think moving greens and tees is an awfully big step to take.

You may have to lift the green because it has thatch but that is

a different problem.

To make a 440 yard hole into a 480 yard hole just to make a par 5 is a very limp and silly thing for a golf committee to embark upon. It is very easy to ruin a good hole for the sake of length. I have played a course in Estoril where there is a marvelous little 320 yard dog-leg right and it is one of the trickiest holes I have ever played. Not unfair but an awfully good hole.

I would like to see, as in Scotland, a greens convener appointed for a minimum of five years and I would have thought this was much more sensible than the system in England where you have a member who is on the greens committee for the two years he is on the board and the third year he is appointed chairman because he has had experience of two years on the board. That is neither use nor ornament. If this was changed I am sure courses would be in the sort of condition I would like to see them in.

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FACE TO FACE

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When the small points are being attended to it indicates to members and people like myself that the place is being cared for.

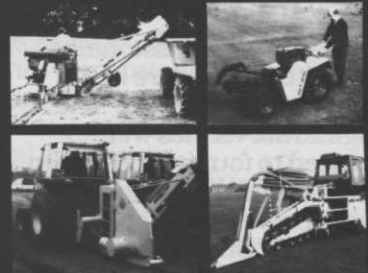
Greenkeeping standards and methods are all about the clubs, the committees of clubs and their responsibilities. They are the paymasters and it is up to the club committees to serve the greenkeeping side so that all the effort is being channelled along the right road and that the money being spent is spent in the right way and not wasted.

It is more difficult to keep a course in good condition now because so much more golf is played. Some 30 years ago I could toddle around every evening of the week, chipping and putting around the greens. Nobody saw me because there was no-one playing the course. It must be a difficult job keeping the place spick and span, and perhaps the secret lies in the number of men and the utilisation of resources.

This is the way I would like to see my ideal course, and I am not talking about a championship course, but a little nine hole course down the road, which would give me great pleasure to play if it were in decent order and all the little points were being taken care of.

ED'S NOTE: No doubt the above will stimulate much discussion and even correspondence. For example Tom Watson perhaps did not know that it had rained for six weeks prior to the Open Championship in 1981!!

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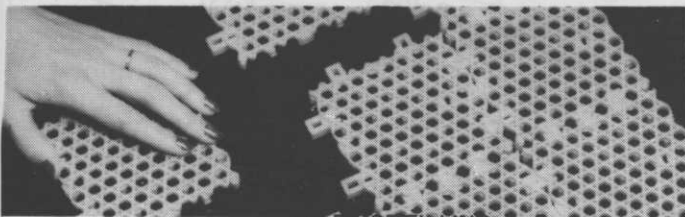


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*You change the holes you cut the grass, You work your butt to save your ass,
 But all they do is moan and groan, Shout at you on the telephone.
 You spike and scarify as time goes past, To get the greens all firm and fast,
 The better greens are bent/fescue, But are given praise by golfers few.
 So the greens for colour are far to pale, When they judge by that your sure to fail.
 Then the greens wont hold a ball hit thin, But they never try to get backspin.
 So you're told do this they think they know, And politely you tell them where to go!
 But they shout for water, they shout for feeding, they say that's what our greens are needing,
 Aye! That's the view of the golfing mass, And that's why they play on meadowgrass!*

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