

Flags and Flagpins

Smart and well designed accessories can enhance the aesthetic appeal of any golf course by John Campbell

Many golfers would like to see the flagpins on all courses conforming to certain standard specifications with regard to size, thickness and design, etc, and most manufacturers who are aware of this are now producing a more standardised range of this type of equipment.

However, it is still suprising to find a fair variety of flagpins - long, short, thin and thick on many courses, or even on the same course.

The choice and colour of the flagsticks is often dictated by the type of course, the environment and nature of the terrain and the whims of the club committee.

Quality and type of flags and pins can also be influenced by a limited budget or the fact that the course may be more liable to attention of vandals. So the club may be less inclined to devote priority to the maintenance of course furniture and equipment.

In the early days of the game there were no flags or flagpins to mark the hole and the procedure then was for the first party of players going out on the course to find and mark the position of each hole for those following with a gull or rook feather which happened to be lying around.

If, as sometimes happened, the hole could not be found due to ravages of sheep or other animals churning up the turf, the leading match was expected to select another site, cut a new hole with a knife and set up the feather beside that.

In those days golfers were used to more primitive methods of dealing with the hole, and greens as we know them today never really existed.

A broken branch from any nearby bush or tree with a fragment of cloth attached to the top was generally considered quite suitable. At a later date flags were pieces of material or bunting attached to a length of stick

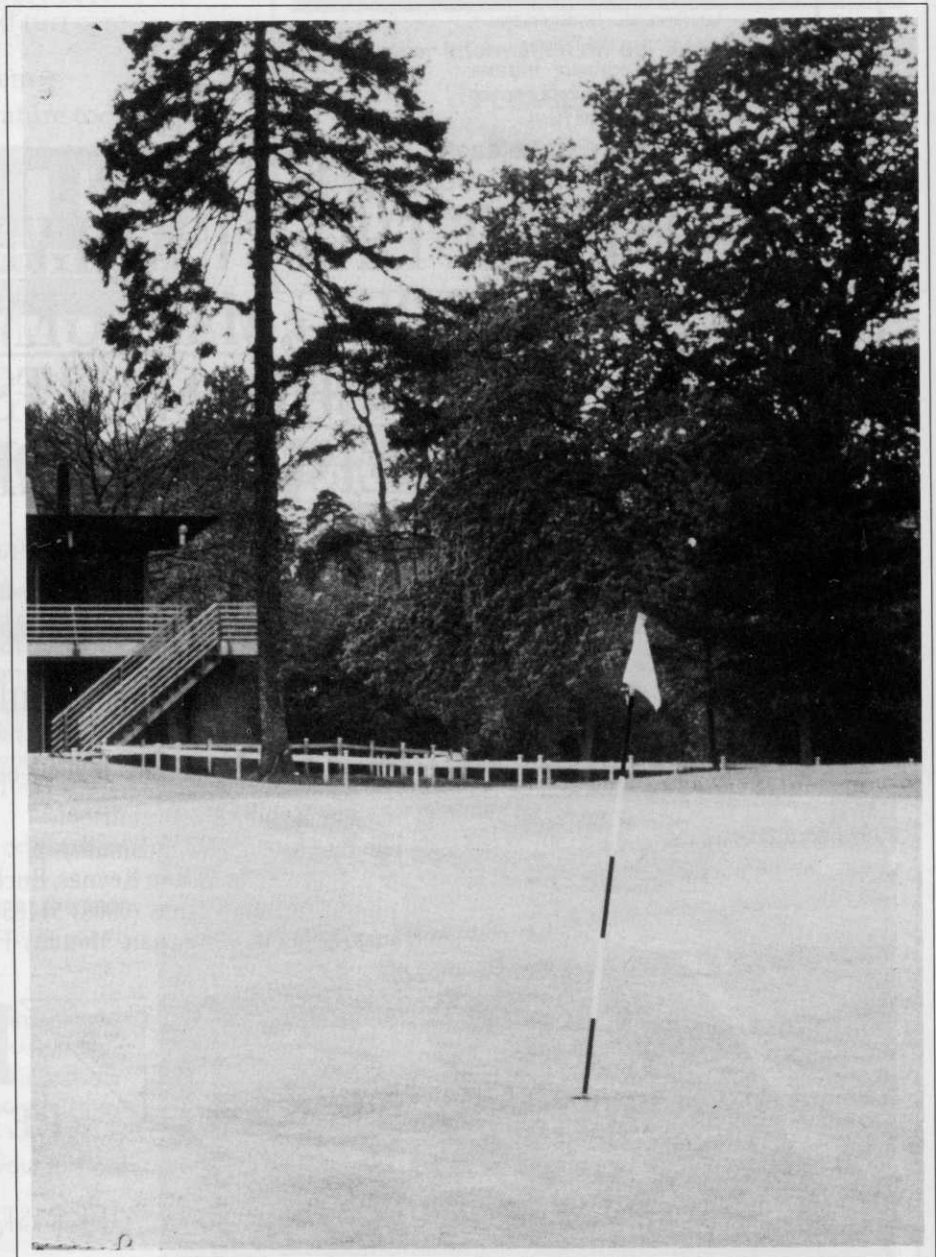
or bamboo.

But these flags soon became dirty and tattered and their main purpose as a marker was ineffective for they were hard to distinguish.

And they were never replaced

unless they were removed by vandals or carried away by the wind.

The custom of attaching flags to the end of a stick has not always been entirely universal for at one time some clubs used



Combination sets of flagsticks and hole cups are specially designed to keep the base of the flagstick erect in the cup.

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oval-shaped wicker baskets surmounted on the hole sticks and it is believed that this tradition is still carried on in North America where these unique markers seem to blend in with a background of lakes, weeping willows and other ornamental trees.

If flagsticks are not properly maintained and regularly replaced, their function as hole markers is substantially reduced when they are allowed to assume a grimy appearance with paintwork flaking and chipped.

In this condition they tend to merge with the background in the manners of camouflage and players experience great difficulty spotting them from a distance. For good visibility reasons, there is often quite a variation in the choice of flagstick colours from one course to another.

Some clubs prefer them all white, others like them red, or combination of red/white, or black/white sections. Quite a lot depends on the

layout of the course and the background features to the greens and for this reason some colours stand out more clearly than others.

At St Andrews, there used to be a custom (and probably still is) with regard to the colour sequence of flags on the greens which is not always fully understood by visitors.

From the 1st to the 9th going out the flags were all white, then, from the 10th to the 17th they were red, finishing with the traditional white flag on the 18th green.

No historical reasons are advanced for this unusual colour sequence, although one theory is that a white flag was traditional on the 18th green on the Old Course where there is a prominent red brick building in the background.

Course accessories like flags and flagpins play an important part in the game and if regularly maintained these items can enhance the look of any type of course. Golfers today have the advantage of more

brightly coloured flags, which in addition to indicating wind direction, they can be easily picked out in the distance against any kind of background.

Many courses have now installed combination sets of flagsticks and cups that are specially designed to keep the lower part of the flagstick upright in a socket extending below the base of the cup.

Most golf club officials and greenkeepers would agree that smart, well designed course accessories can enhance the aesthetic appear of a well groomed course and add to the character of the general surroundings.

Such equipment must be attractive, dependable and easy to maintain. Besides being able to withstand the weather, equipment sometimes has to suffer harsh treatment from vandals and it is desirable that it should be durable and capable of standing up to a bit of wear and tear.

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