

"The chances of becoming a golf course architect were about equal to that of being struck by lightning"

Michael John Hurdzan President A.S.G.C.A. 1984

With very few professional golf course architects and no formal training to become one, the new two year course planned by the British Association of Golf Course Architects may well alter 'the State of the Art'. Steve Marnoch illustrates the problems of embarking upon a career as a golf course architect.

Opportunities in golf course architecture at present are nil".

F. W. Hawtree, B.A.G.C.A. March 1982

As a young man who had his heart set on becoming a golf course architect, this reply from an eminent member of the B.A.G.C.A. was not an easy one to receive although it served to give an accurate illustration of the work opportunities at that time.

I had developed an interest in art and design and had played golf for my club for a number of years. My father Peter Marnoch was, and still is incidentally, head greenkeeper at Coventry Hearsall Golf Club so it would appear I had as good a grounding as any for a future career in golf course architecture.

For guidance, I contacted B.A.G.C.A. and U.S.G.C.A. and was informed that the number of enquiries for the development of golf courses far outweighed the number actually being designed and constructed. I was advised to pursue a career which was closely related. A career as a landscape architect seemed suitable and one which could lead me nearer to my goal.

Following the completion of my degree, I again pursued opportunities to specialise or move solely into golf course architecture. Unfortunately, despite having the qualifications and experience to match, there were still no openings into the profession.

"It is doubtful if there are any vacancies in golf course architecture at present".

J. Hamilton Stutt B.A.G.C.A. 1982

Nothing had changed!

Suddenly, the opportunity arose to work with the construction team on the re-development of the Jubilee

Course at St Andrews designed by Donald Steel. Considering the past years of struggling, I decided that if I was to succeed as a golf course architect, it would be essential that I gained some 'on-site' experience in the techniques of course construction.

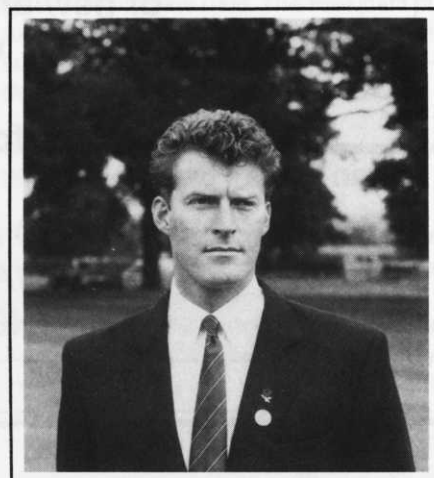
It was a great privilege to work at the 'Home of Golf'. During my time there I felt I was in a strong position to be noticed by an architect and perhaps secure an appointment. This, unfortunately, was not to be and sadly, after six months I decided that to continue in this line of work on the construction team may prove detrimental to my long term career, therefore I decided to progress into architecture or perhaps getting a chance to join with a full member of B.A.G.C.A.

What followed was more experience in the specialist field of construction where I was directly involved in the implementation of designs produced by members of the Association and even produce some of my own work which did receive acclaim from both greenstaffs and committees concerned. However, I was still attempting to become involved in golf course architecture rather than 'design' but there were no formal paths of training to achieve recognition, this was impossible.

It is with some relief that this position has now changed following a recent statement of B.A.G.C.A.

"At the B.A.G.C.A. Committee meeting held on the 4th July 1989 it was decided that the Association had an obligation to educate its future members and a syllabus and reading list covering a two-year programme was formulated".

M. G. Hawtree, Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, B.A.G.C.A.



The course has been planned to include a series of study essays, a wide reading list and finally the production of a full 18-hole course design with working drawings, specification and bill of quants. It is a part-time course with attendance at residential workshops twice yearly. Primarily it consists of the participant producing a number of assignments which are accessed by a personal tutor who is a full member of B.A.G.C.A. and assigned to each course member at the beginning of the course.

The content of the course includes discussions ranging from golf course layout in Europe and America since 1900 and evaluations of terms including 'penal', strategic and heroic when considering hole design. A number of study modules have been set which cover subjects varying from planning for Sports and Leisure through Grass and Botany to History of Landscape. This is the first course of its kind in this country and began, suitably, at the Sports Turf Research Institute at Bingley in October 1989. I have been sponsored to attend the course by my present employers, the Casey Group

of Companies based in Rochdale.

The fact that they are backing me in my career as a golf course architect suggests that the Group is concerned with producing an excellent standard of work in golf course design and construction which would be supported by a qualification from the B.A.G.C.A.

The course syllabus appears to offer a balanced coverage of the wide variety of the expertise that a golf course architect requires. The success of the teaching and running of the course over the next two years will be of interest. It was made clear at the first meeting that the tutors and organisers are specialists in their respective fields of architecture but are not trained as lecturers and for that reason should be allowed some licence to develop that role. I have no doubt that the course will experience some teething problems due to its infancy, but that all concerned, students and staff, will pull together to develop this course for the future and help maintain its development.

Organised by B.A.G.C.A. with support from the R & A and EGU this course is a response to the amount of interest shown by individuals in becoming golf course architects and as a concerted effort by the Association to provide a structure and foundation whereby young architects can be properly trained. Successful completion will give a certificate in golf course architecture and provisional membership. Full membership still requires the design and supervision of six 18 hole courses within a six year period.

This response is encouraging and commendable from the Associations' members who are bound by a moral code of ethics, as are any other members of a professional body. The course hopes to continue the high standards set by past and present members by instilling the same ideals into the new students. This comes at a time when tight control is required to maintain this high quality when there is such an interest in golf.

During a recent discussion, I was asked what the difference was between an 'Architect' and a 'Designer'. My reply was that an Architect would do the job properly.

I hope that having completed this course, there will be a number of good golf course architects who are not led by the mystical attraction of designing courses and can see no further than 'green is good', but who can provide working projects which are successful, aesthetic and testing to all and prove to be creditworthy of the Asso-

ciation.

A current concern is with the amount of so called 'designers' who appear to be playing at the real role with perhaps some knowledge of maybe one of the many facets required by a golf course architect. I am sure that this is of great concern also to the Association and one of the reasons behind structuring the formal course and training. This worry is endorsed by many professionals in the business.

"All too many golfers or developers imagine that the overriding qualification for an architect or designer is that he should be or have been a very good player".

Jim Arthur in his article 'The Way Forward'

It is essential to differentiate between the titles 'architect' and 'designer'. The former must be restricted to members of B.A.G.C.A. and their American counterparts. They are governed by specific conditions, terms of engagement and scale of fees. Currently, virtually all members are qualified in a relevant science and have passed a probationary period.

In contrast, the 'designers' have no formal qualifications and are quite often golf professionals seeking to widen their interests in the game and provide a new source of income, once their playing career has ended.

"It is perhaps unrealistic to expect any change of attitude among the many unqualified persons who dabble in so called course architecture. Therefore, in the future, sensible golfers and golf course developers should look to the more responsible elements to be found in the course construction industry".
"The Golf Course" October 1989

Surely the production of something akin to green deserts with flat playing surfaces or mounds too steep, impossible carries over ill-constructed water bodies, which the greenkeeper will have to maintain for the future with his normally meager budget for maintenance, will reflect badly on golf course architects as a whole if we are not careful.

I imagine the famous names of the past like Colt, Fowler or MacKenzie (whom we shall be studying) would be turning in their graves if they could see the 'howlers' being produced today which, in the long run, can only cost the client a fortune to rectify in capital outlay and lost revenue during repair works.

The problem must lie with the client sector who seem to lash out millions on courses with no assurances as to the quality of the end product.

It is essential that the client employs someone who is bound by professional ethics and liabilities to ensure that quality and integrity through experience is maintained.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be seen that trying to break into a new profession can be fraught with danger, especially when the supply of finance to the leisure sector can fall off dramatically, as has been experience in the past.

With a limited amount of work, there can only be a small group of people to handle that, as was with the original Association where even they relied upon other careers which they could fall back on in times of hardship.

With the current massive interest in golf, it is human nature that certain individuals will want a 'ride' on that wave. If the true ethics of golf and interest in the game for **all** are to be maintained, it is important that the 'new architects' must have the grounding and indeed be steeped in the historical development of the game in order that the original ideas and styles are not lost in the flood of 'Americanisms' and 'spectator friendly golf'.

That is not to say that there is no case for different styles of courses and indeed not a place for 'designers'. There are good and bad in all things. Hopefully the latter content of the article did not antagonise the 'good designers' who have attempted to find out about the background, different styles and techniques of what they are attempting.

If there are no openings to become a golf course architect, then it is perhaps difficult not to fall into the "designer" classification.

With the development of a formal path of training by B.A.G.C.A., this unfortunate situation can now change and by learning from the experience of past professionals the future looks promising. We live in a country with a wealth of excellent golf courses. Let's take steps to protect our heritage in maintaining these high standards for all new developments through good design, good specifications and construction techniques.

The development of this course syllabus is encouraging and shows the responsibility that the B.A.G.C.A. has to golf as a whole. I am please to be part of that and am grateful for the support given to me by the Casey Group of Companies.