

Henry Cotton, that grand old man of British golf, eighty this year, has a plan for the improvement of junior golf, worthy of someone half his age.

After a lifetime fighting for the recognition and status for the professional golfer he has now turned his undoubted influence towards a better deal for the young beginner.

'The way forward is backwards', said Henry Cotton in an interview with the Editor of *Golf Greenkeeping* at the Windsor Exhibition.

"Young beginners at the game are not welcome in many of the established golf clubs. Their mode of dress reflecting the current trends is open to criticism, they do not understand the rules, the etiquette of golf has not been explained or understood, they hold up the senior members during play and their enthusiasm often leads to a show of temperament not acceptable in golfing circles".

Club throwing, shouts of anguish and football type reactions to the good and bad shots are all symptoms of teenage enthusiasm among beginners. Conduct, certainly not acceptable to the mature golfer who resents the intrusion of juniors into his weekend relaxation, which may well have cost him several hundred pounds in annual subscription.

If we are to continue to be a force in international competition, then something needs to be done to give our future golfers the opportunity to learn the game, the rules and golfing behaviour before admission to established golf clubs, maintains Henry Cotton.

The existing municipal courses are insufficient in number to meet demand and local authorities do not have the finance to build new ones. Available cash for leisure is now put into Sports Halls maximising a fraction of the land area needed for a golf course.

Golf started on the links. Land unsuitable for agriculture or for that matter anything else. A flat area was chosen as the putting surface and the grass cut short, first by grazing sheep and as golf progressed, by the early hand mowers.

Initially the teeing area was alongside the last hole played and the fairway, the ground between the greens.

Six holes and later nine were the norm, playing the course twice or three times to equal a round.

The first Open Championship played at Prestwick in 1870 over 36 holes was completed by three rounds over a twelve hole course.

Henry's idea is that golf for beginners should return to the same early principles. Cut out the frills of a fully



THE WAY FORWARD IS BACKWARDS

says Henry Cotton, advocating a new plan for the development of junior golf

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furnished Clubhouse and expensive new course development and layout a basic tee to green construction to suit the land available, whether it will accommodate six, nine, or twelve holes. Leave out bunkers and use the existing trees, rough and natural contours as the hazards. Over such a basic golf course the beginner can learn the rudiments of the game.

Learning to swing the club, manufacture shots from a limited bag of clubs, understand the rules of golf and how to behave in company with fellow golfers. All this for a minimal charge of about 50p.

Henry Cotton wants to encourage local authorities to look at their existing parks and unused land with the intention of providing these minimal maintenance areas. Private land owners with country estates or race courses with huge tracts of unused land are to be encouraged to do the same.

Maintenance of such a basic golf course would be a fraction of the cost of the traditional eighteen hole variety, confined to the cutting of greens, tee and fairways at regular intervals. A changing hut with a coffee machine would suffice instead of a Clubhouse.

Once the junior has achieved a reasonable standard of play and an acceptable handicap as well as learning the rules and etiquette then he or she would be ready to apply for membership to the established club.

Miss Leslie Atwood the Secretary of the Golf Foundation welcomed any ideas for increased golf facilities for young people, but said funds were limited if developers were seeking any form of grant aid.

She added that all available money from the Foundation was at present channeled into coaching both in schools and through clubs who welcomed the junior members. Clubs, she said, were now encouraging the young beginners and with almost 2,000 golf courses in Britain this country was far better off in terms of existing facilities than other European countries.

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