

Literary Review and Educational Supplement

(Part II)

...by Fred Hawtree



When I stepped down from the soapbox last month, I promised to continue later with a survey of current trends in the art of education. But recently, things moved rather fast on that front. I myself got caught in the slip stream.

The Chancellor may not be personally involved in hammering the improving stuff into the Class A brains who now make it to the University in Oxford but the election of a new one in March, judged by the four candidates, should have reminded us that scholarship and achievement are not poles apart. Something is transferred at lectures and tutorials which stands the recipient in good stead when he tackles the wide world later. Those of you concerned with training and apprenticeship should clearly ponder how best the greenkeeping experience of one generation and even earlier ones may be passed on attractively and efficiently to the next.

One common gambit used by old hands in lecturing, is to start with an anecdote aimed at waking up the hard core of resistance in the back row. They then find it difficult to drop off again and acquire at least a taste of the tougher meat prepared to follow. That is not my main purpose in side tracking you with a real life drama for a few more minutes, just when you hoped you could stop pacing up and down impatiently. I have first to explain that as the result of the election mentioned, I am now vastly better qualified for the task in hand. No! It is very kind of you but, to the regret of academics everywhere, I myself was not elected Chancellor. Nor indeed, was I a candidate at all, although one only needs a couple of M.A. chums to sign a nomination. Nevertheless, in

the run-up to polling day, powerful forces were unleashed which gave my own C.V. a belated nudge in the direction of the higher echelons.

Devising job-creative titles is now an important industry and associations like our own produce some elegant devices. APFOLM (Association of Playing Field Officers and Landscape Managers) is my favourite, with UKASTA (United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association), a snappy second.

FRHS is another quantum leap. I myself qualified for it once. I found, while waiting at the gates of the Chelsea Flower Show, that a subscription to the Royal Horticultural Society paid there and then would get me in for nothing with the RHS journal for the rest of the year. I paid up and looked round that particular show with a sense of involvement that only another Fellow can understand. And it only cost a few quid.

I believe that the Zoological Society offers a similar enticement so with just two more subscriptions, your visiting card could read: 'A. N. Other, F.Z.S., F.R.H.S., M.B.I.G.G.A.' We can now see the wisdom of the Steering Committee in slipping the 'International' into the Association's title. The casual observer will interpret this initial as an Institute of some sort, a leap forward which translated the Groundsmen's Association several years ago from N.A.G. to I.O.G.

The objection to this type of qualification is the need to send off cheques every year to stay in the race. But those who disdain routine learning will just have to pay up and hope they can get it off their Income Tax. If they also disdain to write the cheques then there is nothing more I can do. They had better turn to Page 3, though not necessarily in this publication.

If anybody is still out there, let me warn them that in return for regulation studies even the one-off appendage is not always what it seems. Let us go back to that election in which, as you will remember, your man Roy Jenkins was successful. In fact, let's go back further still to 1938 when after three years of heavy research at the Frilford Heath Golf Course and at the Majestic Cinema in the Botley Road, I was allowed, through some superbly perceptive system, to add the letters 'B.A.' to my record. I flashed them around for a bit but people tended to shy off, so I soon gave them up.

Nevertheless, it was rumoured at the time that if one remained on the college books for a further period, at modest cost because not in residence, there were exciting possibilities for further advancement without the need even to attend at the Majestic Cinema. (No wonder it is now an MFI furniture store). So I stayed, as they say, tuned. But when the qualification period expired, the Imperial Forces of the Nipponese Emperor declined to let me out of Cycle Camp in Batavia to attend at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford and go through the appropriate motions. They said it was too far and in any case I could acquire the degree *in absentia* which is how they were dishing them out at the Yokohama Tech. Unfortunately, communications were poor, consisting mainly of one pre-printed post card each year on which one was invited to select a few statements, the choice being limited to something like:-

- I am well
- The Nipponese look after us very well
- I hope you are well
- Our Nipponese guards are very well
- I hope.....is well

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I did not consider it wise to add any witty postscripts in case my next postcard might be shorter still:-

I am not so well.

Thus, I stayed on the bottom rung of the ladder both then and for the next 49 years, in fact, until two months ago, just before the election in March.

As you may know, Lord Blake, the Provost of Queen's College, was a candidate and it was not unnatural that a letter should arrive from the college Bursar to let me know that voting would take place on March 14th & 16th. Unfortunately, an M.A. degree was the minimum qualification, but B.A.'s who had never gone that far need not be filled with remorse. They could be entered for a simple but moving ceremony on 7th March at which the Master's degree would be quietly pinned *in absentia* on the phantom breasts of those worthy of that distinction. To be worthy, you had to send in (*Wait for it!*) a cheque for £9.

What would you have done? Myself I went round to *The Feathers*, one of Woodstock's leading eateries, and studied the menu on the wall outside. What could I get for £9? The cuisine is *nouvelle anglo-américaine* which tends to confuse the customer into uncertainty whether he is eating the meat course or the fruit salad. There was nothing for £9. But for £12.50 I could have "Medallions of Monkfish served with a warm Raspberry Vinaigrette and garnished with slices of carrot and orange" (I warned you, didn't I?).

I came to one of those snap decisions which characterise the late developer. After a life-time devoted to the intellectual advancement of greenkeepers, it would be ungrateful to turn down the career-best available on March 7th and stupid to squander an extra £3.50 into the bargain... on RASPBERRIES! I went home and wrote to the Bursar. This long flirtation, just one year short of half a century, could now be brought to the altar and made official. Moreover I should not be one of those who peevishly returned the marriage certificate if my favourite fell at the last vote. This time it was for real.

We should now be coming to what I promised you, but I am sorry. I have not been watching the clock and the alarm has just gone to switch on the TV for the Open University course which is my next chosen hurdle.

The nuts and bolts of greenkeeping education will therefore have to wait until May. At least you realise now that it's not just any old hack that's feeding you the raw material. It's coming straight from the top.

So what's another month in the great school of life? And what, provided you get there in the end, are 49 years.

Part III next month takes you behind the scenes in the echoing halls of agronomy and exposes the secret methods as well as the passions and jealousies of the greenkeeping advisory world. RESERVE YOUR COPY NOW!

OBITUARY

Older Northern Section members and others, who remember Jim Ellis, will be sorry to hear of the sudden death of his widow, Edith. She died unexpectedly, on Monday 23rd March on her way to hospital for tests.

Jim had been Head Greenkeeper and also involved in the construction of the St. Ives course at Bingley, before moving to Stand G.C. at Manchester.

From there he took on the two new courses at Saint Nom La Breteche, near Paris, while it was still under construction.

Edith settled down magnificently to life in France and gave him every support. He brought both courses to perfection, but was then sadly killed in a road crash in France on 10th August 1961 while on his way to England for the Annual B.G.G.A. Tournament at Bridlington.

Edith is survived by her son Martin, her daughter Kathleen and three grandchildren.

We extend our deepest sympathy to her family.

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