



Birds & Words

by
Fred Hawtree

While he was waiting for the golf to start in the last tournament at Sun City, one of our more stimulating golf reporters turned to the local bird life to make up an extra paragraph or two.

He started like this: 'The Bul bulls are dead spraucy, full of bunny and take diabolical liberties. Know what I mean?' And went on to explain that these thrush-like birds would even ravage the breakfast tray on his balcony unless he defended vigorously.

Well, frankly, I did not know what he meant. Unless he was making fun of the local patois, I was lost. I had heard of Bul bulls because they comprise one third of my knowledge of South Africa, on the wing; Turkey Buzzards and Lilac-breasted Rollers make up the other two-thirds. But 'spraucy'? A mixed pedigree? Perhaps:- Sprightly plus Springy times Bouncy plus Raunchy? But neither am I sure what the last word means.

Then there is the other half of the puzzle. What about a Bul bul 'full of bunny'. The turkey buzzard could handle a fair-sized rabbit but not the 7" Bul bul. Or am I being too literal again?

The same writer is both intelligible and entertaining when he is writing about golf itself although like his *confreeres* he may occasionally spice his accounts with novel terms from the leading edge of the developing golf idiom. I have learned not to wince when I read that a player 'carded' a 70' even if it causes confusion in a Yorkshire woollen mill. I also go along with the verb 'to bogey', after a certain initial resistance. Once its implications become clear, it is more precise than the old vague distinction between bogey and par. If one thinks about it, a scratch player's 18 pars will halve the match under handicap with the 24 man's 18 bogeys. That is as tidy as any calculation about handicap can ever be.

But what about 'spraucy'? Can we apply it to golfers too? Too late! Golfers do not spraucy anymore. Those with more shelf life beyond the sell-by date marked on my tin are too young to have seen Alfred Perry, professional at Leatherhead Golf Club. When Bernard Darwin described on the wireless the manner of his winning the 1935 Open, it was obvious, even without the benefit of television, that Perry *sprauced* down the 18th to take the title. Dai Rees also had a considerable spring in his gait. But there was so much less of Rees from the knees up than there was of

Perry that he hardly qualified for true sprauceness. Perry even might have been described as paunchy though not, I am sure, raunchy.

Professional golfers have not only lost their spraucy. We no longer see in the lists of their scores, those romantic parenthetical labels after their names. '(Reddish Vale)', '(Beau Desert)', '(Luffenham Heath)', '(Whittington Barracks)', - all names to conjure with and salutary reminders that even the man who scored in other worlds still played alongside humble club players when at home. Golf clubs lost something of their lustre when hotels, knitwear and air lines took their place for a time between the brackets. Now even the brackets have disappeared.

In case you remain unmoved by the nostalgic regrets up to this point, let me remind you of just one more feature that has faded from the annals of golf - perhaps the most grievous of all. When they redesigned and condensed the text of the annual 'Golfers Handbook', while it was still a hard-back, they wiped two thousand names from the records. They retained the name of the secretary and the professional at each listed club but they dropped the name of the greenkeeper into the bin. A tradition dating back to the earliest golfing annuals, deep in the 19th century, was quietly ended without a whimper, a grumble or even, as would have been appropriate, a riot.

I have since protested to Mr. Laurence Viney who edits the smart new paperback edition of this valuable publication but what would you do, honestly, if you were asked to alter two thousand alphabetical entries already neatly parcelled to fit the space allotted. BIGGA must therefore take up the running as the first test of its new clout. If two thousand greenkeepers decide that they can do without this extremely useful annual and persuade their clubs accordingly, you may find that you too are 'full of bunny' if that's what it means metaphorically.

Your monthly ration of gourmet reading is this month being prepared in France where the appetite for change in golfing matters is less obvious. I suspect it has always been thus because the terms they employ are already novel being foreign. Consider the following:-

- The tee - *Le tee*
- The green - *Le green*
- The rough - *Le rough*
- The dog-leg - *Le dog-leg*

Only when it comes to the ball, *La balle*, (already a French word), does one hear the occasional frivolity such as '*Le ballon*' (balloon or football). In Britain, there were once facetious terms like sphere, orb, pill and the globe. 'Miss the globe' actually got into the glossary of golfing terms in the Badminton 'Golf' edited by Horace Hutchinson (whom you met here in past references to Westward Ho!, Pau and Biarritz). Nobody will regret their departure but there are other more honest, ancient terms which ought not to be lost.

1987 is sure to be a Conservation Year for (something) or Save the (something else) Year so we can now come to the educational content for which these articles are widely renowned. In order to see how far our golfing language has forgotten terms used a hundred years ago, I offer you a brief exercise in word power. Questions 1, 2 and 5 are obligatory for Scottish candidates. Pencils ready?

Here goes. Mark one box only against each word.

Word	Definition
1 Baffy	<input type="checkbox"/> A Describes golfers playing in snow <input type="checkbox"/> B Lofted wooden club with full brass sole plate <input type="checkbox"/> C Refreshment hut at 10th tee at Tidworth Garrison Golf Club.
2 Bisque	<input type="checkbox"/> A Stroke taken at option of receiver <input type="checkbox"/> B Metal counter used to mark position of ball <input type="checkbox"/> C Small oat-cake eaten by Scottish greenkeepers during Lent
3 Fluff	<input type="checkbox"/> A Tufted fringe of putting surface <input type="checkbox"/> B Failure to move ball significantly <input type="checkbox"/> C Used of attractive lady members usually with prefix 'little bit of'.
4 Fozzle	<input type="checkbox"/> A To remove silty material from land drains <input type="checkbox"/> B Ineffective stroke <input type="checkbox"/> C Large wading bird common in the Fens
5 Sclaff	<input type="checkbox"/> A Trim cut turf to even thickness <input type="checkbox"/> B To scrape the turf before striking the ball <input type="checkbox"/> C Convulsive exclamation after 'missing the globe'. (Horse-sclaff' when uttered by opponent).

If you have scored 5 points by marking B.A.B.B.B., congratulations!
 You are a fully qualified and spraucy greenmaster
 If not, kindly see me in my study next month.