

Literary Review and Educational Supplement

(Part III)

...by Fred Hawtree



In the hectic and competitive world of journalism, no magazine can afford to remain silent when it nobbles not just one, but two outstanding 'exclusives' in consecutive months. British Golf Greenkeeping is no exception.

First, there was the account in The Times (8th April) of Prince Charles breaking camp in the Kalahari with Sir Laurens van der Post. I need not remind you that with uncanny foresight, we printed our virtually identical account one month before it happened. The only thing not foreseen, as it turned out, was the helicopter. But, really, who on earth could have foreseen that?

Next we promised to give you the facts about education. This threat threw into disarray not only the teachers' unions, but local authorities, parents, universities, polytechnics and the Ministry of Education itself. Before we entered the ring, things were reasonably placid. The occasional strike, public enquiry, or caning did not ruffle the surface and the kiddies went about their lessons with no more than the customary reluctance. Now let me pass you just a few recent pickings from the Telegraph, Times and the Sundays. All Hell, as they sometimes say, has broken loose.

Daily Telegraph 30 March...

'Grammar school fight-back by parents opens'

The National Grammar School Association was formed in Birmingham to re-open the Comprehensives versus Grammar Schools debate.

'Teachers brand new GCSE a flop'
Education standards for 14 and 15-year-olds have fallen since last year.

Daily Telegraph 31 March...

'Goodbye to the school sixth form'
Falling rolls have raised fundamental questions over the education of our 16 to 19-year-olds.

Margot Norman assesses the value of tertiary colleges.

Parents and teachers, she concluded, 'should go into the colleges and make a nuisance of themselves'.

Well, really!

£120m plan by Labour for the under-5s"

'Last year only 23% of three and four-year-olds had access to a nursery place'

Were the other 77% picketing?

The very next Sunday, John Marabon, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, was regretting the phasing out of Latin. "If ILEA replaces sixth forms with 'tertiary' colleges, Latin will probably

cease to be taught at any maintained school in London... As Latin becomes a rarity, the methods and aims of teaching English began to change... Children were encouraged to express themselves in whatever way caught their fancy... This new way of teaching English now predominates. Its disastrous effects are everywhere to be seen in the semi-literacy of a growing proportion of the population and in the many school-leavers who do not even have a notion of what it would be to speak their own language well".

One week later, another character was writing 'Let Latin remain dead!'

And by the middle of April, Lord Lloyd of Hampstead was writing to The Times on behalf of Greek, which he said was more important to our heritage and had suffered more than Latin.

We cannot go into the Ministerial proposal that head teachers should be given control of their own budgets because they themselves are already predicting chaos this year because of the new imposed pay structure for teachers. At the same time they may have to take on board a national curriculum for the new 16-plus GCSE. So they will be fairly busy.

Meanwhile the new Director-General of the Confederation of British Industry, Mr. John Banham, launched his five year strategy, one prong of which is renewed concentration on education. "Half our young people leave full-time education with no O-level passes or CSE equivalents. On this basis we cannot be expected to compete..." He likes the scheme in Boston, Massachusetts, where employers guarantee a job for every child leaving school with the requisite qualifications and attendance record.

Perhaps it's all the parents' fault. Angela Ince, housewife and journalist writing in The Times, tells us that a recent Gallup poll, after surveying 600 parents, revealed that the majority wanted to help more with homework but felt they lacked the knowledge. But what is it all for?, she asks. "Take mathematics. Only mathematicians really need it; the rest of us are adequately equipped if we can add, subtract, multiply and divide... I couldn't tell you what logarithms are for. Or what they are, yet I spent months of my young life gazing doomily at them". She thinks a lot of children lose interest because they suspect that a lot of what they are taught will never be useful to them afterwards. They start with the natural urge to learn because if they don't learn they don't survive but "round about the age of seven come to regard the most exciting and instinctive thing you can do as a dead bore".

Now you can see my difficulty. I promised you full details of how to educate your apprentices. I have already held you on tenterhooks for

two months waiting for them. Now we are in trouble. The whole system of education is changing. My advice will be out of date before you have read it. Even if you receive any apprentices, it looks as though they will not be able to tell you the past participle of a single Latin verb, let alone Greek. In any case they will arrive dead bored and if they do show any signs of life, it will only be due to relief at their escape from the strife, muddle, tedium and mayhem of the classroom.

So how exactly is Greenkeeper of the Year, 1987 to set about grooming his youngsters for stardom from 2000 AD onwards? Do not expect or offer any straight answers. After all we have been educated ourselves and therefore presumably have got it wrong already. But can we come up with any clues on how to find our way out of the labyrinth without appealing to the experts. I think that the brains which maintained our golf courses in spite of Green Committees, agronomists, salesmen, Captains and, it sometimes has to be said, golf course architects will be able to cope with the new situation in their own way. But there is no harm in going on about it a bit longer.

At least there is a broader base of support than formerly. Training courses in allied subjects, specialised courses in greenkeeping itself, a Greenkeeper Training Committee, City & Guilds examinations, seminars, lectures, conferences and a Sports Turf Research Institute. This started two-week training courses early in its career when it was just The Board of Greenkeeping Research. I still have a certificate dated 1938 to prove it. In those days we took an examination on the last day. One test involved commenting on samples of Lead Arsenate passed round to us in brown paper bags. We studied them carefully and could really find nothing wrong but made up a few bogus answers like 'A bit lumpy!', 'Rather too fine!', 'Stale!', which we passed to R. B. Dawson, the Director, who was himself examining us. With a certain relish, he told us that the proper answer was that a poison like Lead Arsenate should never be passed round in paper bags.

It took about ten seconds for the penny to drop then we proceeded to take him apart for breaking the law in front of us innocents and ignoring the risks to our health and thus the future of greenkeeping. When the protests subsided, he explained that we were wrong again. The substance in the paper bags was flour.

They would call it pupil participation or interactive teaching these days. Call it what you like, he drove the point home more forcefully than by reading out the Poisons Regulations.

A big bonus for the intensive courses at Bingley now is the comprehensive summary of lectures given to each student at the end of his week. This is a reference book he can use for the rest of his life.

On a wider basis, certain City & Guilds examinations are now green-keeping-oriented. The Greenkeeper Training Committee, according to its Administrator, Nick Bissett, wants to improve the quality of training available (*Who doesn't!*) and has approved five colleges in England and Wales which offer City & Guilds Greenkeeping Courses at Phase II level and which can be monitored. He does not say whether the monitoring is to be done by results or inspection. Their new Log Book for trainees contains some 'revolutionary' ideas like attendance at Green Committee Meetings.

"Generally", he says, "one still hears the old argument about training being done for other Clubs".

The approved colleges are at York, Nantwich, Winchester, Lewes and Bridgewater, so they are not chosen on the basis of geographical convenience, as some think. There is nothing east of London or in the Midlands and there are some notable omissions which have first class facilities and proven track records in this field. All very rum!

Scotland, as the home of golf, naturally took the lead in training many years ago, not only in Glasgow, but at the Elmwood College at Cupar in Fife where Mike Taylor is the Head of Department.

The great difficulties of arranging off-course training have always been demand and distance. To provide a demand, too wide an area has to contribute. This may at last be overcome by the centre for the land-based Open Tech. initiative at the Capel Manor Institute, Bullsmoor Lane, Waltham Cross. They are offering several 'distant learning' packages for people working on turfgrass to follow at home. I have seen one on irrigation which I suspect was written by George Shiels. If the rest are as good, they will go a long way to fill a real need, though all the courses are not designed specifically for greenkeepers. Even so, they are planning a package on understanding golf course design which sounds specific enough. It emphasises the need for all trainees to play and understand the game in all its aspects if they are to do their job with the interest, intelligence, and satisfaction which only comes with adequate knowledge.

Outside aids are extremely valuable if the young men can be got to them but there is still much to do on the job. Regular, prepared training periods, pupil interaction, the carrot rather than the stick, patience or persuasion rather than take it or leave it, these will all come naturally to a head greenkeeper, he must certainly agree. But, just to complete the picture, can we help him? I think so.

Ransomes used to make occasional films which served to illustrate general aspects of maintenance or landscape. Perhaps they still do. But now that video cameras and cassettes are commonplace there is no reason why this type of education could not be more specialised and exploited for greenkeeper training.

Bingley could video-tape standard practices; St. Andrews, Wentworth or Sunningdale or, indeed, Sludgecome-on-Ouse, my favourite track, could show us their daily routine or special preparations for championships. Every substantial firm in the country could detail how to use its products-mowers; fertilizers; fungicides; pesticides; aeration; irrigation; mowing tees, fairways, rough, banks, greens; repairs. There is no end to it. And it could all come out of their advertising budget. Academic training like the recognition of plants and trees could also be enhanced in this way. A typical training session might be 20 minutes video, 20 minutes demonstration, 20 minutes with the trainee trying it himself. And finally, even if they slip in the occasional relaxation of a recorded Masters or Open, that would do no harm. That's all part of the game. And the game's the thing!

Next Month:

"On wheels"; "Golf's big love affair"; and other tit-bits. Don't miss them. There is always something new to learn in your favourite publication.

We've done our groundwork. So you can do yours. Faster. And easier.



The Triple M five-bladed model, superb value from around £2,599.00 (+VAT).

Mountfield's new British built, Triple M cylinder mower is specially designed to cut time as well as grass. With three 5 (or 7) bladed cylinders giving a broad 66" cut, the Triple M makes short work of just over 2 acres an hour.

Take off the cylinders and you have your own tow-truck or tractor!

It can be manoeuvred effortlessly round awkward areas. And, with a low centre of gravity, will cut across slopes as easily as the flat. Five forward gears, plus reverse, give a range of speeds up to 6½ m.p.h. So it will cope with a variety of grass and ground conditions.

Maintenance? No problem. It's designed and constructed to make maintenance quick and easy.

Reliable too. The powerful 8 hp Briggs and Stratton engine with electric start, is guaranteed for two years. In short, it's a machine that embodies everything you've ever wanted from a large area mower. And everything you'd expect from Mountfield quality.

Seeing is believing. Our demonstrator will be happy to visit you, and show you the Triple M in action. For a free demonstration or literature, complete the coupon.

To G. D. Mountfield Ltd., Reform Road, Maidenhead, Berks. SL6 8QD. Telephone: (0628) 39161
A Ransomes Sims & Jefferies PLC Company.
 Please send me literature and the name of my nearest dealer.
 I would like a Triple M demonstration.

Name _____
Address _____
Postcode _____ Telephone No. (day) _____

