



Natural use of existing trees to frame the Belfry's 9th green

Where massed conifer planting has taken place, there is little else that can be used as a guide for tree selection. So what can we use for inspiration? At the outset this should come from two sources both related to "association". Association with local character and soil.

When establishing local character we must assess local tree species, their natural habit of growth, their groupings, how they are spaced and how these groups are interrelated. In nature, single stands or monocultures are rare so they should not be seen newly planted on golf courses.

Secondly one must look at the association of soil. All soils and landscape situations have typical plant associations from which one can almost identify the soil types and their pH. The Oak, Hazel and Holly all thrive on heavy clay soils, the Beech, Whitebeam, Wayfaring Tree, Spindle and Blackthorn on chalk hillsides. Pine, Birch and Heather occur typically on the thin acid soils; Field Maple, Hornbeam and Crab occur abundantly on limestone.

That of course is just the beginning. Having established the main species that will provide our medium and long term planting programme, the next

aim is to decide on the shapes, means and overall policy of the planting. Are we trying to connect two belts of woodland at either end of the course, or to develop from this woodland, gradually thinning out the density of trees to create a mixture of parkland and woodland? Is there a water course running through the site which requires its own special treatment or are there extensive vistas which should be retained? The questions are numerous and particular to each site. If the course and its surrounds are relatively bare of trees, local inspiration still requires great care and planning. That should not entail a rash of evergreen plants.

So far we have not mentioned golfing criteria in planting. These have been documented in much more detail in other articles and books and there is not enough room here for a repetition of such criteria. For successful establishment, a knowledge of leaf size, the spread and depth of roots and tree positioning vis à vis the tees, fairways and greens are all critical and must not be overlooked for a successful solution. But if we are to bring back sincerity into some of our golf courses then first an appreciation of the landscape, soil types and local character is essential.

Finally a personal plea. In natural woodland, there is no clear transition between tall woodland trees and the field (ground) layer. The edges favour smaller light-demanding trees and shrubs in an area described by ecologists as the Ecotone, - "mixed communities in the transition area". In these areas, wildlife and plants can thrive.

There are some places on the golf course where such planting is inappropriate - around greens and tees where air circulation would be obstructed and perhaps where poor tee shots land and balls are lost, delaying others on the course. But elsewhere, gradual reduction in height from the main body of woodland to the rough margins of the fairway gives naturalness to the view.

Nobody should damn the use of evergreen trees outright, either in the landscape or on our golf courses. With discretion they can add considerably to our options. In that sense at least they make the job easier. But don't think it is all that easy. The best landscaping schemes were never seen by those who planned them. We have to look fifty to a hundred years ahead. Let's hope we who choose and plant the trees will be remembered kindly.

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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