

# BOOKS FOR GREENKEEPERS AND GREEN COMMITTEES

## Part 3 – Basic Sciences by Eddie Park

'I WOULD like to draw attention to the fact that at most courses the green committee – and, in fact, the greenkeeper – is practically an amateur.' Those words were written over 35 years ago by Lord Brabazon of Tara, a man of stature in the golf world, as is evident by the fact that he gave his name to a famous open amateur event and also the main course at The Belfry.

Harsh words at the time, but to some people there is still a ring of truth in them. I have always found a fascination in the science behind the art of course maintenance – in, other words, the 'why' of it. But this does not seem to interest many greenkeepers.

In the medical world, the budding doctor is not allowed anywhere near a patient until he is proficient in anatomy, physiology, biochemistry and all the other basic medical sciences. The intention is that he will be better able to diagnose the abnormal (because he knows all about the normal) and predict the future effects of treatment.

Contrast this with greenkeeping, which has tended to be obsessed with the

'how' of it – the methods and techniques.

Recently, at excellent conferences held by all three of the old greenkeepers associations, there were signs of a welcome change in attitudes. Only when that core of science is widespread in course maintenance will the charge of 'amateur' be dropped for good.

Basic knowledge stems from what used to be called nature study – mainly observations of the plant and animal world. I recently came across a book called *The Naturalist In Britain* (1976) by D.E. Allen, which traces the growth of knowledge about the natural world, a fairly recent phenomenon with most of the work being done by amateurs over the last two centuries.

### Earlier years

In the earlier years, much of the work was simply identifying and collecting whichever specimens the individual found of personal interest – obviously, plants and animals, but also fossils, rocks, insects, butterflies, birds, etc.

An early book in my collection

is *The Field Naturalist's Handbook* (1893) by the Rev. J.G. Wood, typical of its era and showing the immense variety of these organisms already catalogued and grouped under habitats, but it took some time for the concept of communities and the reason for their existence to take shape.

Nevertheless, as early as 1785, a farmer called William Marshall was writing: 'Soils will ever find, in process of time, their proper produce,' perhaps the earliest evidence of an understanding of that most important subject for greenkeepers – plant ecology.

The word 'ecology' has many definitions, but the one I like best is: 'The study of the all-togetherness of everything.'

Sir Arthur Tansley, one of the founding fathers of the modern naturalist movement in this country, wrote *Our Heritage Of Wild Nature* (1946), which predicted most of our present troubles, e.g. the destruction of the countryside by agriculture, the inevitable economic disaster that would follow widespread high productivity in farming, the unpleasant effects of coniferisation and the need for education in nature for those who work in it.

In this latter connection, he pointed out the fact that education should concentrate more on 'things' rather than 'subjects.' What he meant by that is the need to look at any subject in an 'all-together' way, realising that, in nature, everything really is linked together.

I believe it is our failure in this respect that has led to the

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## Basic sciences by Eddie Park - Continued...

present unsatisfactory situations both in agriculture and golf course maintenance. There has been too much emphasis on narrow subjects and opposing theories and too little on the inter-relationships between all living organisms.

Yet, all through this past critical 40 years, the naturalists have been pointing the way ahead. A series of books, the *New Naturalist Series*, streamed forth, over 50 of them, all with the general intention of bringing together subjects such as botany and geography (rather boring on their own, but interesting if linked with the effects of man) and all produced under an enlightened editorial board by top-class writers.

The bad news is that many of them are now out of print. The good news is that many are back in circulation in old-book shops at low prices.

### Seaside holiday

An early experience for me was buying *Wild Flowers* (1954) by Gilmour and Walters during a wet seaside holiday and being captivated by its easily understood ramble through the history and science of practical field botany, together with a simple introduction to plant ecology.

Find one somewhere and enjoy it yourself and try to follow it with *British Plant Life* (1953) by W.B. Turrill.

The relationship of geography to these subjects and an introduction to conservation are well explored by L. Dudley Stamp in books such as *Britain's Structure And Scenery, Man And The Land, The Common Lands Of England And Wales* and *Nature Conservation In Britain*.

The author held a chair of social geography at London University and much of his work was devoted to the actions of man on the countryside, including the scientific basis for conservation. The historical aspect of these subjects is

fascinating in its own right, but for those who now want to know how to avoid the natural disasters with which we are surrounded, it is essential reading.

You may be wondering if this isn't a roundabout way of increasing your knowledge of the science behind greenkeeping. My experience, and I gather that of others, is that this kind of background reading makes it much easier to understand the sciences involved when you come to them.

Other books that explore related subjects in an interesting way are *The Common Ground* (1980) by Richard Mabey, *Farming And Wildlife* (1981) by Kenneth Mellanby and the provocative *Theft Of The Countryside* (1982) by Marion Shoard.

I have been greatly impressed by the experience at my course with help received from Yorkshire naturalists, initially to stem the tide of neglected scrub invasion, and also by their wealth of botanical knowledge, shedding new light on greenkeeping procedures.

So, to start on some of the basic sciences themselves. Those responsible for the maintenance of golf courses find considerable value in learning as much as possible about these subjects and it does not matter where you start.

Most public libraries have a fair selection of modern books, but I find many of them either too superficial or far too complicated. Fortunately, some of the best books were published between 1947-60 and, again, these are now to be found in old-book shops at reasonable prices.

It seems logical to start with climate - the weather, which we all talk about so much (and use too often as a convenient excuse for poor conditions), but not so much weather forecasting as weather patterns. We all have a poor memory for weather in the past and it comes as a shock

when we have a wet autumn or a dry spring or whatever. The truth is that our weather is remarkably consistent over the medium to long term.

Locally, it may do something extreme, but it always pays its debts and averages out. Try to find a little book called *This Weather Of Ours* (1946) by Arnold B. Tinn, which puts this very much in perspective.

### Different sides

Geography is another subject with many different sides and it is well worth taking a careful look at the similarities and differences between areas. A series called *The Study Map Note Books* by Allan Murray or *Physical Geography* by R.K. Gresswell are both helpful.

No longer should we be prepared to accept that data from the USA can be just transplanted bodily to the UK or even that conditions in the north-west of Britain are identical to the south-east.

I have never been able to whip up much enthusiasm for geology and judging from the number of books on the subject going cheaply in the shops, I'm not alone!

However, it is a good idea to have some knowledge of what is under the site in which you are involved and its history. *Geology And Scenery* (1938 and reprinted many times) by A.E. Trueman is an old favourite that describes the geology of most areas of Britain and relates it to the scenery we can see. A very helpful book for those who don't want to get too involved in the subject.

I hope I have kindled an interest in finding out about the widest possible nature scene, for only then can the limitations of man's ability to control everything begin to be appreciated.

Soil science, botany and more plant ecology to follow next time.