



JIM ARTHUR
argues the case
for mowable
contours for
sensible
maintenance

The Right Approach

Browsing through some articles I had written twenty odd years ago, in search of some half-forgotten statistics, I came across one pleading for more attention to be paid to improving approaches, specifically to create better conditions for the pitch and run up game. Reading only recently an American eulogy, for Americans, about super new courses they should play in Britain, all American designed of course, where lavish praise was heaped upon the architects (mostly top US pro's) for their penal protection of the greens by water and bunkers 'so that the green has to be directly attacked', their opposed attitude to our traditional game – our's played mostly along the ground, their's mainly in the air – was sharply brought home to me. This eulogy was incidentally somewhat flawed by the praise lavished on some courses in receivership and others abandoned and uncompleted. One sympathises with their unwary readers who travel many miles in high hopes of a memorable round, to be greeted by half-built greens or at best a course boasting a Portakabin as a clubhouse, with all the evidence of lavish plans having had to be abandoned in favour of a holding operation, hoping to survive until the end of the recession – perhaps in ten years time!

One of the advantages of a principle to which I have adhered all my professional life, viz 'write it down for the record', emerges in old age – one cannot be accused of having as convenient a memory as displayed in 'Gigi' by Maurice Chevalier – "Ah yes, I remember it well!"

I was stimulated to go back in history by the comments of a young head greenkeeper at a recent seminar on, inter alia, better winter playing conditions, to the effect that it was all very well having good-draining, all-weather greens, but what if the course was rendered unplayable by waterlogged or flooded surrounds and approaches.

No one is suggesting that we build the surrounds on stone carpets, as we virtually invariably build greens today, but certainly even two decades ago I was pleading with all who would listen, to stop digging holes in clay into which shallow crater greens were built on stone carpets. Often, as in one well known course on Midlands clay, the drainage from such greens was taken to a small sump (in some of the stickiest clay you have ever seen) a few yards in front of the green and dead centrally sited – creating a lovely bulls-eye bog in a critically important area.

There are many ways of improv-

ing conditions around the green to avoid this waterlogging. Clearly, surrounds must where necessary be drained, usually by intercept (cut-off) drainage and must be carefully constructed with surface flow in mind. There is nothing new in this. James Braid at the turn of the century solved this shedding problem by constructing shallow valleys or swales (additional drainage was often not needed) to collect and divert surface flow from slopes above greens.

Assuming that surface water has somewhere to go if it can be persuaded to drain into the soil, there is much to be said for deep aeration of surrounds, especially of areas compacted by walk-off wear to the next tee. Needless to say, if you are thinking of Vertidrainning, then find out where the pop-up pipes run – especially in older systems where installation was all too shallow as no one catered for aeration from the surface a foot deep. The main risk is of course the supply line to the hydrant box off the main, and from the box to the horse shoe ring round the green.

The main area for improvement in both fairly new and old courses is the actual approach – best defined as an area the width of the entrance

to the green and at least 20 m deep. Not only should this be regularly, deeply and intensively aerated (after all, the entire traffic on the course converges on this vitally important area) but it demands, and benefits from, exactly the same kind of treatment as the putting surface itself. The most important of these is regular mowing with a triplex, collecting the cuttings. Nothing improves turf more – nor more quickly. Turf density improves, especially with allied treatment, but also tractors and gang mowers are kept well away, whereas, too often, in the not too distant past before the advent of mounted gangs, tractors and trailed gangs passed and re-passed over the same area to pick up missed sections, with inevitable damage.

Approaches and surrounds should be mown at a greater height than greens of course but close enough to make it possible to putt with confidence from well off the actual putting surface, hazards permitting. Nothing to my mind looks more alien than the concept (imported again from America) of a wall of grass around the green which, if a ball pitches up against it, leaves it virtually unplayable. This is supposed to produce better conditions for chipping, but I remember vividly

one Surrey club with a constantly changing green committee, who demanded that their greenkeepers should mow surrounds to one inch height – 'to stop the balls rolling off the putting surface into greenside bunkers'. My advice to erect a six inch wall of wire netting as likely to be more efficient was not well received, but I had enclosed my resignation with my report on the grounds that the club could waste its money if it wanted to, but I reserved the right not to waste my time.

In the bad early days of irrigation in the late sixties and early seventies pop-up systems covered the greens only and indeed in many badly designed three head systems, even failed to do that. This meant rock-hard patchy approaches, giving unpredictable bounces, so an extra head was installed – operating with the green. The nett result was invariably a bog – especially if fixed, half-circle heads were installed round the sides and back of greens and a full circle one at the front. One such installation, much criticised by me, was defended by the installing firm as being specifically what the members wanted, lush approaches on which they could stop the ball! Words (didn't) fail me!

Needless to say, approaches, being inherently less well drained, need totally independent control and much less water, while surrounds should never be covered by full circle greenside heads but by periodic, tediously laborious adjustment from part to full circle for limited periods, and back again.

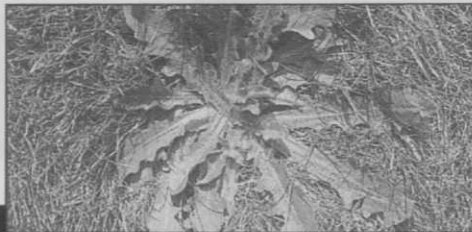
My advice is invariably not to apply any fertiliser to surrounds or approaches, even if the cuttings are removed in the box (and 'fertility' marginally reduced thereby). Even the worst heretics chasing colour and confusing it with quality do not expect lush green surrounds. In a few years the native grasses will dominate under such austere management. Many a time have I said on my first visit to a course "when we can get the greens half as good as your ('unfed and unwatered') surrounds we shall be winning the battle."

I do not claim to have invented the concept of better approaches to favour more predictable pitching and run up, even though I was banging on that drum in the late forties. After all, the concept of a 'fore green' was the cornerstone of many great architects such as Alister MacKenzie and Mackenzie Ross in the twenties and thirties – and is still to be found on many of their continental masterpieces.

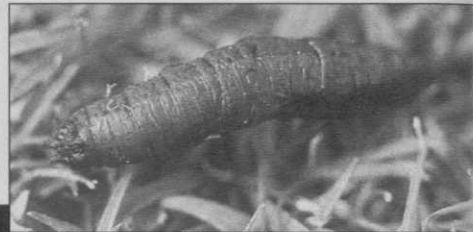
It may be of academic ➔ 8



Chafer grub



Cat's-ear



Leatherjackets

PESTICIDES

Misgivings, misconceptions and madness

The Right Approach

7 interest to those in charge of established courses, but it may hopefully fall on sympathetic ears if I plead for far more consideration to be given by architects to those clobbered with looking after impossible contours, envisaged on drawing boards. We need gentle mowable contours for sensible maintenance, not walls of death. My pet hate is the elevated green perched like Ayers Rock on a flat terrain, with a short steep approach, and equally steep surrounds. A ball pitching onto such a steep slope can and usually does go anywhere except onto the green. Yet you still see them being built, often because it takes money to build up a gradual slope – and flair to design in such a way as to avoid the problem.

In passing, why do we tolerate such excrescences as multi-plateau greens, severe slopes and hollows, steep cross-falls and similar gimmicks which not only make putting a lottery but greenkeeping impossible. There is nothing wrong with building fairly uniformly gently sloping (large) greens which will soon develop their own less obvious borrows and are just as good a test of putting skill – as opposed to chance – and so much easier on which to produce perfect putting conditions all year round. With these comic greens, ridges get scalped, hollows become lush and soft, grass species vary as water and fertiliser shed off slopes into hollows, pin placements are minimised and wear increased. Above all, that all-important uniformity of appearance as well as putting surface is lost. Architects, please accept that you do not have to be eccentric to be acclaimed, though judging by a few American eccentrics it helps to be insane to produce such horrors, or at least to have a well developed Oedipus complex.

THERE IS SO MUCH written about pesticides these days that not a month goes by without their mention in trade magazines. Changes in the law relating to their use over the last 20 years have made the subject one very large bone of contention. I believe that the amount of commentary seen is largely due to the fact that users, suppliers, manufacturers and regulatory bodies are operating without benefit of a well-defined, co-ordinated plan, notwithstanding that all parties involved know the ultimate objectives in pesticide control: "Consideration must be given as to whether it is necessary to use a pesticide at all in a given situation and, if so, the product posing the least risk to humans, animals and the environment must be selected." So says the UK Pesticide Guide referring to COSHH, which came into force in the UK on 1 October 1989.

As directives go, I don't think we could be any clearer. As to the how and when, who decides? Without doubt, there are those with misgivings about it all – not least the GCSAA, whom I believe operate under constraints similar to the above. They have commissioned a study of the medical records of deceased superintendents to try to discover any possible link between the use of pesticides and the cause of death. This is being done, I don't doubt, to help expedite the chemical review process. Another clear intention comes across: if they can prove that the chemicals in use are safe, then they wish to be allowed to get on with their job!

Having heard Professor Noel Jackson speak about turf diseases in the USA at this year's BIGGA education conference, the above move is hardly surprising. Two things he mentioned would raise misgivings with most – namely that a disease called pithium blight can wipe out whole greens virtually overnight, and that in the USA, 'if you lose your greens, you lose your job.' Professor Jackson also pointed out that no-one is safe, since diseases are likely to become as international as the players that play the game of golf. I personally am not prone to panic, but I do keep my locker and desk very tidy these days!

Further misgivings relate to the trade. These can be illustrated by looking at what has been written on the subject of worm-killing this year. The debate

was started by the excellent Jim Arthur, and followed by Kerran Daly who, amongst other things, described the unpleasant and potentially harmful practices associated with lead arsenate. Gordon Irving has subsequently contributed sound common sense in suggesting that it is better to use an effective product once under controlled conditions than one with reduced longevity many times. If I were involved in the supply of vermicides at the present time I would most definitely be rubbing my hands, for having the opportunity to sell ten times as much product to achieve the same result is not to be sniffed at. That is not to say that I believe the trade to be either callous or uncaring, but a professional salesman can do no more than make the most of the situation.

Perhaps my biggest misgiving would revolve around the old adage, 'ignorance is bliss'. Recently I read a front-page report in a trade magazine entitled 'Fusarium attacks human'. I thought at first I had picked up the wrong periodical, and that if I read on, I would find out where Elvis was this week, or if any more aeroplanes had crashed on the moon. But no, this was a genuine, if extremely isolated case. How much more do we still not know, not only about the chemicals we use but about what we are trying to control. Manufacturers and regulatory bodies alike need not write in to say that everything possible is being done – if this was the case, people would live forever and it would only rain at night. I may be accused of cynicism, but the day I read a pesticide label that states 'This product affects only its specific target; it does not affect micro-organisms or the eco-balance of any system, and if you fell into a vat of it, you would emerge smelling of roses' – then, I would feel fairly confident about using the product.

In all seriousness, I am not decrying any efforts in the field of research, but I believe we can never do too much. Anything we can do to accelerate the process of evolving highly safe, highly effective and thoroughly tested products must be seen as worthwhile. Whether it involves money for development,