

The greens were cut once a week, they had a fence round them to keep the cattle off and the annual maintenance budget was £10. The greenkeeper's wages were less than 50p a week and his equipment included a horse. Such was the lot of a greenkeeper when Bedale Golf Club was formed 100 years ago. John Walker, a past captain and vice-president of the Yorkshire club, sifts through a hundred years of committee minutes to see how the life and work of the greenkeeper has changed.

What a greenkeeper could expect 100 years ago:

Ten bob a week and a horse...

In looking back at greenkeeping practices it should be borne in mind that a parkland golf course 100 years ago was far removed from the present manicured masterpiece. Indeed, it was basic in the extreme, with tees identified by markers on fairways, which were themselves cut to the height of today's semi rough, whilst greens were cut probably once a week, or less. As land was primarily for agriculture purposes, golf was mainly undertaken during the winter months. However, the speedy construction of a golf course is highlighted in Bedale's case by the fact that a general meeting was held on November 20 1894 with the purpose of forming a golf club, and an exhibition match was played on December 6 between the two greenkeeper/professionals from Richmond and Studley Royal Golf Clubs.

It is clear from the records that the greens were fenced to protect them from cattle, and the cost for this work in 1913 was £14/18/11 (£14.85) for nine greens, with £2 for the flags!

For the period between 1895 and 1915, the cost of maintenance for the course never exceeded £10 per annum, and this included cutting and rolling greens. It would appear that the fairways were cut by the tenant farmer. After 1915 the course declined, and there are no records until 1919, when it was decided to reform it in April.

A price of £1/1/0 (£1.05) for preparing nine tees was accepted from JH Raper, the Hornby Castle Golf Club groundsman. In 1919 it was necessary to fence the greens again, and wood and wire were given for this work, together with ammunition boxes for sand on the tees. The fairways, during this period, and indeed for many years to come, were cut by the tenant farmer three times a year, at a cost of £17, but who undertook the cutting of the greens is unrecorded, it must be assumed that a groundsman was used. In 1921, the course moved to adjoining land and in March the committee agreed the price for the making of seven greens and eight tees at £17/10/0 (£17.50).

They also agreed to pay 6/- (30p) for putting down moles, and £2 for cutting hedges. In addition to all this it was decided to purchase a stone roller for 30/- (£1.50p) for rolling the greens. J Myers was appointed groundsman in 1921 at a wage of 10/- (50p) per week, and this was the rate paid for groundsmen for many years. Complaints about the length of the grass on the fairways were common, which was not surprising when one considers the infrequency of cutting. The condition of the greens were subject to a request by the club to the landlord for

permission to use sand from the rabbit warren on the course to mix with the basic slag for dressing the greens. Half a ton of basic slag was purchased to spread on rough patches. This year also saw the purchase of a greens cutter for a price of £5/7/6 (£5.35). The accounts for the end of 1922 detail the cost of grass-cutting at £1/12/6 (£1.63), the groundsman's wage at £26/10- (£26.50) and worm killer at 5/- (25p).

By 1923, a decision was taken to hire "Sir William Gray's cutters" three or four times a year, so obviously the groundsman was now responsible for this work, as well as the greens. The rent of the course this year was increased from £3 to £5 per annum.

'The committee got rid of the horse in the winter when it was not needed'

1924 saw the appointment of a new groundsman at a wage of 5/- for each cutting of all the greens, and 3/- (15p) for rolling. This price was also to include the filling of the sand boxes. By 1925, the groundsman was instructed to take responsibility to cut the fairways, and to this end a grass cutter was purchased for £20, together with a horse! The committee got rid of the horse in the winter when it was not needed.

A 14in Pennsylvania roller mower was purchased this year, so the groundsman now had at least two major pieces of equipment. An inspection of the grass cutters by Messrs Shanks & Son identified £5 worth of repairs

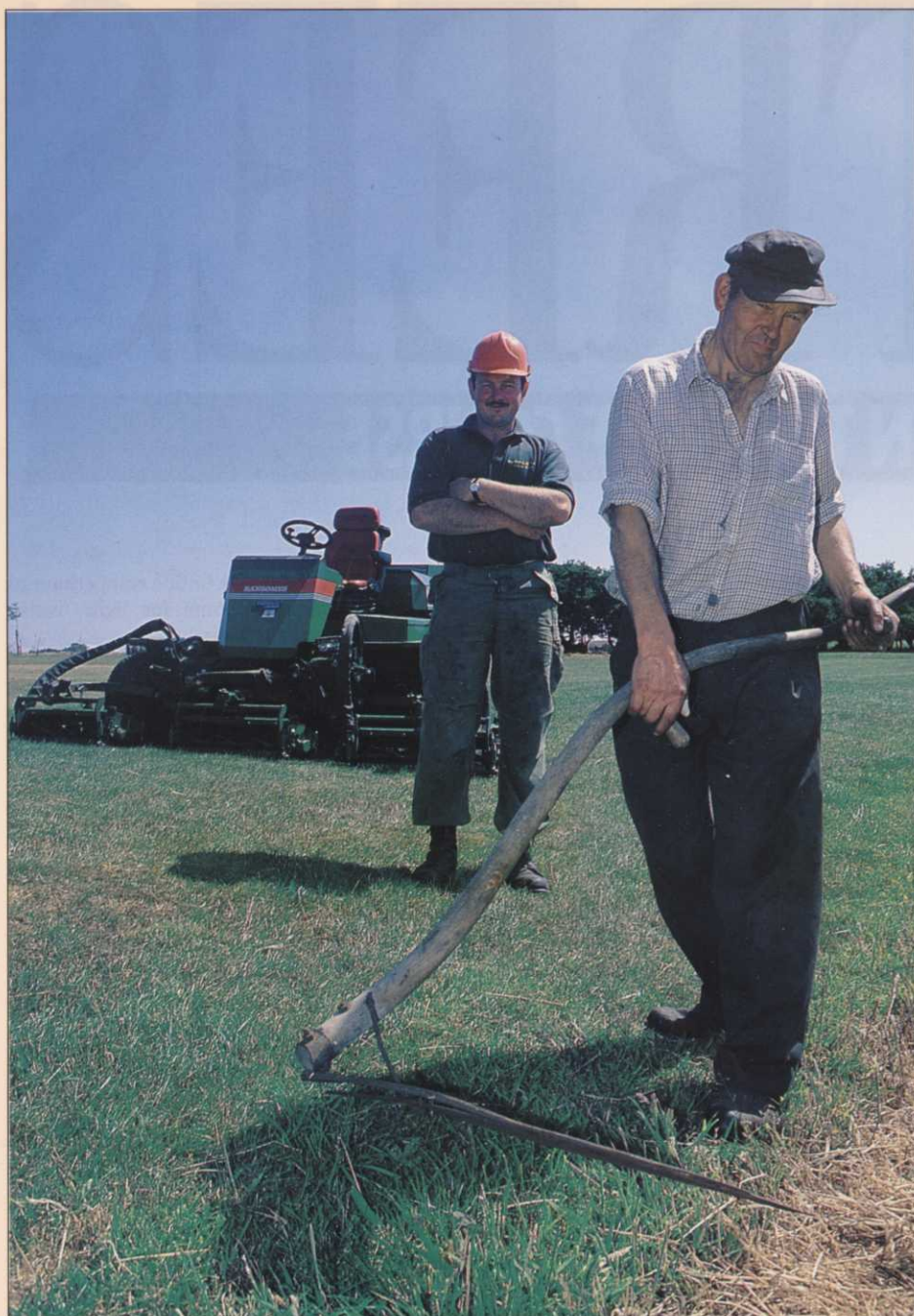
needed, and this was reluctantly approved at the AGM.

The year 1928 saw the appointment of JH Raper as groundsman/professional, who was to remain at Bedale for about 30 years. His initial wage in 1928 was £1 per week.

One of Raper's early tasks was to convince the committee to convert the fairway single cutter to a triple unit at a cost of £40. This obviously reduced the fairway cutting time, but the cutters were still horse-drawn! In 1932, the course moved to a new site some way from the existing, and Raper not only designed the new course, but was responsible for obtaining labour and supervising the construction. In consideration for which the committee purchased a bicycle for him to get between the two courses during the transition and on conclusion paid him an honorarium of £10. In 1933 Raper was asked to attend a sale and bid for a secondhand Atco cutter. Committee permission was given to bid up to £11 for the machine, the price to include commission and other charges.

Raper requested the committee to lay down his duties, which they did as follows: "The professional was expected to keep the course in the same pleasing condition which the committee appreciate as he had done in the past, and endeavour to carry out to the satisfaction of the greens committee any directions that they may find it necessary to give him." Clear, concise, and no doubt a model for many of our course manager/head greenkeepers even today! The committee in 1934, following a request from Raper, agreed to pay his National Health Insurance of 1/6 (7.5p) per week, and his wage was increased to £1/6/6 (£1.30).

The question of purchasing a vehicle to pull the fairway cutter had been considered and



A cut above: George Holland with one of Bedale's original scythes unearthed during a clearout. Looking on is Neil Austwick, with the course's more up to date means of keeping the place in trim

rejected previously, for reasons of cost, but in 1935 Bedale Garage offered to sell them a secondhand car for £10. This was agreed by the committee after running costs had been explored, as it would allow Raper to complete the job in a shorter time, allowing him more time for other work! However, before the purchase was finally agreed, the secretary was instructed to write to the makers of the cutters to check the speed that they could be pulled.

The club showed their generosity to Raper in 1937 by making him a gift of £5 so that he could go on holiday, however, the secretary was told to inform him that he was not to expect an annual present! In 1939, a new motor mower for the greens was purchased, at a cost of £23/10/0 (£23.50).

During the whole of the war period, the question of spares machinery was uppermost in the greens committee and Raper's mind, and that was not helped by the fact that the car used for towing the cutters was a Citroen, for which no spares were available. In addition to all this, Raper was not only expected to carry out his normal greenkeeper's work, but

to keep the clubhouse clean and take the competition entrance fees.

By 1946, Raper had got the committee to agree to the appointment of a groundsman, on the basis of £3/10/0 (£3.50) per week for 31 weeks, and £2/10/0 (£2.50) for the remaining 21 weeks over the winter. This staffing situation did not last long, for by 1951 the membership had declined to 62, and it was decided to dispense with the services of the groundsman, so Raper found himself back carrying out all work with the volunteer help of the members.

The greens were causing a problem in 1948, and worming them was decided with the purchase of 2cwt of Fison's Special Worm Killer, at £2 per cwt. Although the original Citroen car had been dispensed with in 1948, further secondhand cars were used to tow the fairway cutters. Motor mowers for greens had caused problems, but the committee felt unable to purchase a new one with the problems of the falling membership, and it was not until 1957 that a 20in Ransomes Green Cutter was purchased for £121.

The tractor situation was again causing a problem, for the car had been replaced by a tractor, although no records are available, but in 1958 a 1953 Ferguson tractor was purchased for £255, subject to a complete overhaul, a new near-side tyre, and a three months' guarantee! It was decided to keep the old tractor, so for a period Bedale Golf Club owned two tractors. By 1958, a further greenkeeper was appointed and as this was the year of Raper's retirement he was obviously the head man, and for most of his time, the only man, although references to additional temporary help are frequently made. The salary paid was not very great for the greenkeeper, Hodgson, decided that he would be better off during the winter with unemployment benefit. The committee felt he was a good man, and they should keep him, they eventually agreed a wage of £3/10/0 (£3.50) per week.

In 1960, it was decided to introduce water to the course, and various systems were tried. Eventually a Rain King sprinkler was decided, with 400 yds of large bore tubing. The costs are not detailed, but the larger pump cost £85, a smaller one having proved unsatisfactory.

In 1967, the course moved finally to its present location, although additional land amounting to 30 acres was subsequently purchased in 1989. The development of the new course, in 1957, was carried out mainly by the members, as the greenkeeping staff had to maintain the existing course, and could only be spared occasionally. However, this was not the case when the additional 30 acres were developed by golf architects Hawtrees who produced a scheme which also re-organised the existing course at the same time. Whilst the overall contract work was supervised by the architect, day-to-day supervision was carried out by the head greenkeeper/course manager, Garry Munro, a valuable experience for a newly appointed member of staff in 1989. The machinery used on the course since 1967 has shown many increases over the years, as indeed has staff, from one to three to the present day – course manager, first and second greenkeepers, and two staff on agricultural wages.

Greenkeeping machinery in 1994 comprises: For the greens – Toro GM 3000D, Jacobsen Greens King with scarifying units and three Ransomes Auto-certex; for the tees, aprons and approaches – Jacobsen Tri-King (Diesel); for the fairways – Beaver LM 508 gangs (hydraulic); rough and semi – Ransomes MK10 and Mk12; tractors – Ford 39/30 with loader and case International 484; compact tractors – Ford 12/10 and Kubota 15/50 with mounted mower; sundries – 1 Flymo, 1 strimmer, 2 rotary mowers, Hardi BL 200 Sprayer; aeration equipment – Coremaster for hollow coring, Sisis Greens Slitter, and Sisis Fairway Slitter; Scarifying – Sisis twin-headed scarifier, Wessex 5ft Littermiser; Irrigation – Toro system with 3000 controller, Toro 655 heads (700 on new tees).

In the '70s and '80s all servicing work was carried out by outside contractors at costs of up to £8,000, but now all this work is carried out in-house with the exception of grinding which will also be carried out in-house in the future.

All this is far removed from 1894, but it is fair to remind readers of the state of the course then.