

Howard Swan, President of the British and International Golf Course Architects (BIGCA), extols the virtues of teamwork when it comes to producing the successful golf course.

EQUAL partners

When the R&A, in 1987 published its market research document 'The Demand for Golf' we all thought the good times had come! Just the 700 more golf courses by the end of the '90s, increasing our national stock by a third. And so it came to pass that we saw a rush of blood to the head of many, a climbing on the bandwagon, a clamour to make a quick buck. Developers arrived, with or without adequate cash or funding, banks were prepared to back them. Business plans were presented, most of them highly optimistic.

People believed them. The EU Agricultural policy, thought set aside, encouraged farmers to give up their known business and turn to recreation. Golf seemed a good bet, especially to those who played it at their local club.

The boom came...
No overall strategy...
No overall direction...
Where would golf courses be?

What type of course should they be?... Surely not the ubiquitous championship course! Yes, why not, it sounded good! Was there really the demand in the locality? Where would the players come from? Was it sufficient to suggest that one 18-hole course needed a population around it of 20,000?

It seemed to be... Golf courses sprang up all over the place. The planners were inundated with applications for permission to develop golf courses. They could hardly cope. Permissions were granted on the flimsiest of information.

Those in the golf industry rubbed their hands together. Architects, contractors, irrigation experts came out of the woodwork. It would be fair to say some cowboys appeared, and reappeared to take advantage of and from the boom. To meet the supply, new recruits to the greenkeeping profession were needed in bigish numbers. Three or four years intensive activity on all fronts.

Inevitably standards fell....

Design, construction were not alone. Financial integrity seemed missing on many occasions. Too many times were projects architect led, without adequate client briefs. Too many who designed courses were not professional architects. The results soon showed!

Too many times did too much money get spent. Budgets were exceeded, if there were budgets in the first place. Financial disasters loomed. With too high an expectation of returns, and too high gearing levels, there was little chance to service capital let alone interest.

Too many times did greenkeepers have to pick up the remains.

The economy turned, recession arrived, with many golfing bankruptcies. There is much truth in the idiom that the third owner gets the best deal! So, some ten years later we have found this out.

However, hopefully we've learned

much from the roller coaster ride of the late eighties and early '90s, and the market is now better for it. We are all the more discerning from the experience, and we are all the more appreciative of the need to work together as a cohesive team.

We are all the better that there are now considerably less new courses being built and the concentration of many is on the existing stock, old and relatively new, and how these can be improved, renovated, restored to meet modern day demands and expectations.

However there remain new courses to be designed and built if the Henley Futures report is to be believed - another 300 or so.

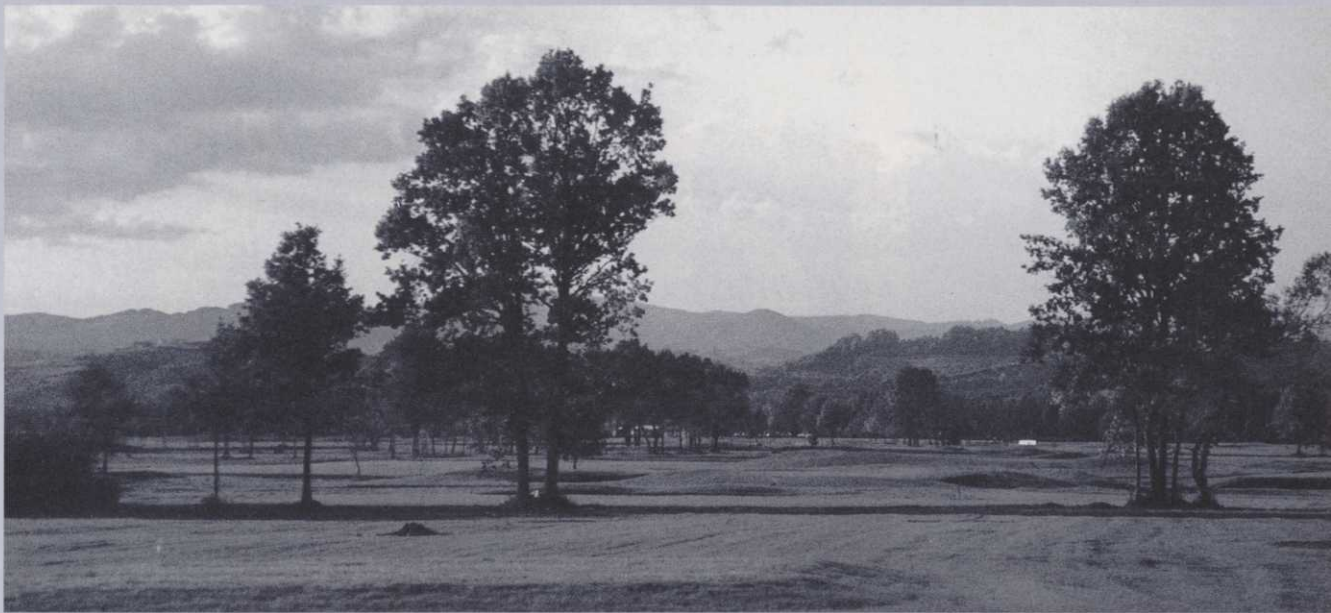
If that is to happen it is vitally important that these courses are designed correctly, properly, professionally by suitably educated and experienced golf course architects, no matter where they might be, or to what scale they might be required. Putting architectural work in the hands of those unqualified is a recipe, almost without exception, for disaster.

The record of the past ten years supports such a view. Designs need to be properly planned and documented after sites have been thoroughly investigated, technically as well as commercially. Working drawings need to be prepared golf courses are no longer designed on the back of a cigarette packet! - and specifications and Bills of Quantities or schedules of work made up to define simply and clearly the quality and extent of work envisaged in the project. This can then be priced, on a competitive basis by experienced and reliable contractors who are committed to make an honest attempt at adhering to such specifications. Not all, sadly, have done, or do. From this, a developer can have a good grasp of his cost outlays, and his funding programme.

Every new course needs growing in. Establishment is not a task to be

The 5th green at Royal Wimbledon and its restored bunkering is a fine example of a successful partnership between architect and greenkeeper, resulting in outstanding work.





On Croatia's first golf course, the grow-in is in the hands of an experienced English Greenkeeper, directing local labour in the establishment programme. Roger Bott has worked closely with the design team in the phases of drainage, irrigation and seeding of the championship standard course near Zagreb, whilst bringing the range, academy and 9-hole family course to play earlier in the year.

taken lightly or quickly. Anyone, or anything in its infancy needs tender loving care... enter the greenkeeper.

The greenkeeper is, perhaps, the most vital part of that team in the development.

But the entrance made by the greenkeeper is often far far too late. He should be there at the beginning or at least close to the beginning of any development, any construction. He is the man, or woman, who can be, and should be the eyes and ears of the golf course architect, and of his employer, the developer.

If anyone is to see, and ensure that the project is built correctly and properly on a day to day basis, it is the greenkeeper. He will, after all, inherit the baby and nurture it through its childhood towards maturity. It is in his direct interests to make sure that all is done well. Rarely can a golf course architect be on any particular project every day. Certainly weekly, if not twice weekly at certain delicate parts of the construction - shaping, drainage, rootzone placement, preparation and seeding - and certainly not once in a blue moon. But the dependence upon the greenkeeper is immense and the relationship vital.

It's little good the greenkeeper arriving where the final stages of seeding are being undertaken, or worse still (but often) after seeding. Any golf course architect, professional and worth his salt, will have advised his client that the early arrival of an experienced and competent greenkeeper is essential and is in everyone's best interests. He needs to see what is going on under the surface as well as on top of it. After all, there is far more below than above in the design and construction of a golf course.

Being there and working with the architect closely and with initial respect and understanding is the absolute requirement.

The situation is even more important in the increasingly active renova-

tion and improvement of existing golf courses. Every course, no matter how old, how young, needs to evolve and grow towards maturity. Its fabric needs constant inspection, evaluation, appraisal, and measures taken on a sensible, rational, programmed basis for improvement.

Its fabric sometimes needs renewal if and when it wears out and cannot withstand the demands and pressures of today, let alone tomorrow.

Golf clubs need to recognise this, and plan for it. Such planning needs to be in the hands of professionals not amateurs.

Constitutions. A few more clubs seem to be going in that direction.

Historically of course, and frustratingly for both greenkeeper and the architectural profession changes to golf courses have been undertaken on something of a random fashion, often by the Captain or Secretary, or Green Committee Chairman in his or her year(s) of tenure of office; a result, without doubt, of the 'democratic' system in membership clubs. We've all heard of classic cases of tees, and particularly bunkers going in one year, on the desire of a Captain or Chairman of Green, and the next

year, renovation, restoration, whatever it is called, the right results are achieved. Any programme of improvement should be set out fully at the beginning, evaluated by the officers of the club, and priorities set by them. The architect should derive the programme after a comprehensive analysis, in which the greenkeeper should have a major contribution. The programme needs to be over a 5-7 year term, the length being directly related to the resources, material, machinery, labour and financial, available.

The cloth needs to be cut to suit the purse.

Decisions need to be taken as to whether the work programme can be carried out entirely in-house or whether, for the larger works external assistance should be brought in.

Bunker work is sensitive, delicate and needs to be taken slowly and is best in the province of the greenkeepers. Tees and greens work, may be suited to experienced contractors under direction and supervision.

The contribution of the greenkeeper to this programme should not be underestimated. Nor should his relationship with the architect. Both are essential for success.

Working together in a professional partnership can be and should be fun! We, both professions, have an excellent opportunity to make it so, together.

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It is reassuring to find that more clubs are embodying in their Constitutions and Rules the requirement of a golf course maintenance policy which hopefully is written by the greenkeeper for his colleagues on the Green Committee. It should clearly state the objectives of the policy and strategy and programme adopted to maintain the golf course.

More clubs seem to be taking the same stance towards course improvements, alterations and upgradings.

Let us hope that the requirement to put such measures in the hands of a professional golf course architect, competent and experienced is also becoming written in such

year taken out by the next incumbent: Maybe something to do with each hitting the ball in a different way. Hookers don't like bunkers to the left, slicers not to the right!

It's about time the system bucked this staccato process and each and every golf club had development committees, taking advice from professional golf course architects, and letting their professional greenkeepers execute the work to proper, and sustainable standards.

The biggest asset at most golf clubs is the course. It has a heritage also. It needs to be treated rationally, consistently and delicately to get the best out of it, and to ensure through revi-

Howard Swan operates his design practice from Essex, and works internationally, presently in nine countries. His work on restoring some of the United Kingdom's oldest courses is well noted. He is presently President of The British Institute of Golf Course Architects.

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