

**Sandy McDivot, Head Greenkeeper at Sludgecombe
 Pay and Play recalls some of the comments directed
 at greenkeepers over the years...**

Often Over

Many years ago when I was a mere school leaver, I came to that inescapable situation where employment was required. Like many school leavers at the time it slowly dawned upon me that the vocations that I was pursuing were not often available to an acne ridden, streak of unmentionable liquid substance, that made Rodney Trotter look positively dynamic. Formula One motor racing driver, golf pro who could not play golf or one of those people that rub oil into the page three models before a photo shoot. These were all careers that I had informed my career adviser to

which I was well suited but he suggested I try being a waiter in the short term until one of the above jobs came my way. The job of waiter, like other dregs of the employment world is a job that involves constantly being nice to members of the public. This is a quality that did not come naturally to me and so after two years of teeth grinding and tongue biting I mutually agreed with my employer to terminate my employment so as to avoid possible physical injury.

I then found myself in the more fulfilling occupation of Greenkeeper. To my slight disappointment, however, I discovered that the greenkeeping industry also involves the task of dealing with members of the public. This is

made doubly difficult for us by the fact that our

members of the public are also members of a golf club. As we are all aware, golf club membership brings with it total wisdom in all matters relating to golf course management but also appears to give them certain rights that are not bestowed upon others that make up the general populace. These rights include being allowed without hindrance, to tell all golf club staff of their inherent short comings and to advise accordingly. It also gives them the right to exhume worn

out jokes at will and to receive ribald laughter from those unfortunate members of staff within earshot.

So we greenkeepers are burdened with an endless stream of witticisms and remarks that we are obliged to take in good humour. The first time I heard that classic remark when moving the tee markers; "Put them forward" it was almost amusing. But after 20 years of its continued use, forcing a grin becomes physically demanding.

The same applies to that constantly repeated one liner; "Couldn't you kick it back onto the fairway?" usually heard after nearly being decapitated by an errant golf ball while innocently working in the rough. Or that all time great of the past, present and no doubt future one so often hears when applying seed or fertiliser by hand; "Feeding the chickens?" Then there's the one that I am sure you will all recognise after top dressing a green; "Come and do my lawn next."

Now I have to apologise to any members that may be reading these lines but these remarks were never of side splitting proportions when it comes to their jocularity and when they are heard for that thousandth time they can be, to be quite frank, a trifle tedious if not down right irritating. But despite this, in the line of duty we all manage to raise a smile and even a slight snigger if pushed to do so. I often thought about falling about helplessly in uncontrolled hysterical guffawing as a response to these remarks, but felt the issuer may detect a hint of sarcasm and so take this reaction unkindly.

But I must not be so derogatory to our golfing friends, after all, as they are so quick to remind us, it is they who pay our wages. In fact when one really analyses the subject of golfer and greenkeeper interaction it becomes clear that it is the members who are often on the receiving end of our remarks. For example, at one club that engaged me many years ago during my formative years, we had one of the local lads working for us. He was mowing a green and had to wait for the Lady Captain to play through. He waited and waited until



heard

impatience got the better of pure thought and he eventually quietly muttered that familiar phrase that must of crossed all of our minds at one time; "Come on you stupid old battle axe."

Now one thing that all greenkeepers must recognise is that nature has a funny little peculiarity whereby it seems that if someone is working with a machine going, they think that no one could hear what they are saying, when in fact they can. Of course, if another person were to speak to them they couldn't hear a word, but it does not work the other way round. The advent of ear defenders has further exaggerated this phenomenon. It is all about proximity to engine noise or something. I am sure Newton or Einstein had a law for it but it is clear that this particular greenkeeper was unaware of its existence and so the Lady Captain was able to hear every word. Being a true Londoner he was able to bluff his way through her understandable objections to being called a battle axe, claiming that someone hidden in the bushes behind had used these well chosen words and not him.

What about the replies we give to some of those classic remarks we hear on a regular basis. Well at this same club the then Head Greenkeeper told me of a response he and his colleagues once gave to the perennial exclamation of horror from a member; "What are you doing to the greens?" following the annual hollow tine. "We are killing worms." came the reply from the greenkeepers. "What do you mean killing worms?" questioned the member. "Well, we make all these holes in the greens and then bang on it with a shovel, then when the worms poke their little heads out of one of the holes to see what is going on, we shoot the buggers." I was not informed of the response the member gave to this story but the beauty of this explanation to hollow tining, is the recipient has insufficient knowledge to know whether his leg is being pulled or not and so they go away with a slightly bemused look. Remember though, comments

like this can be a great source of irritation to the members.

Another good way of irritating members is with this comment. This was told to me by the same Head Greenkeeper from the above club and was the response given to that other remark perpetually given out by members as soon as spade meets ground, "Are you building a bunker?" Amazingly, on this occasion the greenkeepers in question were, actually building a bunker but they decided to give the member some alternative information. "No, we are building a nuclear fall out shelter for the committee," they replied. "What, a nuclear fall out shelter for the committee," said the alarmed member. "Yes," they said, "It has all been approved."

Incredible though it may seem, this member fell for it hook, line and sinker and hurried off to the clubhouse to try and insist he was included in the shelter when Leonid Brezhnev or whoever it was at the time, decided to go out with a blaze of glory. Personally, the thought of sharing a hole for several months with the golf club committee would make slow death by radiation poisoning seem positively inviting but obviously this member had other ideas.

But before anyone gets ideas that I am opposed to the average club committee I must just tell you of one of their little gems they once came up with. This concerns a particularly stuffy club in the Midlands that was still back in the dark ages when it came to sexual equality. At this club, there was a sign on the driveway that stated: NO WOMEN OR DOGS ALLOWED ON SUNDAYS.

Now somewhat understandably, the women were a

little concerned at this sign. It was not so much that they were not allowed to play on Sundays but more because the sign seemed to infer that they were of the same social standing as our four legged friends. So a sub committee was formed and the Lady Captain sent to the Secretary to make the relevant protestations.

The Secretary said that of course the sign would be changed and that it would be brought up at that evenings committee meeting. So the Lady Captain went away happy with the knowledge that the first inroads had been made and that the

walls of male chauvinism would soon be crumbling away. The following week she came up to the golf club eager to view the spoils of her good work and upon entering the driveway gazed upon the new sign. It read: NO WOMEN ALLOWED ON SUNDAYS. DOGS MUST BE KEPT ON A LEAD.

Well, you've got to admire their wit.

