



Greenkeepers Training Committee



Donald Steel, GTC's Chairman, gives readers his thoughts on why he believes "Sustainability" is nothing new...

Trying to say the same thing in different ways is a sure sign that writers have been round the block a few times. When applied to golf, it is another way of proving that nothing is new but all the rhetoric on sustainability and environmental best practises are a clear echo of what Jim Arthur preached all his life - and, in many quarters, was damned with faint praise for so doing.

A Press cutting from 1975, for instance, reminds us that "no sooner had cheers greeted the news that Turnberry would hold the 1977 Open championship for the first time than rumours spread that the magnificent Ailsa course was in poor condition".

Jim Arthur, the R&A's agronomist, was called in to brew his magic potion which "consists basically of a return to nature - a reduction of inorganic feeding, regular aeration and a tight hold on watering".

He recommended "no water" because he knew Clubs would apply a little which was what he wanted but greenkeeping can never be a matter of formula. Greenkeepers (a much nicer title than Course Manager) are custodians of their course and everything must be left to their judgment in taking day to day, week to week decisions.

Adjusting to the weather is probably the prime requirement in order that the best playing surfaces can be prepared.

Green speed will be uppermost in their thoughts but, even then, opinions vary as to what that should be.

From what I have observed over the years, condition will be good if the non-stop battle against thatch and compaction can be won.

They represent the common enemy whatever the soil, the grass or the climate. This makes regular aeration the exercise most believe to be the common denominator in terms of universal policy but most greenkeepers are guided by principles that provide a framework for policies to be effective.



Old Course, St Andrews, by Lewis Birch

As we saw at the Scottish Open and in last year's Ryder Cup, contingency plans are essential but nothing raised spirits more than the recent GTC Workshop at Portmore Golf Park, in Barnstaple, the last to be funded by the R&A - and more is the pity. It was hosted by Colin and Josh Webber, the father and son who abandoned dairy farming in favour of the sort of golf operation of which the game needs more.

Josh, in fact, is the greatest possible recommendation for greenkeeper training, having studied at Myerscough before establishing himself as the most enthusiastic convert to a maintenance programme at Portmore that includes the development of a home-made compost that helps implement a budget designed to give maximum value for money.

Much time was also given at Portmore to environmental matters but acknowledgement of the way in which golf courses have preserved our heathland and protected our coastline are further examples that the subject serves more as a reminder than a novel issue.

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In 1987, Sir David Attenborough maintained "Golf courses have always, and will always, provide splendid wildlife habitats for whatever reason they are conserved". Nobody would argue with the authority of that source but things don't just happen.

That is why good communication is important in informing members of what is taking place and why. It is members who need to be convinced so full marks to West Sussex GC for producing pictorial evidence of their sterling efforts during the English Women's Championship in May, which conveyed the pride that lay behind the teamwork that achieved such commendable results.

When they were also able to add news that Abbie Holland had completed Level 2 at Plumpton College and been named Student of the Year, there was every cause for celebration that the influence of the GTC is strong. Jim Arthur, one of the pioneers, will doubtless have enjoyed a heavenly whisky in celebration although how much water he added - if any - is another matter.

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