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ASPECTS OF DESIGN VII SOURCES FOR COURSES

THE golf course architects of the twenties enjoyed love-hate relationships. They formed little teams for mutual support but only one persisted, apparently because there were no clear-cut arrangements for responsibility. The older members unloaded all the dirty work on to their latest recruit and he, not unnaturally, wanted his share of the fun at the top.

They also tended to disparage each other's talents though never averse to purloining useful ideas and figures likely to blind an awkward green committee.

Tom Simpson, for example, in his forthright way, laid down the law precisely on the proportion of a green's putting-surface which should be made relatively flat for hole cutting. '75 per cent', he asserted roundly, as if he has worked it out over a lifetime. By coincidence, nevertheless, **Harry Colt** had suggested the same figure ten years earlier. Coincidence? Unfortunately I can feel a reminiscence coming on. Simpson and his colleagues will have to wait another month.

The tendency to plagiarise without admitting ones sources is a failing which one tries to grow out of in later years, although it is still tempting to repeat the occasional borrowed witticism as ones own without disclosing authorship. Men of science are expected to rise above these temptations. The rest of us try to cover our tracks with 'grateful acknowledgements'.

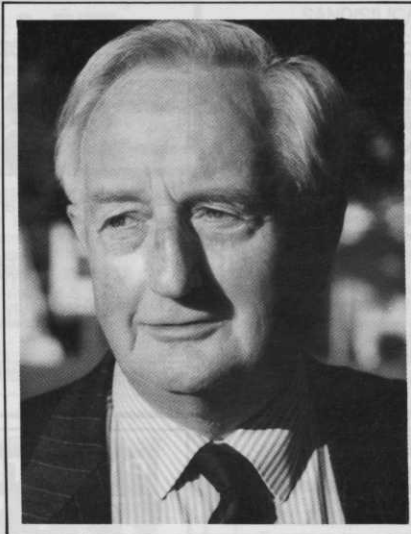
This page once re-wrote the golf architectural gospel in a book which still sells well thanks to the growth of the leisure industry, tourism, and agricultural set-aside. It has also been found useful for the growing number of recruits to golf course designing because all the old favourites are out of print.

When writing a whole book, even this dog-eared page is bound to come up with the odd original thought, simply by the law of averages, since most original thoughts consist of two earlier thoughts put together.

For example, the said treatise, when discussing the bunkering of seaside links and using the folds in the ground to create natural form, 'gather' the ball, and avoid erosion by wind, used the word 'shadow'. Modesty and common sense prevent me from describing the choice as memorable but it might at least be termed apt. The player, it was suggested, would see many links bukers not as sand but as a 'shadow' in lighter areas of fairway.

Six months went by without the golf architectural world being unduly shaken by this revelation. Then a magazine article reported Jack Nicklaus professing himself to be attracted by the idea of 'shadow bunkering'.

As a good greenkeeper, with both feet on the fairway, you will dismiss this as pure coincidence. I prefer to think that somewhere in the Nicklaus residence, if you can find your way, perhaps even in The Den itself, there is a quiet corner dedicated to the literature of golf course architecture and that among all the gems of the past, there is one particular blue-



Fred Hawtree

covered volume which is well-thumbed even if only because it stands out from the rest owing to its awkward shape.

More recently there have been two articles on building tees which made me sit up with a sense of déjà vu. However, I can only continue if what follows is treated in the strictest confidence. I rely entirely on the discretion of the staff and readers of Greenkeeping Management. Should there be one of these who feels that his lips might become unsealed in an unguarded moment, especially following invitations which begin with the words 'what will you have?', he should turn over the page. The sensitive material starts here.

"Still relying heavily on your confidentiality, I will now reveal that if you start designing informally shaped tees by drawing overlapping circles, you may conceivably arrive at an acceptable plan but you will also have wasted a good deal of time."

When Hawtree III read through the proofs of the chapter on tees in Jack's preferred reading, he pointed to one page and asked: "What's all this nonsense?" I explained that in order to reply fully to his courteous enquiry, I was obliged to tell him a story. He appeared depressed but it may have been concentration.

I related how ten years earlier in a booklet which briefly sketched a few basic principles of design, I had mentioned the figure of ten per cent as the maximum cross-fall desirable on a fairway at the landing area of tee shots. I am still not sure

that such a rule is desirable, since so much depends on angle of attack, adjacent contour, and other optional lines available.

But I was gratified to have this figure used (not quoted) back at me within six months by one of my senior "confrères" in the design field. So far as I knew, mine was the first effort to legislate for this matter but obviously if it could occur to me, it could have occurred to him or at least from his subconscious, fresh and glistening, like the morning dew.

"To settle the matter in future, Hawtree III", I said, with a dig in his ribs to stir him from his slumbers, "The tee section of my current opus contains a code or marker". This was a nonsense, as he rightly suspected, though endowed with a certain superficial verisimilitude designed to unmask the plagiarist. It was described as the theory of overlapping circles, a fictitious device, claimed to relate agreeable shaping of the outline of informal tees to their orientation.

Still relying heavily on your confidentiality, I will now reveal that if you start designing informally shaped tees by drawing overlapping circles, you may conceivably arrive at an acceptable plan but you will also have wasted a good deal of time which would have been better spent listening for the mating call of the Leather-jacket. You could have got there hours ago by using your own native instinct or by using interlocking squares, triangles or even, if I may use the term in such distinguished company, rhomboids.

Having set the trap, I sat back and waited for a year or more until I heard the jaws snap smartly. Between them I found no less a quarry than the Bulletin of the Sports Turf Research Institute. An excellent article on teeing grounds gave a lot of good advice, much of which I seemed to recognise. But it also contained one reference which I could identify positively. It mentioned the theory of overlapping circles.

There may be a rule which permits the scientific fraternity to avoid disclosure of its sources in articles of a popular nature, which I suppose is how those in the bulletin are regarded. At the same time, their articles in the annual journal are copiously referenced. It is indeed sensible to quote the authorities consulted on the points you raise in case you get attacked on any one of them.

I reset the trap and waited patiently. The next quarry was less weighty but struggled longer. He not only explained the theory of overlapping circles, he actually produced the diagrams to prove it — flattery indeed. His article appeared in one of our very own favourite greenkeeping publications but as a reciprocal gesture, I shall not reveal its name.

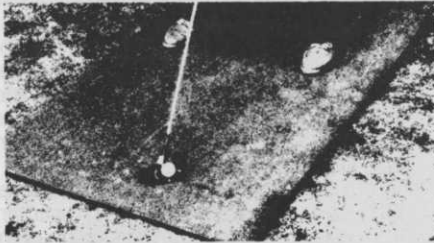
There is heavy snoring in the armchair but he might as well sleep on now because the tale is told. Only the moral remains to be deduced and I am sure I can safely leave that to you. I have enough other worries already. If the theory of overlapping circles invades the main-stream of classical design like a computer virus, the circles may become ever-diminishing until they disappear altogether. But how?

FRED HAWTREE

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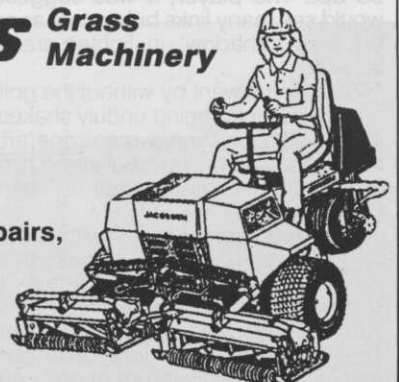
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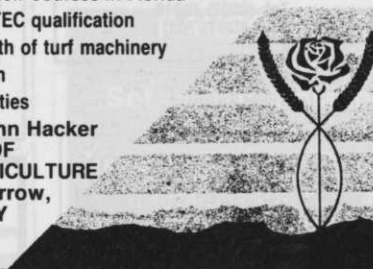
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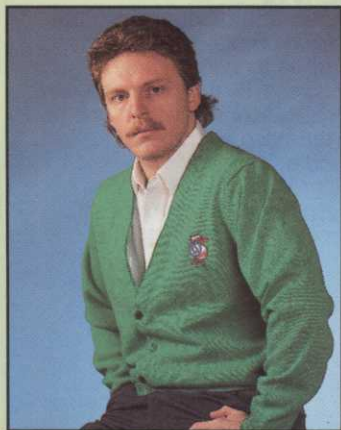
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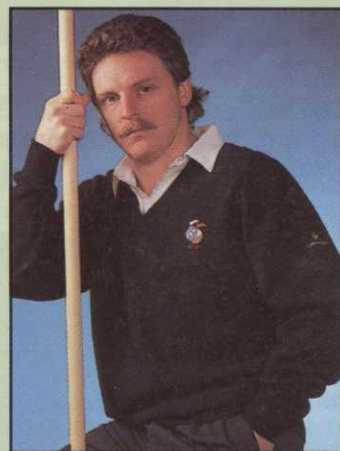


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1. There is not the slightest chance, other things being equal, of opening new courses at the rate of one every 5.2 days until the end of the century.

2. Even if such a rate of construction could be met it would still not satisfy the demand for golf.

The survey is based on a natural demand of 18 holes of golf for every 25,000 of population. But other expert studies, and practical experience in places such as Edinburgh where supply just about balances demand, suggest that the natural demand for golf is of the order of 18 holes for every 15,000 of population.

Even then the statistics can be misleading. Take the area around Virginia Water and Ascot which is positively saturated with golf clubs at Sunningdale (2), Wentworth (3), Berkshire (2) and Windsor. On a strict head count of population you would conclude that this area was over-supplied with golf. Yet for the golf-mad son of a window cleaner living in, say, Egham, there is no access at all to golf.

Clearly we must bear in mind the wise words of Mark Twain, appropriated to his own use by Disraeli: "There are lies, damned lies and statistics".

The most important factor in planning a new golf project is to establish the need for it. In this context it is unfortunate that most of the current golf construction is for the top of the market. Private clubs such as the East Sussex National and Wentworth's new south course do make important contributions to the game but they contribute very little if anything to solving the vital problem of making provision for everyone who wants to play golf. The same goes for resort development, the main source of new courses.

The irony of the current golf starvation is that the main constraint on course construction, the forbidding price of land, has eased considerably. Land is available and farmers are desperate to find alternative uses for their idle acres, land for which we tax-payers are paying subsidies to the farmers to take out of crop production.

There is also, as we know, a chronic shortage of houses in Britain and a no less pressing need to provide the employment to build them.

The third factor in this frustrating equation is that private finance is available to build houses in conjunction with a golf course which, in the curious economics of the housing market, does not cost anything.

If market forces were allowed to operate freely those three circumstances outlined above would very quickly supply the demand for golf in the hard pressed middle sector of the game, the run-of-the-mill golf club. But market forces are frustrated by planning restrictions. And quite right, too, you may say. We cannot have unrestricted housing development all over the nation's heritage of natural beauty.

My problem with that attitude is that planning is all too often applied as a



Peter Dobereiner . . . "the need for high quality courses is imperative."

synonym of prohibition. Well planned development does not despoil the countryside; it enhances it. The city of Cambridge is the outstanding example, among many, of how good development can compliment the natural surroundings.

For the end of the market which embraces the newcomers to the game, the casuals who do not want or cannot join established clubs, the frustrated masses most in need of access to golf, the local authorities should be doing much more. In most cases they have the land. They have an obligation to preserve green belts and, with golf courses, a perfect way of doing so. And at the same time they have an opportunity to exploit a sure fire way of generating income to relieve the burden on municipal finances. If any city councillor wants a vision of golf as a licence to print money I suggest he visits Beckenham Place Park in south London any time of day, any day of the week.

English municipal authorities in general are strangely reluctant, unlike their enlightened Scottish counterparts, to go in for golf. And it is in this area that I think the R and A's proposed National Golf Development Council could play a most important role as a catalyst, particularly in providing information on the economic potential of municipal golf projects.

The other vital function I envision of the NGDC is as an informed pressure group to gain the necessary concessions for golf in the planning process. Presumably it will also act as an advisory service for landowners contemplating going in for golf development, although most golf course architects routinely make site visits and give a free general assessment of the possibilities.

But by far the most important in solving the problem of providing for all who want to play the game, at a price they can afford, is the profit motive. I believe that the most fruitful approach will be partner-

ships agreements, between entrepreneurs and farmers, landowners and public authorities to build simple, basic fee-paying courses. By this I do not mean cheap and nasty courses, which has so often been the case with the despised 'muni'. A good golf course is the product of good design and the result does not have to be expensive. If a course is built from sound principles, allowing the land to tell the architect how the holes should flow, which is how Donald Ross and Alister Mackenzie worked, then good golf can be provided at a reasonable cost. And if the essential groundwork, such as drainage and soundly based greens, is done well in the beginning then courses can be upgraded over the years on a five or ten year plan, adding trees, shrubs, hazards and the embellishments which increase the character of the course.

So strongly do I believe in this concept of basic, high quality courses that I propose to devote the rest of my life to designing and building them.

PETER DOBEREINER

VETERAN golf correspondent, Peter Dobereiner, has retired from The Observer in order to pursue a new career as a golf course designer and consultant. He intends to restrict his writing commitments to books and magazines and to specialise in creating low budget golf courses. Dobereiner's experience in farming and golf has convinced him that economic construction and maintenance charges need not mean a sacrifice in the quality of golfing values. His first course opens next year and he has a number of projects in the planning stage.

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