

John Low's Principles of Golf Architecture Stand Up

By TOM SIMPSON

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WHATEVER is good about the Woking Golf Course, and almost all of it is very good indeed, is due to the ability and knowledge of two Scotsmen who lived at Woking, both intimately acquainted with the Old Course at St. Andrews, and many of the great courses of these islands.

Neither John Low nor Stuart Paton ever practised as golf course architects, but on account of the outstanding skill of their work at Woking extending over a period of 50 years, they were both elected Extraordinary and Honorary Members of The International Society of Golf Architects.

In the many conversations I had with John Low, he laid down in detail the principles on which the golf course architect should work. They may be summarised as follows. I found myself in complete agreement with him, and accepted all his teaching, for what he did not know was not knowledge:

(1) "A golf course should provide entertainment for every class of golfer, particularly the medium player and long handicap man who are the mainstay of the game. At the same time it should provide a searching and difficult test for the powerful player always provided he is prepared to take risks."

A simple matter for the architect who knows his business.

(2) "The game has been waging a battle against the inventor. The one aim of the inventor is to minimise the skill required by the game. The inventor has been allowed too much license."

John Low wrote that some 50 years ago, just after the introduction of the Haskell ball. What he would have said today about 14 graded clubs and a ball that travels 10 percent further than the Haskell of 1900, I tremble to think.

(3) "The centre of the fairway, and/or the shortest most direct line to the hole should be fraught with danger, imminent or deferred to the powerful player. A feature of all the holes illustrated, see in particular Fig. IV." (See page 44.)

(4) "The proper technique of the architect is to make the ground dictate the play. The good architect will see to it that the hole proclaims that the powerful player who wishes to register the par figure, must keep well to the right or well to the left with tee shot at two-shot and three-shot holes, and so in each stroke there shall be some special interest for him, some special maneuver as that practised by the skillful billiard player who always has in mind the next stroke or strokes ahead; a characteristic of all four illustrations."

(5) "A fairway requires to be properly orientated to both the tee and the putting green, thereby stressing the importance of placing tee shot in a position from which alone the green can be approached with any degree of safety. A notable feature of the twelfth, thirteenth and sixteenth St. Andrews; sixth Carnoustie; first, ninth and eighteenth Muirfield; seventeenth Hoylake; fourth Prestwick; seventh Hayling. Some of which holes are illustrated." (See page)

Those who set at defiance the design of sixth Carnoustie in a recent Championship, paid for it heavily by being trapped in the central bunker 230 yards from the tee. They were trying to cut a corner.

(6) "That as few bunkers as possible should be introduced, and no bunker at all within 200 yards from the tee, except of course at short one-shot holes.

"That ridges and straths, natural or artificial, are the best way of controlling the entrance to the green, having due regard to the proper orientation of the green to second shot.

"That the best hazard of all on a golf course is one 200 to 235 yards from the tee, five to ten yards off the powerful player's most favourable line to the hole, as depicted in all the illustrations" on page 44.

What had Arthur Croome to say about this?

"It is severe to doubt because the almost good one is penalised, yet because

Fig I

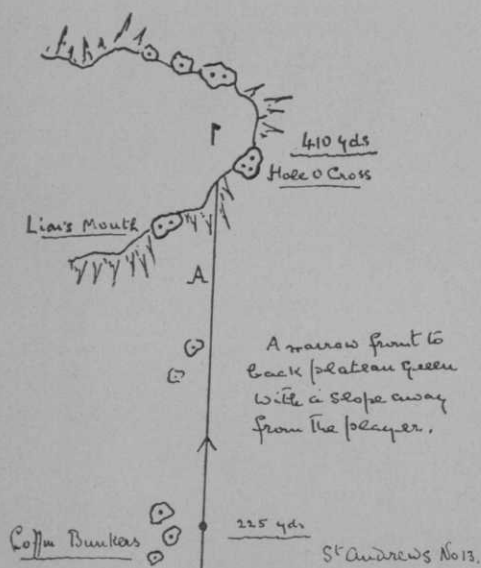


Fig II

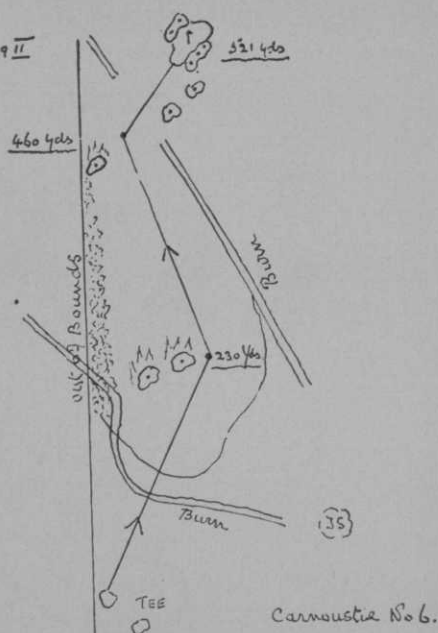


Fig III

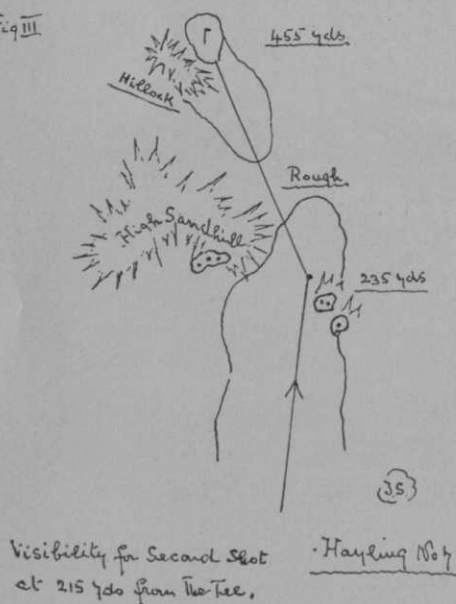
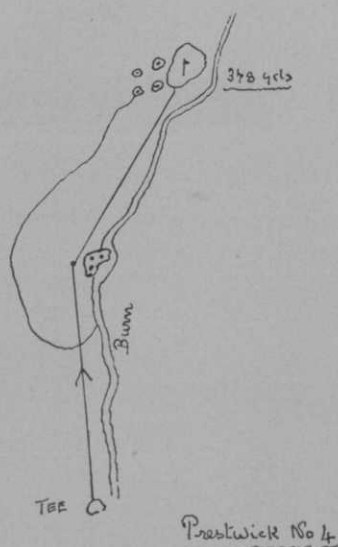


Fig IV

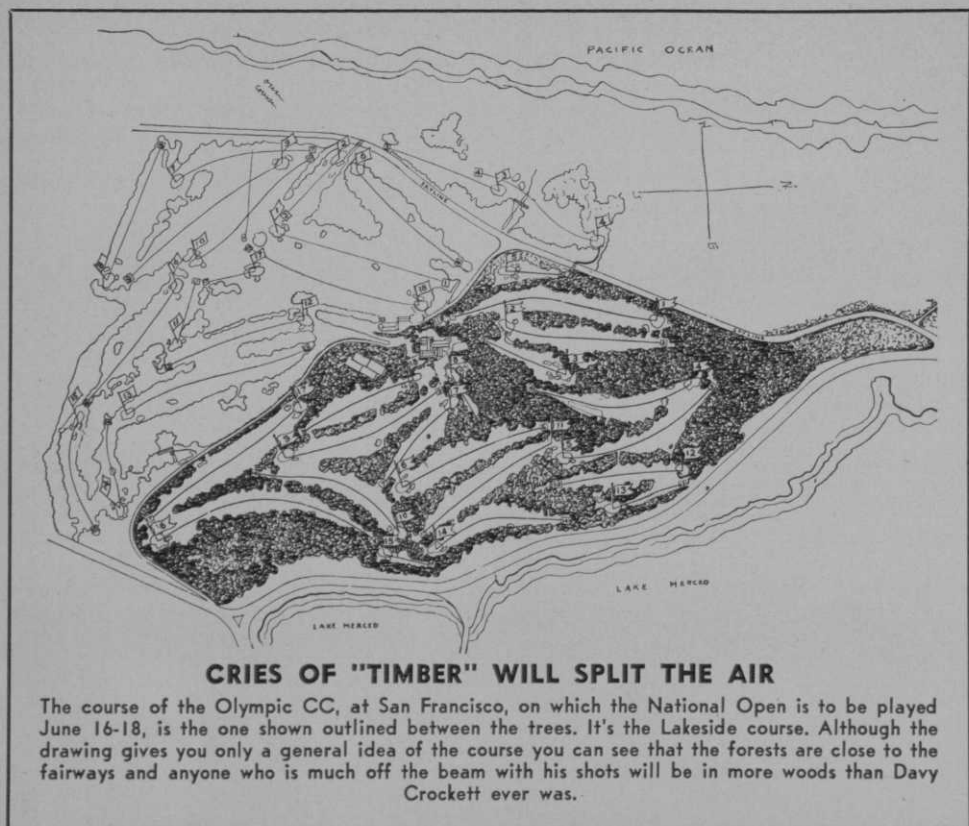


Fundamentals of sound design of golf holes, as presented by four classic holes on British courses, are shown in these sketches by Tom Simpson.

of this direct challenge, the expert is interested without adding to the burden of the less proficient."

(7) "That putting greens should, wher-

ever possible, especially on seaside and heathland courses be of the low, narrow front to back, plateau type, with the plateau tilting away from the player, convey-



ing to the golfer the impression he cannot be up without being over. This is a prominent feature of many St. Andrews greens.

"No putting green should be higher at the back than it is in front (the vast majority are). Such a feature gives the player confidence; the last thing in the world the architect should do. That semi-visibility is an attractive feature, where only half of the flagstick can be seen from where approach shot to the green should be played; of which there are no less than eight examples at St. Andrews."

The Element of Luck

(8) "A course should never pretend to be, nor it is intended to be, an infallible tribunal of skill alone. The element of chance is the very essence of the game, part of the legitimate fun of the game. Take for instance the thirteenth hole at St. Andrews, perhaps the finest hole of its length in the world. (See Fig. 1.)

"To have any hope of a 4, tee shot must be placed alongside Coffin bunker 225 yards from the tee. Anyhow on that

line. The area short of the green that receives second shot, A on the plan, is ragged and unkempt, and not infrequently kicks the ball either into 'Lion's Mouth' on the left, or 'Hole O'Cross' on the right. Another glorious feature of this green is that when once the ball has climbed on to the plateau it is met with a diabolical slope away from the player. All very disconcerting."

For important events, old Tom Morris used to cut the hole half behind Hole O'Cross bunker, where I have placed the flag. Old Tom understood the true spirit of the game.

"This is one of those holes which John Low described as having the quality of indestructibility."

"By indestructibility is meant the attribute or quality of successfully resisting the machinations of the golf ball manufacturer and the clubmaker."

"This does not necessarily involve great length, quite the contrary, for the following holes have this quality of indestructibility, sixteenth St. Andrews, 351 yards;

fourth Woking, 311 yards; twelfth St. Andrews, 316 yards.

"All very short two-shotters. All very difficult to do in four."

(9) "That all the really great holes of the world involve a contest of wits, a contest of risks, and hover on the brink of the Heretical Precipice. Such holes for example as:

Second, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth St. Andrews, fifth and ninth Liphook, third Portmarnock, ninth County Louth, thirteenth Prestwick, fifteenth Turnberry, fourth and seventeenth Woking, ninth and eighteenth Muirfield."

No one should attempt to copy a great hole, as so much may depend on its surroundings and some feature miles away beyond the green, which influences and

affects the play of the hole.

If the features of the terrain are suitable some of the character of the prototype may be incorporated into the design.

(10) "Inequalities of surface on a putting green should not be exaggerated. Moreover they embarrass the greenkeeper. A tilt from front to back. From left to right, or vice versa is legitimate, yea desirable.

"When designing and constructing putting greens, the architect should have in mind a 'Holy of Holies' for the flag on important days. Nowhere has this been done better than at Woking."

(11) "'Le mieux est toujours l'ennemi du bien,' which being interpreted is, 'leave well alone,' and that is just what green committees will not do, especially when they have a really fine course." T.S.



SUPERINTENDENTS HELP AKRON LAWN OWNERS

Sixty superintendents of Cleveland District GCSA participated in annual Lawn Clinic and Garden Festival staged at Akron Armory.

The affair drew more than 9000 to two afternoon and two evening meetings at which course supts., answered lawnmowers' questions. The Armory housed 46 educational exhibits and eight complete gardens.

In addition to the supts. Dr. Joseph Palivka and Dr. Richard Davis of Ohio State University Experimental Station, and Dr. Wm. M. Daniel, turf specialist of Purdue university, addressed lawn-owners on turf problems. Richard Barnhart, supt., Akron parks, and Edward Gran of Akron Garden Forum designed striking scenic backgrounds for the show which was promoted by the Akron Beacon Journal.

Supts. were guests of the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. at dinner at the Firestone club, following a conference on course maintenance problems. W. E. (Bill) Lyons, Firestone supt., was general chmn. of the clinic.

A television feature in which Lyons (at left above) Nelson Monical, Larry Wolf and Paul Truckenbrod told of how golf turf research greatly aided lawnmowers, was put on by WAKR, Akron.