

Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz, STMA Historian

Similarities an Ocean Apart - Part I

First I would like you to know that my visits to College Park, MD, and Milwaukee, WI, to meet the families of Dr. Fred Grau and Harry Gill were beyond words. Fred's daughter, Ellen Mentzer and Fred Jr. shared slides, pictures, articles and publications that are still in the home where Fred Sr. lived. I didn't get the chance to look at it all, but I did get some wonderful things that I will be sharing with you from time to time in this newsletter and at the annual conference. Harry Gill III, also known as "Bud," was equally congenial and I was able to borrow pictures and things to copy for use by STMA. I realized during these visits that we all have our own pieces of STMA history tucked away somewhere. Can we all make a commitment now to help preserve that history?

My next scheduled trip is with Alain Langlois, owner of Lanco, the drainage folks from Montreal, Canada to visit several of STMA's friends in the UK. We will visit John Souter (Scotland), Brian Robinson, John Warner, David Shelton, Derek Walder (England) and many others from the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) to observe the latest ideas, technology and equipment that are being used and sold for drainage, construction, and maintenance of sports fields. We will also spend a few days at Saltex, the IOG's trade show where 8,000 grounds personnel will assemble at the Windsor Race Course near London. In this issue, I would like to touch on the history of the IOG so you can see how it parallels with our organization.

Before he died in 1989, IOG founder and president, W. H. "Bill" Bowles, wrote about how the work of the IOG was pioneered through the National Association of Groundsmen. I would like to share with you some of what he wrote. He begins by telling of his early education in the art of groundsmanship. When he was a schoolboy, he lived on a sports ground where his father was groundsman. He stayed active in the field after he left school and, after the death of his father during World War I, found himself in charge of a sports ground.

From that time onward he produced playing pitches as best as he could, assisted by what he remembered of his father's work and from a short experience elsewhere. Although he was friendly with a few neighboring groundsmen, they were very closed about their methods and tended to keep any know-how under their hats. This attitude was pretty general around the 1920's - there seemed to be a fear that a man was risking his job if he gave any information to another.

At this time, Bowles began to consider the possibility on forming an association to help overcome the general detachment of groundsmen and promote networking.

Amongst the older groundsmen who were well established and had the foresight to see how the profession could benefit from such an association were George Lane (Dulwich College) and G. Mullinden (National Provincial Bank). They welcomed the idea and wished such an organization had been formed earlier. Others were less enthusiastic and some were apprehensive about the prospect.

However, in 1933 things began to move. Someone suggested contacting Herbert Robinson who had a wide association with groundsmen. Mr. Robinson gave Bill the names and addresses of head groundsmen employed in well-known areas. One of these names was Harry White of Lords (cricket ground).

Bowles and his wife sent letters to 30 groundsmen in different parts of London, inviting them to the 'London Stone' (a pub) on January 10, 1934, to hear his proposal. Although only 11 of the 30 invited showed up, it was an auspicious occasion. Each of those 11 welcomed the prospect of an association and handed in subscriptions (dues) there and then. Elections were held and Bill became secretary. All those in attendance were very enthusiastic and vowed to try and recruit every groundsman they knew.

The first annual dinner was held at the White Horse Restaurant in Holborn. The press accepted their invitation and the group had their first newspaper report. In 1936, Bowles handed over the reins of secretary to Charles Littlefield and became chairman of the association.

The war (WW II) caused temporary abandonment of the group, but after it was over, they lost no time in resuming their activities. Littlefield made contacts with Sheffield (city) and they became the first provincial branch (chapter).

The untiring efforts of Charles Littlefield in all directions kept the groundsmen's association steadily growing. To him must go much of the credit for the first Hurlingham exhibition (Saltex today) held at the Hurlingham

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