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The first section includes lecture notes of papers presented at the 1999 New Jersey Turfgrass Expo. Publication of the New Jersey Turfgrass Expo Notes provides a readily available

source of information covering a wide range of topics. The Expo Notes include technical and popular presentations of importance to the turfgrass industry.

The second section includes research papers containing original research findings and reviews covering selected subjects in turfgrass science. The primary objective of this section is to facilitate the timely dissemination of original turfgrass research for use by the turfgrass industry.

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Dr. Ann B. Gould, Editor
Dr. Bruce B. Clarke, Coordinator

CLASSIC GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE IN BRITAIN - TO RENOVATE, RESTORE, OR UPDATE?

Jonathan W. Tucker¹

Heritage is a growth industry in Britain, and the classical combination of stately home and landscape garden provides an instantly recognizable image. It would be considered sacrilege to destroy or deface historic masterpieces created by geniuses like Humphrey Repton and Capability Brown, but many of our classic courses have fared less well. Why is this so?

All golf course architects (from the most humble to the greatest such as Alister Mackenzie, Harry Colt, and James Braid) would like to have achieved finality in construction. But, all courses evolve over time and many are now unrecognizable from their early origins. Even the home of golf, St. Andrews, has been transformed most notably during the 40 year tenure of Old Tom Morris. From about 1860 to 1880, the painstaking work of removing the “whins” was carried out, which widened the fairways substantially. As a consequence, alternative routes for play were provided, whereas before widening carries over the primary bunkers were enforced. Therefore, at different times the golf course at St. Andrews exhibited the competing schools of architecture, penal and strategic. Tom Morris was also responsible for separating the 1st and 17th greens and carrying out other surgery on the venerable course.

It is interesting that the foremost architects of the “Golden Era,” notably Braid, Colt, and Mackenzie, undertook redesign work on established courses and, indeed, revisited their own designs with a view to making improvements.

What makes a classic course is difficult to define as it is an elusive quality. A highly manicured and picturesque course does not by implication mean that it is a classic, as the attraction may only be “skin deep.”

Many of the early architects had excellent sites most obviously on the links where the landscape and golf layout were in perfect harmony. Under these circumstances, the golf course could be “found” rather than imposed. Heathland courses were also created which utilized the natural advantages of the landscape to the full and applied the philosophy of providing enjoyable physical and mental challenges for all standards of player.

The Alwoodley Golf Club in Yorkshire represents the earliest example of a full 18 hole layout by Alister Mackenzie and highlights his mastery of camouflage. Mounds and hollows were created artificially so that they were indistinguishable from the real thing. During reconstruction of the greens in recent years the original contouring was faithfully replicated. Even the steeper gradients through greens (a 1 to 15 foot slope) were retained for authenticity, although “flatter” sections were incorporated on the steeper slopes to contain downhill putts on the slicker surfaces of today. At Royal Birkdale, greater latitude was permitted in the remodeling of greens during the reconstruction program, but the essential design ethos and strategy of the course were observed.

¹ J. W. Tucker, B.Sc. Hons, MBPR, Associate Member BIGCA, Golf Course Architect, The Sports Turf Research Institute, St Ives Estate, Bingley, West Yorkshire, BD16 1AU, England.

Many of the changes on our historic courses were enforced by improvements in equipment epitomized by the change from the rubber core Haskell ball from the "gutty" and replacement of hickory shafts with steel. These developments have altered the relationship of bunkers to holes and require progressive lengthening by development of new tees. Often the desire for extra length invariably results in the destruction of short holes, which test finesse and shot making skills but not brute strength.

The subject of fairness often concerns the golfer, and repeated criticism (particularly from the professional golfer) of an unfair feature frequently results in its obliteration. Alister Mackenzie recalls such an incidence on a golf course where a mature tree was removed because "it was in a direct line with the local scratch player's best shot." Upon removal, the scratch player "revised his view" and said that it had "become so dull that it was not worth playing!" General agreement was reached so a new hole was formed to take its place, although this required additional land and removal of the previous 5 holes to accommodate the changes. Therefore, "the uprooting of a single tree was the direct cause of the replacement of 6 holes!"

The gloriously contoured green at Sitwell Park has also been lost due to early criticism, although it may have survived with progressive familiarization and acceptance.

There was a proliferation of inland golf courses towards the latter part of the 19th Century. The majority were ugly creations characterized by geometric features and uniform hazards (such as turf ridges or dykes) placed at a standard distance down the fairway. These courses represented an evolutionary dead-end and the changing philosophy of design has removed virtually all their original traces.

Blind holes have for a long period been shunned by golf course architects, but there are many classic examples worthy of preservation such as the Dell at Lahinch (a legacy of Old Tom Morris). This type of hole remains virtually un-

changed as it demonstrates the fundamental law of survival of the fittest and has been enjoyed from one generation of golfer to the next.

Changes are often made in the interest of expedience. The steep banks and acute features once mown by hand (or possibly even grazed by animals) are now maintained by larger triplex equipment. Therefore, slopes need to be moderated and contours spread out over a wider area. Larger greens and tees are also required to cope with the demands of play, but imposing an alien design in a traditional landscape and erasing all the natural features of the green site is the worst type of progress. Reconstruction needs to be sympathetic to the site (particularly when blending in with other greens on the golf course) to avoid creating a "freak" green in the interest of leaving an indelible mark on the course!

Changes are increasingly enforced by the need to observe increased safety margins, particularly with encroachment of housing against golf course boundaries and the inexorable increase in the weight of road traffic. Removal of the hole or relocation of the green may well be demanded, but it would be sensible to reinstate the original design ethos and strategy if it is worthy of preservation.

True restoration implies that the course must be reinstated to as close to its original condition as possible. This would be fine if one were playing with equipment designed when the course was built to truly appreciate the original design intentions of the architect. Consider the analogy of a vintage car competing with its modern counterpart. While undoubtedly more stylish, its performance needs to be related to the standards of the day and not in a head to head contest with its modern equivalent. While I would not advocate customization, some changes are necessary to meet the modern demands of the game and maintenance requirements.

Golfers of yesteryear would also be amazed at the uniformity and degree of surface refinement now achieved on our golf courses. This

factor, in combination with the use of water to manipulate surface quality, has been responsible for removing some of the strategic values of our older courses.

A detailed survey of the club's historical records and photographs can assist in renovating and restoring features which were lost. Where the detail is lacking, a thorough knowledge of the architect and his works is essential to provide a coherent and sympathetic scheme. One of the major problems is the influence of golf club committees who adopt a haphazard approach to course "improvement." Fortunately, many are stating in their course policy document that no changes shall be made without the involvement of a qualified course architect.

Adopting the latest fad or fashion may prove popular in the short term, but the traditional approach to golf course architecture has greater longevity. Water features have been used increasingly on our courses, but golf is a pastime, not a penance, and the difficulty of the course does not relate to its overall quality. Modern construction techniques can also enforce a repetitive design style that is at odds with the individuality of the greens formed by hard labor and horse-drawn scoops.

Sand bunkers inevitably deteriorate over time as sand builds up on adjoining banks and the constant process of erosion and trimming back of faces results in loss of shape. The practice of rolling turf down the face can be valid, but this must be considered in relation to the original aesthetics of the architect (and his trademark design style) allied to the visibility of the hazard.

Tree growth has a major impact on our historic courses. Prior to the Open Championship staged at Royal Birkdale in 1998, the decision

was made to restore the open links aspect by removing the weed trees that had spread throughout the course. As a consequence, broad vistas were opened up and additional vantage points offered to the spectators. Both from a visual perspective and for the agronomic good of the course many Clubs would benefit from a tree management program. By pushing back tree lines to their original position and punching gaps in tree belts, original features would be exposed and possibly even the original strategy of play revealed.

In summary, most of our classic courses have changed significantly over the years, and perhaps the only way to halt the trend is to limit the performance of golfing equipment. There is usually a limit to how far tees can be pushed back towards the boundaries! Often the design concept of the original architect has been lost or at the least submerged under layers of course improvement projects usually initiated by well meaning but misguided committees. The first step is to make an audit of what you have to determine if it is worthy of restoration.

Undoubtedly greater protection needs to be offered our classic British courses, but in most cases it would be folly to try and replicate the golf course as it was originally laid out in the interest of authenticity. It is the overall style, layout principles, strategy of play, key design features, and extent of vegetation which are the main elements to consider in the restoration plan.

It must also be remembered that maintenance has a profound influence on the playing characteristics and presentation of our courses, and the greater the drive for uniformity and consistency, the greater the risk will be that the original architectural values will fade.