

DIABOLICAL ANTICS

Six years ago it came to my knowledge that that great and, some would say, eccentric practitioner in the art of golf-course architecture, Tom Simpson, had expressed a wish that he could see the obituary I should write of him. I therefore with his co-operation did it in advance in these columns and, much delighted, he sent copies to all his friends. It was not until last year that, at the age of eighty-seven, he died.

Now for these past few days it has been for me as though he were living again, for by a coincidence I have had in my hands, and only wish that I could keep, two extraordinary books which recall his life and thoughts and work. The first, handsomely bound in leather and surely unique, is entitled in gold letters *Golf Architect's Bible*, but far from being the printed treatise one might expect, is in fact a lifetime compilation of notes, writings and cuttings by Simpson himself, ranging from A for 'Ants and Cockchafers' to W for 'Worms'. It is now the property of his fellow architect Mr C. K. Cotton.

The contents of Tom's 'bibles' are far from so prosaic as Ants and Worms. In the flyleaf, starting as he means to go on, the compiler has written in bold red ink: *Ninety per cent of the criticisms made by club members are due to Invincible Ignorance*. Also on the flyleaf are, unaccountably, the initials CVLH, which can only indicate Mr C. V. L. Hooman, who played in the first two Walker Cup matches in 1922 and 1923. Tom not only wrote out and assembled almost everything that a golf architect could need to know but added many of the touches that made him such a 'character'. Here, for instance, is a list of 'things to take on visits'—all eighty of them, including not only passport, protractors, plans, etcetera, but, less obviously, bananas, bible and seasickness remedy!

Here, too, is pasted a list of 'stock phrases' for use with—or perhaps I should say against, for he fought a running battle with them all his life—club committees.

The club having been informed that their course is 'far from attractive' the stock phrase runs 'we would stress the importance of beauty in all construction work. Beauty is difficult to define, as is the taste of sugar, but is none the less very real. Those who appreciate it take off their shoes. The rest just sit around and eat blackberries.'

Another 'stock phrase', emphasizing the subtle quality of the Old Course at St Andrews, seemed to strike a chord. And guess who wrote it. Yes, honestly! Thirty years ago. Another stock phrase reminds clients that humdrum holes are no good and that 'it is only the mad masterpieces that remain in the memory'. Among them are included the 12th, 13th, 14th, 16th and 17th at St Andrews, the 4th

and 17th at Woking, the 14th at Liphook, and the 13th at West Sussex.

Tom Simpson was a great keeper of personal books. He had a magnificent 'Wine Book', which he had compiled from his own vast experience and which he once lent me, and a big cuttings book of miscellaneous items written by or about him. This he left to Dr S. Pope, a past captain of Liphook, and I have it before me now.

Simpson himself lived at Liphook and always claimed, as so many do today, that it combined skill and pleasure in ideal proportions. It has only fifty bunkers, against an average of a hundred and twenty; you can get round comfortably twice in a day, and in forty-two years no one, including Bobby Locke, has done better than 69. His relations with the club he loved so well were not, however, uniformly harmonious. When he suspected that the committee were meeting to demand his resignation, so Dr Pope tells me, he caused himself to be driven slowly up and down in his Rolls-Royce in front of their window.

Simpson was all against length for length's sake and all in favour of luck. He liked his courses to demand 'mental agility'. Golf, he thought, should be 'a game of real adventure as against an examination of stroke production . . . should combine a pleasant form of physical vigour with the problems of the chessboard'. Or again, 'No tee shot can possibly be described as good if the proper place to be is the centre of the fairway. . . .' 'The vital thing about a hole is that it should either be more difficult than it looks or look more difficult than it is. It must never be what it looks.'

This attitude, when translated on the ground, led him into much trouble, and I have been re-living the controversies that arose from his work at Rye and on the New Course at Sunningdale. Golfers in their 'invincible ignorance' did not like being teased by what Bernard Darwin called his 'diabolical antics', and in fact both these works were later changed.

He also, from his worship of St Andrews, where on at least six holes no part of the green is visible, was a great believer in showing only half the flagstick and this failed to find favour too. A case in point was his short 14th at Rye. I do not think that any who can remember this semi-blind hole will compare it favourably with the late Sir Guy Campbell's brilliant replacement.

Nevertheless, his meticulous plans, estimates and accounts show what a competent man of business he was, for all his occasional quirks and fancies on the course. The closeness of his estimates to actual cost is astonishing, and the planemakers of today will be shaken to know that on occasions the former actually exceeded the latter.

At Rye, for instance, he estimated £1,460 and the cost was £1,374. 6s. 6d. (the 14th green and tee, complete, cost £250 in 1932. I suppose it would be £1,000 today). At Sunningdale, he estimated £7,912 against £7,748. 16s. 3d.; Muirfield, £473 against £443. 2s. 8d.; Ashridge, £2,461 against £2,587. 16s. 6d.; Woking (25 men at 1s. an hour) £409 against £423. 11s. 9d.

How many people, I wonder, have private courses today? In Tom Simpson's pre-war brochure for prospective clients he quotes having built private courses for Lord Louis Mountbatten, Sir Phillip Sassoon, Bt, Sir Archie Birkmyre, Bt, Sir Mortimer Singer, Bt, and a commoner by the name of Mr James de Rothschild. The pictures and description of the exquisite—and diabolical—little pitching-and-putting course (estimate £685, cost £665) which he built for the then owner, Mr William Clark, in the gardens of Windlesham Moor, fascinates me too. Is it there, I wonder, today? And, if so, can anybody hole it, as Joyce Wethered did on the opening day, in 28?