Tribute to former Turnberry Head Greenkeeper, Jimmy McCubbin

Jimmy McCubbin, who died after a long illness, borne without complaint and cared for by his devoted wife, Agnes, on July 29 aged 85, was a great friend of mine.

We first met when he took over the head post at Turnberry in the run up to their 1977 Open. He was responsible for the huge success of that event and in particular for restoring, in a very short time, links which had been neglected and mis-managed.

We had three years to get what was almost total disaster into condition suitable for the world’s most important Championship. This was achieved to the surprise of many pundits, and illustrated it could be done in very short order by following traditional methods and not taking too much notice of the members!

Although Jimmy had served his greenkeeping apprenticeship at Maybole, when he joined Turnberry Hotel in 1935 he started literally at the bottom in the kitchens before becoming Head Gardener, from which post he moved to take on the management of the course. When he retired in 1982, he had 47 years service with the Hotel.

When the R&A gave me the task of getting back MacKenzie Ross’ wonderful links I needed someone with an instinctive feel for traditional greenkeeping and Jimmy came with no baggage! For over two and a half years I walked the course every month with Jimmy and for his help and support I am very grateful.

He had a devoted team, faithfully implementing an agreed policy. The result was a highly successful Open for which Jimmy rightly took his deserved plaudits, showing what could be done in a very short time to restore any course ravaged by the feed and water school.

The 1977 Open was indeed the jewel in Jimmy’s crown!

Jimmy was a quiet man of total integrity who could and did inspire loyalty in his staff and get the best out of them. He trained many youngsters in the sound basics and many of them have gone on to very senior positions. I am not alone in remembering him with affection and respect but so many of his contemporaries have left the fray.

Here’s tae us, Wha’s like us? Damn few. An’ they’re all dead!

Jim Arthur