FEBRUARY 2011

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

A smile is never far from the lips of BIGGA’s latest Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. Gordon Child has lived life to the full and in, modern sporting parlance, not left anything out on the park. His greenkeeping career was carried out at some of the finest golf clubs in the country and he watched some of the finest players in the world playing courses he’d prepared. His BIGGA career saw him become the only Chairman to date to serve for two years and spend 10 years as Regional Administrator for the South West and South Wales, while his own golfing ability was good enough for him to play in two Open Championships and now sees him beat his age virtually every time he goes out.

“It was while I was there that I enjoyed one of the pieces of luck which I’ve enjoyed all my life. I started work in 1947 and at the time there were only two colleges in the UK which did turf culture and one of them was Leeds College of Art and Technology while the other was in Scotland. The college was in easy reach of my home so for three years I was able to study three nights a week and one half day for which the club gave me time off. It provided me with the foundations for my whole career.”

It also saw the beginnings of a friendship which was to last for over half a century.

“It was while at college that I met Jim Arthur who was working for the STRI at the time and who was one of the lecturers brought in by the college,” said Gordon. Friendship with the legendary agronomist lasted until Jim’s death at the age of 84, in 2004, and ironically saw the pair of them living just a few miles from each other in Devon – Gordon in Churston and Jim in Budleigh Salterton. Following his time at Dore and Totley Gordon joined the Army and the Liverpool Regiment where he served in Korea along with another well known BIGGA figure, the late Bert Cross, and when he got back his grandfather told him that he was to take up a job at Royal Birkdale.

“I was told I was going. I wasn’t asked. Going to an Open venue was his idea, his feeling being that I’d worked on a parkland and that I should learn how to work on a links course.”

As career advice goes it couldn’t have been much better, as having Royal Birkdale on his CV was the passport to what was to come.

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Scott MacCallum catches up with, Gordon Child, the latest recipient of BIGGA’s Lifetime Achievement Award.
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“It was at Royal Birkdale for quite a while, never more than an Assistant, but I built up my knowledge base.”

Gordon left Birkdale to become Head Greenkeeper at Blackburn Golf Club but before long moved south to St George’s Hill, in Weybridge.
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host to a number of events Rickmansworth Council. Municipal course on behalf of Gordon also managed the local courts and the gardens, while golf courses as well as the tennis move. “I long time make up my mind to Moor Park came in it took me a long time to make up my mind close to the country at the time – Moor Park, in the middle of the biggest clubs in the country... It was very hard to leave.” I met Eric Sykes there and he came and spoke to me about Churston played Moor Park and when I retired from the club, he said, “I’m the guy who saved your life and I’ve been hearing about your golf so I must have done a good job!” Marion had encouraged him to take up golf again and Churston initially gave him a handicap of 12. It was cut in half by the end of 1987, appropriately at the Open at St Andrews in 1960 and the Centenary Championships – the Centenary

The following year Gordon became BIGGA National Chairman and he is still the only man to date to have held the position for two years. Highlights during that time was the Duke Of York officially opening of BIGGA HOUSE in 1998 and being Captain of the Rest of the World team for the Ryder International Cup in Atlanta, Georgia, that same year. “I’ve got so many wonderful memories of my time as Chairman and particularly meeting so many great and wonderful people. “I remember some superb trips to the American and Canadian Conferences and meeting motivational speakers, Frank Dick and Simon Weston at Harrogate. “Frank Dick’s speech is still the best I’ve ever heard,” said Gordon who continued to be BIGGA’s representative on the GTC and the Region’s Education Officer for several years after his Chairmanship.

Another one of the coincidences which have followed Gordon through his life occurred when he retired. “I took over from Jock Millar, at Moor Park and when I retired from Churston Jock’s son, Kelvin, took over from me. “The families have both been close and I have to say Kelvin has done a wonderful job since he took over. Since retiring Gordon has had his fair share of health issues and now boasts a new knee in one leg and a new hip in the other while he is a superb advert for a Plymouth-based Scottish heart surgeon from whom his quadruple by-pass represented 286 successful operations in a row. “I was playing in the final of the Devon Seniors at Pepper Tor recently when a friend came over and said that a guy wanted to meet me. “I went over and he looked familiar but I couldn’t place him. “Then he said, ‘I’m the guy who saved your life and I’ve been hearing about your golf so I must have done a good job!’ Marion had encouraged him to take up golf again and Churston initially gave him a handicap of 12. It was cut in half by the end of 1987, appropriately at

As he looks back on a life full of enjoyment and achievement is it any wonder that smile is never far away?

Indeed, the quality of his golf saw him play off +2 in his prime and compete in two Open Championships - the Centenary Open at St Andrews in 1966 and the next year later, appropriately at Royal Birkdale. As he prepares to enter his 80s Gordon will have another shot to play with so that achievement will go on for some time to come.

“My final golfing ambition was to be playing to single figures when I hit 80 so I think I’m going to make it,” said the man who still plays three times a week, often 36 holes in a day, and only on a rare bad day does he fail to beat his age. Marion Child
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We were members, but once you class estate and a lot of celebrities were playing. it was a great help to me. We were somehow.

were some playing a ball from off the television somehow. I watched Seve play the greatest week. He was on a severe downslope with the hole cut just over a bunker on the 17th but he sized it up following week we all tried to play the shot and no-one could keep the ball on the green never mind anywhere close to the hole," recalled Gordon, who also remembered Greg Norman playing a ball from off the television
game.

After six years, six tournaments and, at the age of 50, Gordon accepted the job which was to see him through to his retirement and provide him with home for the next 30 years of his life. "The Chairman of Green at Churston played Moor Park and came and spoke to me about coming down to Devon."

"The timing was right because if I had stayed at Moor Park I wouldn't have had the time to get involved with BIGGA or the other work I've been able to so since," said Gordon.

Gordon was on the Board of the BIGGA when the amalgamation talks started in the mid 80s and was actually delivering a paper on Parkland Golf at a St Andrews conference, chaired by Walter Woods, when the R&A got involved in bringing the BIGGA, EIGGA and SIGGA together with a view to forming what became BIGGA.

When it became a reality in 1987 Gordon, ably assisted by wife, Marion, who has been a constant companion, became a volunteer Regional Administrator for the SW and South Wales and remains so until the role became a salaries position in 1997.

He is particularly proud of the Westurf Show, at Loring Ashton Golf Club, which ran for 10 years and which ensured that the Region was financially secure for many years. Another success was the creation of the Cannington College golf course for which he was a key mover, all was also Jim of the great and, another close friend, golf course architect, Martin Hawtree.

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Marion had encouraged him to take up golf again and Churston initially gave him a handicap of 12. It was cut in half by the end of the first season and he is currently standing at 4, with his 80th birthday in May. "My final golfing ambition was to be playing to single figures when I hit 80 so I think I'm going to make it," said the man who still plays three times a week, often 36 holes in a day, and only on a rare bad day does he fail to beat his age. Marion Child

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