In December’s GI (shown inset) we featured Alan Kite, Head Greenkeeper at Sutton Coldfield GC, who had marked 50 years of service at the club. Remarkably he’s not alone, as another terrific servant to the industry was honoured at BTME.

Billy’s good friend Brian Summers added: “I have known him for a good many years and we have grown old together; I wish him all the luck for the future.”

Billy Mitchell has worked at Perranporth Golf Club in Cornwall for half a century and this achievement was a highlight of the South West and South Wales ‘get-together’ in Harrogate. He’s been a key member of the BRGBA Devon and Cornwall sections since its inception in 1977, and has been happy to remain in the background working away to help the section run smoothly.

He is well known in the BRGBA family and has made lots of friends through his many trips to Harrogate to visit BTME. He and his brother John, who has now retired from green keeping, were given Life Membership of the association for all the work they have done to promote BRGBA and the Devon and Cornwall section.

They have also been on the Open Support teams throughout the country and hugely enjoyed themselves assisting with the smooth running of the world famous tournament and also mingling with top professional golfers.

Billy is an assessor and helped set up the Duchy College training programme and remains very much involved with the assessing and education of trainees.

He’s also involved with the Links Forum for South Wales and the South West. The promoting of pure links golf is Billy’s passion and he will talk to anyone who is interested on the subject, giving them his knowledge he has gained after 50 years at one of the most unusual links golf courses in the country at Perranporth. He has no immediate plans to retire.

Two hugely prominent members of the greenkeeping fraternity became the latest recipients of the coveted BRGBA Life Membership at the recent BTME show. John Philip MBE (right) and Chris Kennedy (above left, with Walter Wood) were unanimously awarded the accolade - which less than 50 greenkeepers have ever received – at BRGBA’s AGM, joining an illustrious list.

John will forever be associated with his work at Carnoustie, where his tireless work brought The Open Championship back to the famous links. He even had the 11th hole on the Championship course named after him after 27 years of service.

Despite retiring last year he remains highly active in the industry and gave a fascinating presentation focusing on the history of the Open Championship and modern course performance guidelines during BRGBA’s educational programme at BTME.

Commenting on joining the likes of Walter Woods and Jack McMillan MBE on the roll call of BRGBA Life Members, John said: “It’s a fantastic honour to receive such an accolade from your peers. I didn’t know anything about it until it happened at the AGM so it was quite unexpected. I’m sure a few people knew about it but they managed to keep it quiet!”

Chris Kennedy spent 22 years as Golf Courses Manager at Wentworth Club until his retirement last summer. During his tenure he was responsible for presenting the courses for a staggering 52 professional events, and renovated the West Course in partnership with Ernie Els.

He was also presented with Life Membership at BTME and is now looking to pass on the valuable know-how to younger greenkeepers in an advisory capacity.

Chris said: “Both John and I have done wonders to raise the profile of greenkeeping through sheer excellence throughout their careers.

‘They’ve also helped to inspire many young greenkeepers, many of whom have gone on to enjoy terrific careers themselves.

“The accolade of BRGBA Life Membership is only awarded to a select few, they are both hugely deserving of it and I congratulate them warmly.”

We were saddened to hear of the death of Mervin Downing, former Head Greenkeeper at Aldenham Golf & Country Club, earlier this year. Here’s Peter Hodgkinson, Bench manager at George Brown’s in Chesham, with a tribute to his great friend.

“Greenkeeping recently lost one of the good guys. I first met Mervin Downing 40 plus years ago one evening at Aldenham for a meeting of the BRGBA London section.

“I remember we attended various educational seminars at the club - one by a young Jim McKenzie with a slideshow of improvements carried out at Wentworth Golf Club. Afterwards we would of course retire to the bar and the company was always convivial, with Brian Anderson, Martin Smith, John Edwards, Norman Edey, Jeremy Hill, Michael Peters, David Low, Don Wilson, Derek Mason, Alex Low, Mervin, Alan Moffat of Parkers, Dennis South of Rigby Taylor and many others. By the end of the evening it always seemed to bechatting happily with Mervin. I was always comfortable in his company - a capable, hardworking man who understood the countryside, liked a pint and a cigarette and a chat. Mervin joined Aldenham in 1967 and worked with Dave Knight and Graham Pooler under the direction of Head Greenkeeper Alec Low. Always cheerful, Mervin was good company.

“Mervin loved all aspects of shooting, vermin control on the golf course, pigeon shooting on the neighbouring farmland and of course the pheasant shoot he set up.

“When Alec Low retired in 1995 Mervin was promoted to Head Greenkeeper. In 2009 after 14 years in charge Mervin stepped down, and he continued as course mechanic. He was now able to spend more time with his wife Jenny, daughters Samantha and Natalie and grandchildren John, Molly and Peri. Sadly illness was to strike but Mervin endured the treatment with great stoicism. He passed away on 1 January 2013, and will be missed by all who knew him.”