

"LIFETIME'S SERVICE TO GOLF"

*Our President takes his place in
"The Birmingham Post's"*

"Midland Portrait Gallery"

A GOLF administrator who obtained so much pleasure and satisfaction from playing the game that "I wanted to put something back into it" is Mr. Carl Bretherton, a former Midland Amateur Champion and member of the England team, who has been President of the Warwickshire Union of Golf Clubs since 1936 and of the Handsworth Golf Club since 1951.

His interest in golf began at the Handsworth Club in 1900, when he was only eight years old. He was introduced to the club by Mr. C. A. Palmer, with whom the young Carl lived after his father had died. He was the youngest of four boys who were members of the club at that time, the others being three young members of the Holmes family, Jack, Joe and Don.

"By the time I was 17 I was becoming proficient at the game and was ready to start specialising", Mr. Bretherton says. In the next four years he reduced his handicap from 13 to plus 2, and in 1913 won the Midland Counties' team competition for Handsworth in company with Mr. C. A. Palmer and Mr. F. C. Carr. In that same year he took part in the Amateur Championship for the first time, progressing through four rounds at St. Andrews.

During the 1914-18 War, Mr. Bretherton, engaged in war work in a factory because he had been declared unfit for military service, had no opportunity to play golf. "I hardly touched a club for the four years", he says. "It took me some little time to get going again, for I was not in very good health".

It was in that period immediately after the war that he achieved his greatest successes, however. In 1919 he travelled to Portrush to take part in the Irish Open Amateur Championship and won the event against strong opposition.

With typical modesty, Mr. Bretherton explained: "Of course, I was lucky in the early rounds. The standard of play was not all that high. The third round was the worst from the playing point of view, for I went out in about 42 and was still all square. Then I won the next five holes, which made it look good."

His semi-final victim was Ernest (later Sir Ernest) Holderness, who subsequently won the Amateur Championship twice during the next four years and also represented Great Britain with distinction in several Walker Cup matches. Mr. Bretherton was a convincing winner, by 5 and 4.

In the 36-holes final he met Tommy Armour, who went on to play for Great Britain against the United States in 1921 before turning professional and taking up residence in America in 1924. Armour then represented the United States against Great Britain in a professional match in 1926—the year before the Ryder Cup competition was introduced—and came here to win the Open Championship at Carnoustie in 1931.

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After the first 18 holes, Mr. Bretherton was two up, but when he was bunkered at the 28th Armour drew level for the first time since the start. As so often happens after such a hard tussle, Armour then relaxed slightly, however, and Mr. Bretherton took the next four holes in par figures and went on to win by 4 and 3.

In 1920 and again in 1921 Mr. Bretherton won the Midland Counties' Amateur Championship, and was chosen to represent England against Scotland each year from 1922 to 1925. When the Home International Championships were introduced in 1932, Mr. Bretherton was selected to be the non-playing captain of the English side, and also led the team in each of the next two years.

Long before that time, he had begun to take an interest in the administrative side of the game, becoming Honorary Secretary of the Handsworth Club, and assisting the Midland Counties' Association and the Warwickshire Union.

In 1924 the formation of the English Golf Union took place, and for the next 33 years Mr. Bretherton was one of Warwickshire's representatives on that Union. He has held the presidency of the Warwickshire Union of Golf Clubs since 1936, a year in which he was also President of the Midland Counties' Golf Association. He has been a Vice-President of the Professional Golfers' Association since 1928.

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Meanwhile, he had been taking an increasing interest in the subject of greenkeeping, and in 1929 joined the Board of Greenkeeping Research. In 1945 he was asked to become its Chairman, and held that position for nine years. Since then he has been Vice-Chairman and has also been made a Vice-President. About ten years ago the basis of the greenkeeping research constitution was altered to bring in other games and the name of the organisation was changed to the Sports Turf Research Institute.

Among others, the English Bowling Association asked for advice from this non-profit-making concern. "I would like to pay my own tribute to a Director of the Institute, Mr. R. B. Dawson", Mr. Bretherton says. "Nearly everything I know about turf I have learned from him and his staff".

His work in this connection brought Mr. Bretherton in close touch with groundsmen and with the playing fields movement. Thus it was not surprising that his election to the presidency of the Midland Section of the British Golf Greenkeepers' Association came in 1938. He became President of the Association in 1955 and still holds both offices.

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Having such views, it was natural that he should devote much of his time to the public golf courses in the Midlands, and he has done valuable work as honorary technical adviser to the City of Birmingham, borough of Sutton Coldfield, borough of Smethwick and borough of Solihull for municipal courses.

His comparisons between golf of 40 years ago and now are most interesting and his advice to young players is sound. "I started young, which I think is an

enormous advantage—not only in playing, but in the judging of distances", he says. "I had every encouragement and assistance from the older members of the club with whom I played".

"I was also fortunate as to the course on which I played. Then they were not so uniformly good as they are now, but at Handsworth, Sandwell Park, Little Aston and Hollinwell the ground was always clear, for they are on gravelly subsoil.

"There was nothing like the number of big events, and in my day the game was all learned locally. The club and county matches were the most important part of the training, and all the matches consisted of 18 holes singles played in the afternoons. They did not last the whole day as is the case now.

"Young players should have some tuition to start them along the right lines, but they can be over-coached. They may need a check-up with the professional occasionally, but I don't think they should be constantly coached. It is essential for them to have some individual qualities.

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"Practice should take an intelligent form rather than be in quantity, for I think more people practise too much than too little. It is quite unnecessary to be knocking balls about all the time. If you have the right method, you don't need a lot of practice."

Mr. Bretherton, of course, learned his golf when there were no matched sets of irons with steel shafts. In his day, hickory shafts were in use, and one had to adapt one's strokes to suit the club. It is, therefore, pertinent to recall that the aspect of the game for which he gained the greatest renown was his extraordinary accuracy from positions up to 170 yards from the hole. He was also a consistent putter, and in putting, the state of the player's mind becomes more important than for any other stroke on the course.

A tall, lean, bespectacled man, Mr. Bretherton has thus devoted most of his life to golf and the analysis of turf and the men who work on the preparation of it. These subjects have become more than hobbies—they are his life.

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