

Elliott Small is BIGGA's New National Chairman and Scott MacCallum sat down at BTME to find out a little bit more about him...

Small beginnings

The honour of being BIGGA's National Chairman for the Year 2000 has fallen to one of the best known faces in British greenkeeping.

Elliott Small, who was helped into the famous red blazer by outgoing Chairman, Gordon Child, at this year's AGM, will lead the Association for the next 12 months and there can be few who would doubt his credentials for doing the job.

Like his predecessor, Elliott is a former Regional Administrator - holding the Scottish position until relatively recently - and as a result knows the workings of the Association, and all of the personalities within it, like the back of his hand.

"I was absolutely delighted when Gordon asked me to be his Vice Chairman, although I was a little apprehensive about what it meant - Gordon is a tough act to follow. He's had a number of tough situations to handle and has dealt with everything that has been thrown at him extremely well," said Elliott, as he grabbed a few quite moments during this year's BTME.

"I'm hoping that I have a comfortable year and that everything runs smoothly," he added.

Although well aware of the honour Elliott did have to think carefully about accepting the Vice Chairmanship - which automatically leads on to becoming Chairman.

"My first thought was that I couldn't do it while still a working greenkeeper, such is the amount of time that today's National Chairman has to devote to the role. It would also involve my club backing me 100%, otherwise it would not have been possible," said Elliott, who has been Head Greenkeeper at Tulliallan Golf Club in Kincardine-on-Forth, in Central Scotland, for the last 23 years.

Elliott talked it through with wife, Edna, who is as much a recognisable face in British greenkeeping as her husband, and she encouraged him to go for it.

"Originally I'd felt that if I ever was to be Chairman it would be like Gordon, when I was retired, but as Edna said I could be forgotten about in five years time."

He then spoke with his Green's Convener who was fully supportive

and he subsequently put the matter to the full committee.

"My Green's Convener was also Vice Captain as well so he'll be Club Captain at the same time as I'm Chairman. The committee supported me and said I could have the time off I needed to do the job."

BIGGA's new Chairman was born in Galashiels, in the Scottish Borders, into a greenkeeping family.

"My father, Bob, was the greenkeeper/pro at Galashiels Golf Club for 32 years. My brother, George, took over from him and was there for the next 30 years."

Now you would expect that with such a pedigree Elliott's future as a greenkeeper was preordained. But that is not the case.

"My father tried to put me off the profession initially. He didn't want me to become a greenkeeper because there wasn't any money in greenkeeping, or professional golf, at that time. Although I did work with him briefly after I'd left school."

Elliott had been a keen sportsman during his time at school. As well as golf he was a fine rugby player representing South of Scotland Schoolboys as a wing forward alongside a legendary rugby figure, and fellow Galashiels Academy pupil, Jim Telfer, the former Scottish and British Lion's coach.

Discouraged from greenkeeping it was to one of the Scottish border's famed industries that Elliott turned for employment and the tweed industry.

"I spent almost five years as an apprentice designer in the tweed mills designing skirts, travelling rugs, scarves, jackets... anything that is made out of tweed."

He left after completing four and a half years of a five year apprenticeship.

"My father retired and decided he would go out to New Zealand to see my sister who lived out there. I decided I wanted to go as well."

After Small Senior had been in New Zealand a few months the local golf club asked if he would take over the shop and he did that for another 10 years in his "retirement"

Elliott got a job driving a truck and worked in the golf shop or on the course in the afternoons.

"I'd start work at about 5am and deliver bread to the country stores and when I finished at 12 noon I'd go straight to the golf course to work on the course and hit balls.

"At that stage I had aspirations of becoming a professional golfer. I used to enjoy working on the course but I was very keen to play golf and I got down to a handicap of 1."

He also had a brush with another couple of golfers who did make a decent fist of becoming professionals.

"I actually played in the first tournament that Bob Charles ever won as a professional. The New Zealand Open was held at Invercargill Golf Club and on the Sunday after it finished our club, Queen's Park on the other side of the city, held a pro-am to which some of the top pros and amateurs in the country were invited. I was invited as one of the four of five up and coming players. Another Open Champion, Kel Nagle, also played in the tournament," said Elliott, who still retains the programme of the event as a souvenir.

Having met Edna before he first went to New Zealand they kept writing and Elliott returned to Scotland in 1963 and they were married the following year.

They went straight back out to New Zealand for another two years before the lure of the home country brought them back.

Another potential career almost snared Elliott on his return as he spent a few months working for an electronic's company before a greenkeeping job emerged working with his brother at Galashiels.

After Galashiels, Elliott worked at Hartsbourne Country Club, in Bushy Heath, before taking on the job of Greenkeeper/Pro/Club Master at the nine hole Torwoodlee in Galashiels.

"We did everything. Edna did the catering while I used to start at 6am out on the course - I had one person to cut the fairways in the summer - come back in and work in the shop and then the bar. We never finished before midnight," he recalled.

With the arrival of children, a move to something less time consuming was deemed necessary and Elliott was appointed First Assistant at Ralston

Elliott dons the
prized Chairman's
jacket, helped by
Past Chairman,
Gordon Child

Golf Club with the promise of the Head Greenkeeper's position when the incumbent retired.

"He retired quicker than we originally thought so I took over only about nine months later. I was there for six years before moving to Tulliallan in 1977."

He has always been heavily involved in the greenkeeping Associations during his time in the profession.

"I joined the East Section of SIGGA in 1977 when I was at Torwoodlee and when I went to Ralston I joined the committee. I was West Section Chairman when I moved to Tulliallan," said Elliott.

"I realised then that there was room for another Section so started up the Central Section in 1980 and was Secretary for the first two and a half years before eventually becoming Chairman."

Elliott took over as Regional Administer from Chris Kennedy in 1990 when Chris moved to Wentworth and worked in tandem with Edna for the next seven years before the part time appointment of Peter Boyd.

Elliott has gone for another experienced man for his Vice Chairman in the shape of Clive Osgood, of Walton Heath.

"I've always had a lot of admiration for Clive. He's a gentleman who has the best interests of the Association at heart. I think he'll do a good job."

As he settles into the role Elliott is very clear on one thing he'd like to achieve.

"I'd like to see the growth in the Association continue in membership terms. But the one thing I'd really like to see, and I don't think we will have arrived as an Association until it happens, is the greenkeeper sitting at the top table of a dinner alongside the Club Professional and the Secretary. Usually you find the greenkeeper sitting in the body of the hall and I'd like to see golf club members understanding the importance of their greenkeeper."

With Elliott Small at the helm for the next 12 months you can be sure that the Association will move closer to that goal.

