

Major American Award for Walter Woods

Neil Thomas writes an appreciation of BIGGA's first Chairman

'How fitting it is that as we celebrate GCSAA's 75th year of existence we recognise a person who was entrusted with maintaining the birthplace of golf. Walter Woods has given much to the game and the golf course superintendent profession. We are pleased to honour Walter for his lifelong commitment to golf.'

**GCSAA President
 Tommy D. Witt, CGCS**

Below: Presentation of the BEM - Walter, Lord Elgin, and BIGGA Chairman at the time, George Malcolm

Centre: Walter in younger days with Glen Campbell, Ben Crenshaw and Jack Nicklaus

It was with much pleasure that BIGGA received the news that Walter Woods has been selected to receive the 2002 Old Tom Morris Award from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America during that Association's 73rd International Golf Course Conference and Show in Orlando next February. GCSAA's most prestigious honour is presented each year to an individual who 'through a continuing lifetime commitment to the game of golf has helped to mould the welfare of the game in a manner and style exemplified by Old Tom Morris'. As well as being the professional and golf course custodian at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, Old Tom (1821-1908) was a four-time winner of the Open

(1861, '62, '64 and '67) and ranked as one of the top links designers of the 19th Century.

It is a fitting time then for us to pay tribute to Walter's services to the greenkeeping profession as well as to BIGGA. For many years now he has been regarded as one of the leading figures in British greenkeeping. Although officially 'retired', this is an incongruous term to apply to Walter as he continues in a consultancy role and is still hugely influential with his advice and guidance to greenkeepers and within BIGGA where he remains on the Board of Management in his capacity as a Guardian. When one recalls that he was BIGGA's first Chairman in 1987, it is surely testimony to his dedication and commitment that he remains so actively involved with the Association today.

I first came to know Walter when appointed Executive Director of BIGGA in 1987. My first impression was of his total enthusiasm for the cause and it did not take me long to conclude that I was to have the privilege of working with one who was at the very pinnacle of his profession. In a large member organisation, concern is for the individual and Walter stands out in this regard, ever willing to support and guide the greenkeeper, whether young or old, in times of adversity. Generations of greenkeepers have benefited in this regard as have those privileged enough to have received training under Walter's supervision. Practical training on the golf course at St Andrews where he was Links Supervisor for 21 years has produced many fine greenkeepers who now occupy top positions within the game, while Walter's work at Elmwood College in Fife was instrumental in raising the standards of greenkeeper education. He has been a major contributory force in establishing that college as one of our leading greenkeeper training colleges. Today, greenkeepers can gain first class qualifications and commensurate salaries and conditions of service. Much of the good work for this

enhancement of status can be traced back to the seventies and eighties when Walter and a few like-minded professionals grasped the nettle in leading the way as far as greenkeeper education and training were concerned. Their pioneering work led on to the structure which has produced the trained professional greenkeepers ever more apparent within the game today. In the past 20 years the greenkeeping profession within the United Kingdom has been transformed from a 'know your place' attitude to greenkeepers within many golf clubs to today when those working within the profession enjoy a status commensurate with their technical skills, knowledge, qualifications and dedication. To this changed scenario, Walter has contributed so much.

At St Andrews, Walter hosted numerous tournaments including four Open Championships and 11 Dunhill Cups and he remains an instantly recognisable figure to whom you are immediately directed on mention of his name. He is a true and worthy successor to Old Tom Morris,



Right: Two old friends and the first two Chairmen of BIGGA. Jack McMillan MBE and Walter Woods BEM

Bottom: The essential partnership - Caroline and Walter

Previous Old Tom Morris Award Winners:

- 1983 Arnold Palmer
- 1984 Bob Hope
- 1985 Gerald Ford
- 1986 Patty Berg
- 1987 Robert Trent Jones, Sr.
- 1988 Gene Sarazen
- 1989 Chi Chi Rodriguez
- 1990 Sherwood Moore, CGCS
- 1991 William C. Campbell
- 1992 Tom Watson
- 1993 Dinah Shore
- 1994 Byron Nelson
- 1995 Dr. James R. Watson
- 1996 Tom Fazio
- 1997 Ben Crenshaw
- 1998 Ken Venturi
- 1999 Jaime Ortiz-Patiño
- 2000 Nancy Lopez
- 2001 Tim Finchem

not only as a former 'Keeper of the Green' on the links of the Old Course at St Andrews, but in the legacy he will leave for the greenkeeping profession and the game of golf as was the case with Old Tom. As did his revered predecessor, he has taken greenkeeping forward albeit in different times and perhaps a world apart from Old Tom's days. However, the profession must continually evolve in line with the game and its increasing demands and expectations in relation to course maintenance and presentation. Walter is at the forefront in this regard in the finest tradition of Old Tom Morris.

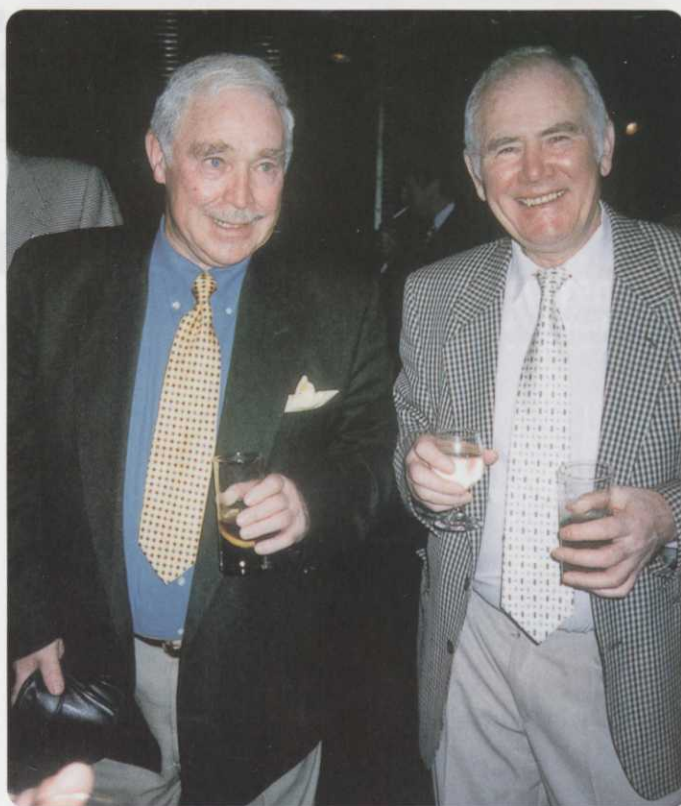
Walter had already served as President and Director of Education for the Scottish and International Golf Greenkeepers Association when he first took up the reins as the first Chairman of BIGGA in 1987. He had an unenviable task. The preceding two years, at the instigation of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, had finally seen the coming together of three previous greenkeeping Associations - the British, the English and International and the Scottish

and International to form the new British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association. These had been difficult times before the three previously volunteer led Associations finally united to form the first professional Association for greenkeepers in the United Kingdom. Walter was charged with the task of establishing the new Association and he spared no effort in this regard. BIGGA inherited 1200 members from the old Associations and today it has some 7300 members worldwide. Walter's work in BIGGA's formative years was crucial and I personally owe much to his wise counsel and leadership in those early days. We worked closely together and the embryo Association set off on a rapid growth curve. Moving through the intervening years, BIGGA today has its own national headquarters, employs 21 staff and has members in some 32 countries. As a professional body within the game of golf, BIGGA now stands shoulder to shoulder with its fellow organisations in the United Kingdom. This is a tremendous source of pride to Walter and BIGGA owes much to his drive and influence during the past 15 years.

In reflecting on BIGGA as an international Association, it is pertinent to reflect on Walter's global outlook. He has long viewed greenkeeping from a world perspective, has visited many countries and spoken to numerous greenkeeping and allied bodies on greenkeeping and his own experiences. He has spread the word abroad and I would venture to suggest that his influence stretches far beyond our own shores to many distant places.

Walter would be the last to extol his golfing achievements but they are significant. He has won many Championships, played at County level and been a scratch golfer. He has been able to bring the golfer's perspective to his role as a greenkeeper and this has been greatly beneficial both in his own career and latterly during his role as a consultant.

At home in St Andrews, the wel-



come to visitors is unsurpassed. Countless numbers of greenkeepers and their families have enjoyed the hospitality of Walter and Caroline. Guests have lifelong memories of playing the Old Course with Walter and learning much of greenkeepers and greenkeeping in the process. It is always 'open house' as far as Walter is concerned. Walter is never afraid to voice his opinions within the game of golf and has always promoted the greenkeeping profession in membership of influential committees within the R&A at St Andrews and elsewhere. His kindly and considerate manner masks a fierce determination to protect and enhance his profession. At times he may be perceived to move in 'mysterious ways' but I have long since realised that, with his intimate knowledge of all matters golf and greenkeeping and of the powers that be, his tried and trusted methods have stood the test of time and they work.

Essentially Walter has a love and passion for greenkeeping and the game of golf which come second only to his family. His integrity and concern for his fellow men are widely acknowledged and he was recognised in 1991 for his contributions to golf and greenkeeping when he received the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. Now he is a most worthy recipient of the Old Tom Morris Award. Within BIGGA and the profession in the United Kingdom, there will indeed be much pleasure derived in learning that the GCSAA's most prestigious honour has been given to Walter and he joins a role call of illustrious names who have previously received this Award.

For me it has been a great privilege to have known and to have worked so closely with Walter in the development and progress of BIGGA and to have enjoyed his company and friendship throughout the years.

