



Andy Campbell MG CGCS - A Qualified Success

Scott MacCallum profiles Andy Campbell, who will lead the Association for the next 12 months

BIGGA has been blessed with some outstanding Chairmen since its inception in 1987 but in the 2004 Chairman the Association can honestly claim to have secured the services of a man whose qualifications are second to none.

Andy Campbell MG CGCS, Golf Courses and Estates Manager for De Vere Carden Park, is the only British greenkeeper to hold those two qualifications and is the living embodiment of how the education and training available to today's greenkeepers can open doors to, previously out of reach, employment opportunities and ensure the pressures inherent in those jobs can be met successfully.

For a 42 year-old to have achieved such an important role at such a prestigious resort as Carden Park - in addition to being in charge of the 30 greenkeeping staff he is also responsible for the team of pros, the starters and the rangers as well as being the Chairman of the Golf Club - you would imagine it to have been an unhindered march to the top of the career tree. However, the truth is far from the case and resembles more of a game of Snakes and Ladders, including a six year period out of the greenkeeping business altogether and a spell away from Carden Park when the Resort fell into receivership. It says all you need to know about Andy's strength of character, as well as the uncertain times in which we live.

"Recently I met up with Richard McGlynn, an Irish lad who used to work for me and who is currently working in Austria. Over a pint he said 'You might not be the most talented greenkeeper I've ever seen, but you are the most persistent.' I don't know if it was a compliment or not but I think I know what he means," said Andy, as we sat in the splendid clubhouse which overlooks the 18th hole of the Cheshire Course, the first of the two built at Carden Park. The other being the Nicklaus.

"That's the way I would sum it up 'Persistence'. I've always had the ability to get up, dust myself down and get on with it."

When it came to a career, greenkeeping's gain was very much the loss to two other professions and if things had turned out differently it could have been Andy Campbell's name at the top of this piece, profiling the new Chairman, and not Scott MacCallum's.

"I was a junior member at Chester Golf Club and at 16 was planning to stay on at a school and do A Levels with a view to becoming either a journalist or a banker and had gone so far as get the careers' information back from the training bodies of both," said Andy, whose journalistic interest stems from a relative who worked for The Daily Mail.

"But I'd been playing a fair bit of golf and wasn't too keen to go back to school for another two years. I'd always had a background in gardening, from my maternal grandfather who lived locally and I was



always in his greenhouse and cutting the lawn for pocket money, while my paternal grandfather was Head Gardener on an estate near Inverness."

It was around this time that a job became available as an apprentice at Chester Golf Club and Andy saw the opportunity to combine his two great interests.

"I got the job and first thing I had to do was resign from membership because in those days you couldn't do both and you weren't allowed in the clubhouse."

Chester, however, provided a superb starting point for Andy and he is particularly indebted to two individuals at the club.

"I was fortunate while I was there that Chairman of Green was Alf Jiggins, an ex City Surveyor for Chester, who'd done some golf course design work with Hawtrees. He was the man who got me involved in going to committee meetings when I'd been given the role of Senior among Equals. Len Sproston, was the Head Greenkeeper, who has recently retired, and he was one of the more forward thinking greenkeepers of the time."

With Len, Bill Lawson, Terry Adamson, Keith Holmes and Phil Davies, Andy was one of the men who took the decision to set up the North West Section of the EIGGA, much to the annoyance of many of the old BGGGA members.

He applauds the legacy, which had been left by the men who first made inroads into greenkeeper education.

"It is quite unusual for a group of people who want to move themselves forward without the pressures to do so being imposed by outside forces like business and bosses but that is what happened at the beginning. Greenkeepers have always had a thing about wanting to help themselves."

Andy left Chester in 1984 to become Course Manager at Eastham Golf Club on the Wirral, at the time a 13-hole course but when the move didn't work out he left the industry and set up his own landscaping business, employing at one time 11 people.

"In '92 my mum, who knew I wasn't particularly happy in landscaping, spotted an advert in the local paper for a Course Manager at Carden Park. It was the early 90s and it was getting increasingly difficult to get paid and there was a lot of pressure - so I applied and got the job."

They finished all the landscaping work over the next three months and Andy was back in greenkeeping, with thanks, on this occasion, to Brian Hatton, the Estates Manager, who had recognised what Andy could bring to Carden.

"The beauty of this place at the time was that it was really a big landscaping job. The golf course was halfway through construction, there was not hotel or clubhouse or even roads and I had knowledge of working with contractors and knew where corners might be cut."

All went well at the privately owned club until it went into receivership in October '94 and although initially retained Andy resigned when he was asked to compromise health and safety with a temporary maintenance facility and said he wasn't going to be responsible for working in those conditions.

He endured a miserable winter, including the '95 Harrogate, before being asked back by the Receiver as a consultant.

"I was basically last man standing when St David Hotels came in and took over. I had the keys as the Receivers had left the day before and Brian Hatton, sadly for him had been made redundant."

St David Hotel's injected the investment, which made Carden Park much of what it is today before De Vere bought over the group.

"My job role has increased as each hurdle has been jumped, the last being on January 1 when I became responsible for all the Pro Staff, the Starters and Rangers from both a financial and operational point of view."

This time his job title has remained the same "Golf Courses and Estates Manager".

"I don't feel the need to change it and if it's good enough for George Brown, it's good enough for me," said Andy, who also credits Jon Scott,

agronomist for the Nicklaus Group and the US Tour, for guiding him through some tough times particularly when it came to dealing with politics.

"He taught me only to fight the battles you have a chance of winning."

Through the growing demands of his job and the growth of Carden Park in terms of size of hotel and the construction of the Nicklaus Course, Andy studied hard to first achieve his Master Greenkeeper status in 1997 and then the CGCS (Certified Golf Course Superintendent) in 2001, becoming the only person in the country to hold both.

"I was conscious that if I could get my Master Greenkeeper certificate it would make my role more secure within the company and it was the same with the CGCS certificate as well," said Andy, who hopes Ken Seims, Course Superintendent at Loch Lomond Golf Club, the only other holder of the CGCS goes for his Master Greenkeeper, as that would make two.

"I do get some criticism for putting MG and CGCS after my name. I only do it on certain correspondence but I want people to turn round and ask what it means. It's all part of the battle to change people's perception of greenkeeping."

Surprisingly for one who has taken such advantage of the educational opportunities available to him Andy sees the biggest benefits he's had from BIGGA coming in the networking opportunities.

"Meeting people like Walter Woods, Jimmy Kidd, Bill Lawson and George Brown - I never thought I'd be the guy he'd ask to be his Vice Chairman - was great and they have influenced so many young greenkeepers," said Andy, who added that he was fortunate that he had a boss who encouraged him to go to the Conferences where he met those people.

"You used to think what would happen when those guys left the industry, that there would be nobody to take their place. But someone said 'Ah, but you'll be that guy one day'. I thought 'yeh sure' and I still don't believe that but there are other guys who have followed in their footsteps. People like Gordon Moir and Eddie Adams have come through."

So what of the Campbell year in office? What can we expect?

"Greenkeeping is a microcosm of what is happening in society today. The pace of life is so hectic it is getting more difficult to encourage people out of their homes at night for Section gatherings.

"The challenge for the Association is to find ways to serve those people and service them in new formats. That will come at a cost in terms of technology but more people are able now to use computers and there must be a way of bringing the Association, and what it offers, to more people."

He is also aware of the uncertainties the Association faces in the coming months.

"Neil (Thomas) has built a strong team at BIGGA which is capable of managing the Association and that has been borne out over the last six months and I've no doubts that John Pemberton can continue to do the job he has over the last six months.

"As to what I can do. Well, 12 months isn't very long but I hope to keep people on board and all going in the same direction. I'm always going to bang the drum for education because of what it has done for me and I do believe in it.

"You don't stop on the level of education you've reached. We're in a fast paced environment and there are going to be many challenges to face over the next few years and we're going to need the skills to deal with them."

So what has BIGGA's best-qualified greenkeeper have in mind for his own personal development?

"Well, speaking to George Brown I don't think I'll have much time for books over the next year but I do want to work towards a business administration qualification, while I also want to learn Spanish as so much of the world's greenkeeping population speaks that language."

That's a challenge he may be facing with a well-known Real Madrid player soon... the Spanish, not the Business Administration!