

William John (Jim) Burton, 1908 - 1985

Gisborne Tairāwhiti 2010 Annual Sporting Excellence Awards also honoured Jim Burton with an induction into the "legends of sport" category of the Sport Eastland Hall of Fame. Jim Burton was a very prominent name in Archery New Zealand, and still is. The Burton shoot (30 arrows at 55, 46 and 37m) was named in his honour.

He was remembered on the archery field as a very tough competitor. He also had some of the first Easton aluminium arrows and one of the first Hoyt Recurve bows in the country. He was not only good at archery, but also at rifle shooting. His prowess in both sports was enough to admit him into the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography and Te Ara, the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

He is most remembered by the Gisborne Archery Club, however, for his efforts in raising money for the Gisborne Archery Club hall.

Recognised in the 1950s as the world's greatest short-range archer, William John Burton (known as Jim) was born at Hoylake, Cheshire, England on 8 March 1908.

The second in a family of seven, at the age of one he came to New Zealand with his parents, William Armistead Burton, a merchant, and his wife, Mary Patchett.

At primary school in Hastings and then at Napier Boys' High School until 1924, Jim excelled at rugby, athletics and boxing. In the 1920s he gained regional prominence as a boxer. He also won the Hawke's Bay – Poverty Bay javelin and discus events, and competed at national level. He continued with his rugby career after leaving school and played for the Hastings High School Old Boys' Football Club into the 1930s.

Jim Burton worked for the Department of Lands and Survey from 1924, first as a clerical cadet in Wellington, before being transferred to Napier in 1925. There he qualified as a draughtsman. He returned to Wellington for a short period to reconstruct records lost during the Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931.

On 20 May 1939 Burton married Agnes Mary Reynolds, a stenographer, in Hastings. They were to have three children. In 1940 he transferred to Gisborne, where he was to earn a reputation as a highly talented lithographic draughtsman and became chief draughtsman for the Lands and Survey Department.

Burton took up rifle shooting, and went on to represent New Zealand at both fullbore and smallbore events, winning nine individual national titles. He twice won the Rifle Challenge Cup, awarded to the highest scorer in the King's or Queen's Prize final, and his possible over the 900-yard range in shocking conditions at Trentham in the 1949 event is still regarded as one of the finest feats by a New Zealand rifleman.

In 1942, frustrated by the wartime shortage of ammunition at the Gisborne Miniature Rifle Club, Burton decided to try his hand at archery. His mastery of the sport was immediate and phenomenal. In 1943 he won the first of his 12 New Zealand championship archery titles. In 1952, his fame as a marksman now almost legendary, he won the first of his six Seefab Cup titles in seven attempts. This international trophy is competed for by the world's best in a postal shoot over a double short international round. Jim Burton won again in 1953, and with his third victory retained the cup permanently. Consequently, the Swedish Archery Association donated a second Seefab Cup, only to see him make this his own property with wins in 1956, 1957 and 1959.

In all he won 11 international archery titles and 30 New Zealand titles. In 1958 he was depicted in Ripley's 'Believe It or Not!' cartoon in the New York Globe. The caption stated that Jim Burton had once scored 238 successive bull's-eyes at the regulation range of 30 yards.

His other international titles included the Olympic Bowman League title in 1946 and 1947 and the Fédération internationale de tir à l'arc mail-match in 1953, 1957 and 1958. Domestically, he lost the New Zealand Open title only once on the 13 occasions he competed between 1943 and 1960.

Jim Burton was the driving force behind a 10-year fund-raising campaign for the building of the Gisborne Archery Club. He conceived the idea of a hall, opened in 1970, which would be suitable for the sport and other community activities.

For his services to sport he was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1977, and the Ryan Memorial Medal for archery. He also received eight sporting association memberships, including those from the National Rifle Association of New Zealand (of which he was also a life member) and the National Archery Association of New Zealand. Jim Burton died in Gisborne on 6 June 1985, survived by his wife and two children.

