

DUNBAR GOLF CLUB HISTORY

Golf is recorded in the Dunbar area as far back as 1616; on the west side of the town when playing golf on the Sabbath was banned by the religious authorities of the time. This puts Dunbar among the earliest sites for golf in Scotland but it is not till 1794 that its first golfing organization is recorded. In May of this year a body known as The Dunbar Golfing Society set down its rules and listed its 27 members' names. They met to play on the West Barns links but no other record of them survives; the links there were soon commandeered by the military for use as a training and encampment area.

Not till 1856 did the town of Dunbar establish the Club we know today. In the ornate script of the time, probably that of John Jaffray, the first Club minute carefully records that on Saturday, December 20 1856, having hired Dunbar Town Hall at a cost of one shilling, six gentlemen gathered *for the purpose of forming a golf club to be called Dunbar Golf Club, under regulations to be afterwards submitted.* Capt. George Warrender of Lochend, aged 31, chaired the founder members; George was in the Coldstream Guards and later succeeded to the title of 7th Baronet of Bruntsfield. The other five founders were Capt. James Cox of the Berwickshire militia, Lt. John Stewart, William Anderson, James Brand and John Jaffray, with Jaffray elected as *convenor*, or honorary secretary. The prevalence of military titles is no surprise; by this date Dunbar had become a major garrison town.

Stewart and Brand were to *"supervise the clearing of the ground"* and Stewart was later paid just over £2 10s for his efforts. This is a significant remark, as it suggests much if not all the area was unacceptable for immediate play and so possessed no pre-existing course. The Club's meagre means also deprived them of any course architect such as we might know today, so the course was simply laid on the ground as it lay. This first course was of only 15 holes and located entirely seaward of the large wall visible today from the clubhouse; not until 37 years later would assistance from Old Tom Morris in its design arrive. The course was also very short and turned homeward at the building beside today's 7th hole known as *The Vaults*. A *call* or yearly subscription, of 5 shillings (25p) per member to defray expenses was initially set but soon needed doubling before implementation.

The Club's first official competition was in April 1857 when Warrender's wife gifted the Club's first medal, which was won Lt. Buckle in 93 strokes. The competitors then retired to the George Inn in the High Street for a dinner. In the autumn the second major competition was arranged, for the newly purchased Club Medal. The winner was Capt. Home with a score of 91. Probably the most important members in these formative years were the Duke of Roxburghe and most of his family. The Duke was ultimate owner of the links land and his wealth ensured a stable future for the embryonic golf organization and resulted in a beneficial association over the next 100 years.

By 1869 membership had reached 54, comprising mostly well-to-do East Lothian landowners, Edinburgh merchants and the upper ranks of the military. A black-ball system was operated which kept things this way. However in 1870 comes first mention of ladies' golf when an organization was created allowing their play over 12 holes on a western portion of the links. Although today's ladies' club was instituted in 1894, this earlier club is the third oldest ladies golf club yet recorded.

Soon, in 1871, the Duke was able to provide Dunbar Golf Club with its first clubhouse amid great celebrations. The building survives today at the entrance road to the course and is called Beachcote. Gradually the working staff of the Club was expanded and in 1882 the Dunbar Castle Golf Club was founded. Resembling an artisans' club, the DCGC was strictly for Dunbar residents who were unable

to afford the main Dunbar Club's fees or to survive the notorious black-ball methods. The Castle Club had an entirely separate constitution but, somewhat to the irritation of the "senior club" soon began to produce the stronger players, very often from the caddie ranks. The Castle Club prospers to this day but by now its members are required to be members of the main Club.

In 1884, Arthur Balfour, later Prime Minister, joined the main Club, soon becoming captain. This heralded a significant expansion in Club activities with droves of golfers coming to the town and its course from all over the country. More competitions and prizes proliferated and it was fashionable for wealthy holidaymakers to stay in private villas in the town for the entire summer or "season". Others moved into the town's hotels and boarding-houses and there was a daily influx of golfers arriving at the nearby railway station, the railways often laying on popular excursion trains especially. In 1891 the Merchants Cup was launched by businessmen in the town to lure in as large a field of golfers onto the East Links as possible and the excitement generated made it the chief event of the year.

In 1894 the Ladies club of today was launched with its premier trophy being the Crooke medal, gifted by a wealthy Edinburgh photographer, which is still played for today. Among its earliest famous players was Hilda Mather who reached the semi-final of the British Ladies Championship twice. The popularity of the course among ladies and gentlemen alike soon produced a frequent "block on the green" and pressures soon mounted to lengthen the course. The latest *Haskell* golf-balls flew much further, the demand for Sunday golf was increasing and Tom Morris was called in 1894 to alter several holes (the course was enlarged to 18 by now). Still the numbers grew, resulting in a new clubhouse in 1902 that is in use to this very day. Eventually pressure also grew to the point where the Club applied to the Duke of Roxburghe for permission to incorporate some of his adjacent Broxmouth Park into the course. With his consent, a part of his former deer park permitted four new holes in 1905 (these are the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 18th today). By the time of the Club's jubilee, held at the St George Hotel in 1907, golf's appeal in the town was never higher.

One of the best ways to promote a golf course in these years was to host a professional challenge match and between 1903 and 1913 the greatest players of the day, including Herd, Braid, Vardon, Ray, J H Taylor, Fernie and Massy all came to Dunbar with huge crowds in tow. However, the massive appeal of golf to Edwardians was brought to a juddering halt by events in 1914, when the nation went to war.

The years 1914-18 saw the Club forced into a drastic financial austerity and urgent pleas for donations and debentures were issued; these just enabled the organization to survive and changes in the country's social fabric, caused by the tumult of war, began to affect town life. The Castle club, for example, began to feature much more in the mainstream of the senior Club. Slowly, the holiday traffic returned and, most importantly, radical course changes were agreed. Between 1922-24 Ben Sayers and James Braid greatly lengthened the course by striking out south near Whitesands beach and onto the Long Bank (where today's 9th fairway is), They also consolidated the six fishermen's cottages into a single building (seen today beside the 7th green), known as the Vaults. Previously golf play had actually gone through the back gardens of these cottages. The changes were announced with two challenge matches that brought Open champions Duncan, Braid, Havers, Whitcombe and Ray to visit. The course's length and design were to survive largely unchanged to this day; a testament to its durability and trickiness.

The formation of the Scottish Golf Union saw all clubs conforming to standard par (rather than bogey) measures and a previously rather haphazard handicap system was made consistent across the nation's courses. The Dunbar club was also anxious to claim the premier local golf honours, known as The County Cup, which, surprisingly for such a prominent club, had eluded them for decades. Dunbar's best players, including Willie Cowe, Bill Sharpe and Charles Rowe, would occasionally reach the final but still the title eluded them. Meanwhile, in 1932 the Club successfully hosted the Scottish Amateur Championship, with Jack McLean taking top spot, and the Castle club celebrated its jubilee with a keenly fought match against the senior Club.

After an immediate post-war boom, high unemployment hit Dunbar in the early 1930s and the Club's finances reflected the severity of the economic circumstances. The club noted with concern the falling visitor takings and this, among other pressures, eventually saw the ban on Sabbath golf lifted in 1938. Robert Auld, the club's professional for 37 years, passed away in 1939 to be replaced by Andrew Dishington, of a well-known Gullane golfing family. However, very soon, Andrew was to be called up to join the armed forces in the global conflict and the club was once more, under secretary John Brooke, called upon to tighten the purse-strings for many years. The course during World War Two was very much part of "The Front Line" in the battle against Hitler's Germany. The entire nearby shoreline was turned into a formidable defence line with minefields, concrete blocks, gun batteries, barbed wire and anti-invasion obstacles littering the precious turf. Peculiar local golf rules were brought in for these items to enable some kind of play but substantial compensation claims were necessary, sent from the club to the War Office for a time when peace might return. For now, the course, was maintained by a skeleton staff and everyone concerned was asked to make drastic sacrifices as part of the wider war contingencies.

In 1945, with war drawing to a close, secretary Brooke passed away but, guided by his prudent hand, the Club had secured the financial future of the club admirably. There was a prolonged return to normality as the town and country reckoned with the losses of human life and food rationing which continued for considerable time after the declaration of peace. Dishington returned to operate as greenkeeper/professional, staying in *Beachcote* and the competition calendar expanded once more. One of Dishington's early tasks was to create the short 5th hole we know today and move the 4th green to the shore-side. In 1950 the Club decided upon its first Club Championship, at the suggestion of stalwart member Charlie Mungall with Douglas Barlas generously offering up a trophy; first winner was Pat Butler of East Linton.

In an effort to stimulate both its golf and the Dunbar economy the idea of a *Dunbar Golf Week* was devised in 1952 by the town's hoteliers and boarding-house operators. This proved an instant hit and included a popular professional tournament, the first winner being Irishman Harry Bradshaw. Things were not all plain sailing, however; golf as a national sport seemed to sink into a minor depression and in Dunbar, the most obvious consequence was that in 1957, at last, the Castle Club and the senior Club dissolved the boundaries between them. This was a year that saw the Castle club reach the County Cup final and so the long wait for success went on.

1960 saw perhaps the most important change the club and the town's last 100 years when the Duke of Roxburghe disposed of his entire Dunbar landholdings to the Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers' Company Ltd. Portland thus became the club's landlord and the premier employer in the town. As a huge quarry and distinctive kiln appeared south of Dunbar, the club forged a very successful relationship with its new partner. The club was promised a secure future by Portland who

made no end of generous offers of assistance to the club, the most vital of which proved to be the creation of formidable sea defences at strategic parts of the fragile shoreline.

The 1960s saw a golden age in the club's fortunes as golf's popularity blossomed once more. The visitor numbers in Dunbar soared every summer as the outdoor swimming-pool, cinemas and hotels attracted legions of holiday-makers from Edinburgh and the rest of Scotland. The effect was to generate sufficient funds for the clubhouse to be expanded and car-parks added. The club decided that the time had come to appoint its first full-time secretary and Gerald Kirkby became the first incumbent. The playing strength of the club benefited too and in 1966 the Club took the inaugural East Lothian Winter League title. In 1968 club captain George Low also relaunched the *Dunbar Golf Week*, inviting Max Faulkner and Dai Rees to front the busy agenda of lessons, competitions and social events. The year climaxed with the hosting of the *Schweppes* PGA Championship, won by David Talbot. The club's operations were buoyant on just about every front and morale never higher.

A new generation of excellent players began to emerge from the club's ranks, including Ewen Murray, David Robertson, Craig Maltman and Jimmy Martin who all went on to professional futures. Not surprisingly, the Dunbar club took the 1972 Lothians team tournament and in 1973, the elusive County Cup at last. The cup-winning team was Bill Gray, Jim Aitchison, Robin Little and Neil Fisher. In 1977 the Club appointed Derek Small as professional in succession to Bill Paton and Derek immediately dedicated a substantial part of his duties to encouraging local youngsters into the sport. Graham Wood was greenkeeper by now, having served his initial apprenticeship at Dunbar and he would continue excellent service for the next 30 years.

In 1978 the club's landlord changed from Portland to Blue Circle but without any let-up in the assistance the club received. In 1983 this kindness proved vital when a savage North Sea storm smashed across the course up to the Broxmouth Park wall itself and huge work was needed to put the course into a playing condition for the hosting of the Scottish Boys championship in April. The club's production-line of young talent continued with the arrival of players such as Stephen Easingwood, John Huggan and John Grant, with Stephen later being chosen as reserve for the 1989 Walker Cup team.

In 1984, thanks largely to club professional's Derek Small's endeavours, the Club was able to hold an annual pro-am, which became very popular and also included the *Dunbar Professional Championship* for several years thereafter. The following year, the Scottish Amateur (strokeplay) Championship was held at Dunbar with Colin Montgomerie victorious. In the same year ambitious plans were floated for an expansion of golf into Broxmouth Park and new clubhouse, with Blue Circle as partners, and although revised discussions went on for some 10 years, the plans were not realized. However, in 1988 the club was able to announce with great pride that it had been awarded Final Qualifying for the Open Championship at Muirfield. This was so successful that Dunbar was selected again in 1992. These years saw Dunbar recognized as one of the most important tournament-hosting clubs in Scotland and was a fine tribute to the standing and quality of the course as a challenging test of golf, often made more tricky by the local '*Bar wind*', as it is known. The British Ladies' Championship was also hosted at Dunbar for the first time in 1990. In 1996 the Scottish Amateur Championship returned to Dunbar once more, to be won by Mark Brooks of Carluke.

Perhaps the most favourable consequence of the Blue Circle plans was the opportunity for the club, after 140 years or so of renting, to begin the process of acquiring their prized course. An initial down-payment was made in 2001 and with other payments, as 2008 dawned, the final complete ownership of

the course is imminent. The club's own players were also excelling, their men winning the County Cup in 1998 with a team of Craig Grant, David Jubb, Neil Paterson and Bob Smith, and again in 2001 with Neil Paterson, John Archibald, Angus Massie and Stephen Easingwood. The 2001 title was especially exciting as it was hosted by Dunbar and saw the final result decided down the 18th and then onto nail-biting extra holes.

The new millennium saw Dunbar's course becoming busier than ever with several more Scottish Boys' Championships, Open Championship final qualifying in 2002, the Scottish (Close) Ladies Championship in 2006, Senior Open Championship final qualifying in 2007, the Ladies Home Internationals and the Seniors Home Internationals. Appropriately enough, in their 125th year, the Dunbar Castle Club also finally won their first County Cup. Not to be outdone, the senior Club in early 2008 won their 4th East Lothian Winter League Title in a row, winning in 2005 under the captaincy of Neil Paterson, in 2006 under Dean Muir and in 2007 & 2008 under the captaincy of Club Manager John Archibald. This is a feat only achieved once before, by Longniddry in 1971-1974, in the history of the fiercely competitive Winter League. The team are now focusing on entering the record books next year in their own right with a fifth title.

The Club has entertained golfers successfully throughout its existence and is set to continue this proud tradition. For the casual golfer the town has always offered plenty of holiday accommodation, long sunshine hours and the warmest of Scottish weather. Easy access for rail and road visitors is also complimented by increasing numbers of foreign visitors for whom the close proximity of the lapping waters of the North Sea, the high walls of Broxmouth Park and the unpredictability of the local winds keep up a continuous battle of wits and golfing challenge.

Today, Club Manager John Archibald, Professional Jacky Montgomery and Bar Manager Bob Ferguson combine to offer the member and guest a more than friendly welcome, with fine catering in the clubhouse and the chance to make a visit to this peaceful corner of East Lothian a more than memorable one.