

Golfing in Scotland -The Origins of Golf

Throughout recorded history, every civilisation has played a game with a club and a ball. Pangea for example, as described by Roman scribes, would appear to be the father both of modern hockey and the Celtic games of Shinty and Hurling. In one form or another, the variant games of present day golf were clearly enjoyed throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. The game persisted over the centuries and the form that it took and rules that were applied varied as widely as the terrain the game was played over. In short, the game consisted of knocking a ball from one pre-designated place to another where the ball was to be struck off a predetermined object in the least number of blows. Games often extended from village to village. That this game was ousted from the towns and onto the commons land beyond is one possible solution to the question of how it all began. Whatever the exact origins, it is known that by the 15th century, "kolf" as it was known in the Netherlands and "goff" as it was referred to in England, was a pastime enjoyed by Kings and Commoners alike. It's kinship to the Great Game however, remains entirely questionable. So widespread was the game of "Gowf", as it was known in Scotland, that an Act of Parliament was passed to prevent the playing of the game on Sundays and thus preserve the skills of Archery. The citizens of Aberdeen, St. Andrews and Leith on Scotland's East Coast were the principal "gowfing" miscreants and it was no coincidence that rolling sandy links land was commonplace here. On this very terrain, a game that started with a cleek and a ball took on a form that started an evolutionary process that continues to this day. The question of how it all began may be of pressing concern to some but to the Scot, it is sufficient to know that the game was born on the links land of eastern Scotland. Here, the game has been nurtured for over five hundred years and from here, it has been raised to the great game played and loved by millions throughout the world. Carnoustie 2007 Open The Open Championship is the greatest golf tournament of all with the first championship being held at Prestwick Golf Club in Ayrshire, Scotland in 1860. The following eleven championships were also staged at Prestwick until 1873 when St Andrews played host. Over the years a number of the other great links courses in the UK have been added to the Open circuit such as Muirfield, Royal Troon, Carnoustie, Royal Birkdale and Turnberry to name but a few.

Up until 1870, golfers used to play for "The Belt" until it was won by Tom Morris Jnr in three consecutive years from 1868 - 1870 and therefore The Belt became his property. Now it is the famous Claret Jug that golfers from all over the world strive to get their hands on and achieve their lifetime dream of becoming The Open Champion! The earliest reference to golf at Carnoustie so far unearthed is a 1527 document which records that Sir Robert Maule, Earl of Panmure, "exercisit at the gowf" on the Links of Barry, the huge area of dunes on Scotland's Tayside coast that encompasses the present championship course. Yet it was not until 1842 that the Carnoustie and Taymouth Golf Club was formed. Allan Robertson from St Andrews laid out a 10-hole course and 25 years later Old Tom Morris re-designed and expanded it to 18 holes. By this time a second club, the Dalhousie, had come into existence, named after the earl who owned the vast coastal area. When it became known that the government intended to take over the dunes area for military training, the members of Dalhousie negotiated with the earl to buy the parcel of land on which the course was laid out. But other local golfers were opposed to this private deal and the earl eventually agreed that 176 acres should become the property of the people of the town for a valuation of £1,350. The necessary funds were raised by a three-day bazaar in Dundee that attracted golfers from throughout central Scotland and made £2,758. The Championship and Burnside are still public courses administered by a Links Trust and local clubs have rights of play. A number of talented locals who learned the game over Carnoustie's tough links made their mark in American golf as the game expanded rapidly in the final decade of the 19th century. Recruited as club professionals and clubmakers they found huge respect and large salaries at American country clubs, in sharp contrast to conditions at home. From Carnoustie and the small surrounding communities, almost 300 golfers made the journey across the Atlantic and the famous courses of Medinah, Pebble Beach, Oakmont, Hazeltine and Latrobe, where Arnold Palmer learned the game from his father, were all developed under the watchful guardianship of "migrators" from Carnoustie. One of the most influential was Stewart Maiden who arrived at the East Lake Club in Atlanta in 1907 to take over as head professional from his brother Jimmy. He was followed everywhere around the course by a skinny, frail five-year-old who copied his every move and imitated his swing. That young lad was Bobby Jones and he admitted in later life: "Stewart had the finest and soundest style I have ever seen. Naturally I did not know this at the time, but I grew up swinging like him. I imitated his style, like a monkey I suppose." Carnoustie also produced championship winners in the Smith brothers who were dominant forces in the American game for 30 years. Alex won the US Open twice and was runner-up three times. Willie claimed the title once and was second twice. Macdonald Smith won close to 40 titles in the inter-war years and although he never clinched a major championship, he finished second at Hoylake and at the US Open in Jones's all-conquering year of 1930. The following year Carnoustie hosted its first Open Championship, ironically won by Edinburgh-born Tommy Armour, another to join the golfing exodus to the United States, but by 1931 an American citizen. He won by a single shot from Jose Jurado of Argentina with Percy Allis and Gene Sarazen a further shot behind. The 1936 Championship was played in appalling weather and Henry Cotton's final round of 71 in torrential rain was rated by his contemporaries as one of the finest ever seen in The Open. It was good enough to beat the entire American Ryder Cup team, with Byron Nelson six strokes behind and Sam Snead a further four shots back. Ben Hogan's sole appearance in The Open was at Carnoustie in 1953 and he arrived early to prepare for the challenge, a tactic that paid off handsomely with neatly descending rounds of 73-71-70-68 for a win by four shots. He had already won that year's Masters and US Opens, but could not get back to America in time to compete in the USPGA. Gary Player was the winner when Carnoustie next hosted the Championship in 1968, his one-over-par total beating Jack Nicklaus and Bob Charles into second place by two shots. Into the wind at the 485-yard 14th in the final round he hit a three-wood second shot to two feet for a tap-in eagle, a shot that propelled him to victory. The first of Tom Watson's five Open triumphs was gained at Carnoustie in 1975, but he had to play an

extra 18 holes to wrest the title from Australian Jack Newton who had given himself a valuable lead with a third round 65. Watson birdied the final hole of the fourth round to tie and went on the next day for a one-shot victory. After a gap of 24 years the Championship returned to Tayside in 1999. Frenchman Jean Van de Velde had the title in his pocket as he stood on the 18th tee. A double-bogey six would have assured him of victory, but a rebound off the stand by the last green into heavy rough, a visit to the Barry Burn and then a greenside bunker forced him into a three-way play-off. Paul Lawrie of Scotland had raced through the field with a superb final round of 67 and clinched the title with birdies at the 17th and 18th in the play-off to beat the Van de Velde and former champion Justin Leonard. Source - <http://www.opengolf.com/course/history.sps>