

SPREADING THE GOLFING GOSPEL

In another fascinating instalment **Dermot Gilleece** reveals how the game of golf took hold across the continent of Europe and beyond in a time when captivating tales of mounted policemen in awe of the game's early pioneers and a founding member of Malahide Golf Club played key roles in spreading the word



In 1887, the artist Nathaniel Hone and his wife Magdalen left their home in Malahide to visit a former pupil of Hone's, Harry Stein Cairnes, who lay seriously ill in Paris. Cairnes, a nephew of Magdalen's, was born in Pau in the South of France and studied landscape painting under Hone in Dublin, before going on to the Academie Julian in Paris.

Nestling in the foothills of the Pyrenees, Pau gained the distinction in 1856 of becoming the first golf club on the continent of Europe. It had been

launched eight years after the invention of the gutta percha ball had revolutionised the game and became a focal point for expatriate, 19th century British lovers of golf, who went there in the winter months.

The spreading of the golfing gospel was now in full swing.

As it happened, Cairnes, who had suffered a serious accident in June 1887, died a month later with his mentor and aunt Magdalen close by. After the funeral, Hone and his wife departed for

Pau where they commiserated with the Cairnes family. And the artist played golf. They were joined there by some of the leading Irish families of the time, among them the Jamesons of whom Francis would go on to capture the Irish Amateur Close Championship of 1910. Five years after that visit to Pau, Hone became a central figure in the founding of Malahide Golf Club in 1892.

Pau and the Royal Antwerp club, which was founded in 1888, were relative latercomers, however, in terms

“Pau gained the distinction in 1856 of becoming the first golf club on the continent of Europe”



of the spread of golf worldwide (We will deal with Ireland in a separate part). For instance, Scottish traders were responsible for the establishment of the Royal Calcutta GC in India in 1829 and Royal Bombay in 1842. These are among the oldest clubs anywhere in the world and Royal Calcutta inaugurated the Amateur Championship of India and the Far East in 1892. By that stage, there were clubs in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Singapore and Burma. Not surprisingly, that inaugural championship, played over 54 holes on a

nine-hole layout, was dominated by British competitors, as would be the case for a further 50 years.

The spread of the game to Australasia took somewhat longer. Royal Christchurch Golf Club in New Zealand was founded in 1867 and the Otago Club had its launch four years later. Meanwhile, there is some confusion about the official launch in Australia, some believing that golf was first played there in 1870 in Adelaide, despite the fact that the Royal Adelaide Club was not founded until

1892: Royal Melbourne was founded a year earlier.

Royal Cape is the oldest club in South Africa, having come into being in 1885. But the game had spread to the island of Mauritius by 1844 when the Mauritius Naval and Military Gymkhana Club is believed to have been formed. Royal Hong Kong was founded in 1889. Meanwhile, the men credited with the early pioneering work in the US were two expatriate Scottish school friends from Dunfermline. John Reid, who lived in

“So it was that on a modest six-hole course, set in 30 acres, these golfing pioneers found their field of dreams”

Yonkers, New York, was the manager of an ironworks while Robert Lockhart was a New York linen merchant.

In his book “The Encyclopedia of Golf”, Malcolm Campbell writes: “In the summer of 1887, Lockhart visited Old Tom Morris’s shop in St Andrews and ordered six golf clubs and two dozen gutta percha golf balls, presumably with the intention of taking them back with him over the Atlantic. However, it seems that the order for the clubs was not completed in time for his departure and his implements had to be despatched by sea, reaching him some time later. The clubs were ordered on behalf of John Reid but before he passed them on, Lockhart, who had played as a youth on Musselburgh links and at least knew the rudiments and basic rules of the game, decided to put the clubs to the test himself.”

There are a number of versions of what happened that fateful day in the late autumn of 1887, including a claim that Lockhart had to be bailed out by Reid after being arrested for playing golf in public. But according to Campbell, the most accurate account was that given by Robert Lockhart’s son, Sydney. He recalled going with his father and brother Leslie on a Sunday morning to “a place on the river which is now Riverside Drive”. There, his father chose a teeing ground watched by a mounted policeman. According to Sydney Lockhart: “Father teed up the first little white ball and, selecting one of the long wooden clubs, dispatched it far down the meadow. He tried all the clubs and then we boys were permitted to drive some balls too.”

It appears that the policeman, intrigued by what he was witnessing, asked if he could join in. Young Lockhart went on: “The officer got down from his horse and went through the motions of teeing up, aping father in waggling and squaring off to the ball and other preliminaries. Then he let go and hit a beauty straight down the field, which went fully as far as any that father had hit. Being greatly encouraged and proud of his natural ability at a game that involved a ball and stick, he tried again. This time he missed the ball completely and then, in rapid succession, he missed the little globe three more times; so with a look of disgust on his face he mounted his horse and rode away.”

Having gone through this rather curious initiation, the implements, costing about \$2 each, were presented to John Reid. Golf had come to the New World.

On a bleak November day in 1888, four friends of Reid’s gathered for dinner at his Yonkers home. We are told they had come from a nearby cow pasture where they had been playing golf. Normally at such gatherings, Reid would entertain his guests after dinner to a couple of Scottish ballads for which he was famous. This, however, was not to be a musical evening.

Anxious to find a way of ensuring further golfing activity for at least another year on the pastureland course, Reid thought that forming an organisation might be the solution. Indeed it would have the additional benefit of cementing their friendship and common commitment to golf, while permitting those of a kindred spirit to join them. Before the evening of November 14th was out, Henry O Tallmadge, Harry Holbrook, Kingman H Putman, John B Upham and Reid had formed the first golf club in the US. On Reid’s suggestion, it was to



"Golf had indeed come a long way since its pioneers were guiding feathery balls over rough linkland on the east coast of Scotland"



be called St Andrews, after the cradle of the Scottish game.

Nor did they forget the man who had brought the clubs and balls from the homeland, making their sporting activity possible, whereupon a toast was proposed and drunk to the health of Robert Lockhart. And by way of honouring him more tangibly, he was elected the first active member of the club. A certain Gilbert Turner became the second member. So it was that on a modest six-hole course, set in 30 acres, these golfing pioneers found

their field of dreams.

Since those embryonic days, no nation has embraced the game with more enthusiasm. While building thousands of courses coast to coast, America also made its contribution to the spread of the game further afield, through the magic of Hollywood. Perhaps its most significant contribution was in moving golf from its perceived elitist position to an activity that could be enjoyed by the masses - even by young, black Californians like Tiger Woods!

Indeed it is only when we consider such subjects as war, the Bible, gangsters and life in the old West that we realise how much our perceptions have been shaped by what we have seen in movies. And leading exponents of golf were acutely aware of the importance of this mass appeal. For instance, in the early 1920s, Walter Hagen starred with fellow Americans Leo Diegel, Marge Beebe and Andy Clyde in a Hollywood production "Green Grass Widows" which, naturally, included quite a number of golfing sequences.

A decade later, Henry Cotton appeared on stage at the London Coliseum giving a demonstration of golf, including hitting soft balls into the audience. It proved to be a particularly popular show. By that stage, Hollywood icons such as Clark Gable, Bing Crosby and Douglas Fairbanks had become prominent golfing figures off screen. The stars were drawn towards such clubs as Riviera CC and Bel Air CC, both in Los Angeles, and were regular visitors to Pebble Beach and other courses on the Monterey Peninsula.

W C Fields starred in "The Golf Specialist" in 1930 and eight years later, one of my favourite golfing sequences on film came in the Fred Astaire movie "Carefree". It involved a ball-driving routine in which Astaire danced to the number "Since they turned Loch Lomond into Swing" and rounded it off by driving five balls in rapid succession, perfectly down the fairway, without missing a beat.

It is argued, however, that the only filmed sequence which succeeded in recreating the tension and excitement of a real golf match was in the James Bond movie "Goldfinger" in 1964 in which the hero catches the eponymous villain cheating with the help of his dubious caddie. It owed much of its success to the golfing skill of the movie's star, Sean Connery, in an authentic, English setting.

Golf had indeed come a long way since its pioneers were guiding feathery balls over rough linkland on the east coast of Scotland and from the time that news of the Irish rebellion of 1641 was conveyed to King Charles while he enjoyed a game at Leith. It had become a game good enough for James Bond!