

## The Early Years at Pollok Golf Club

### Professionals and Clubmakers

As a long standing member, almost 40 years, I don't recall there ever being a professional at Pollok golf club. Members sought advice from other clubs and, more recently, John McTear, the professional at Cowglen. This wasn't always the case. In 1892 the newly formed Pollok Golf Club, decided '*to retain the services of Mr James Douglas, the present professional at Eastwood Golf Club, and that he be continued as professional at the new club at such remuneration to be fixed by the Committee*'. Pollok had a resident Professional and Clubmaker for many years after that.

In those early days, golf professionals were multitasked. They played and taught the game, knew the rules, made and mended clubs, looked after the course and even the clubhouse. For the first five years **James Douglas** was the Professional, Clubmaker, Greenkeeper and supervised the Clubhouse – a busy man! When designing the original course, Pollok GC tried to '*secure the services of Tom Morris (whom failing any other professional) to act along with James Douglas*'. In fact **Douglas** laid out the original course. An accomplished golfer he held the course record of 73, later equalled by James Braid, when 'the Triumvirate' played an exhibition match in 1901. **Douglas** had a retaining fee of 25 shillings per week and charged 2/6 to play 18holes in a single or fourball rising to 3/6 for an added lesson. Douglas also arranged exhibition matches, playing two rounds with Fernie of Troon in September 1894. An additional duty was to retrieve lost golf balls from 'the game reserves', Sir John Stirling Maxwell objected to members damaging the fences and disturbing the game, when trying to find lost balls. Members were forbidden entry and *only Douglas* was allowed to collect lost balls at dusk on a Friday evening. Interestingly Sir John Stirling Maxwell also, on occasions, took exception to the members playing in shirt sleeves and required that jackets and ties be worn on the course!! Membership increased from 350 to 400 and Lady guests were allowed on weekdays between 10am and 3 pm.

Heavy summer rain resulted in long thick grass - no change in the weather then and no global warming! Horse drawn mowers and increasing the number of grazing cattle – '*but not bulls*' – didn't solve the problem. The long grass and horse hoof marks irritated the members. Members became increasingly frustrated with the condition of the course, losing expensive balls and wanted Douglas to devote more time to Clubmaking. Eventually in 1897, '*the Greenkeeper should devote his whole time to outside work on the course and that the duties of Greenkeeper and Clubmaker be separated*'. An assistant



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In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a good Clubmakers was essential, fitting members with clubs to suit their individual style. The carved heads of wooden clubs, the forged heads of irons and hickory shafts were purchased from the Cleekmakers mainly in St Andrews. Forgan was the world's biggest producer of golf clubs and Tom Stewart made good irons. Ben Sayers of North Berwick was also successful and, along with Nicholl of Leven, continued for many years. The local Clubmakers were experienced craftsmen and much in demand. Members relied heavily on their expertise calling repeatedly during the actual making of the clubs to ensure the loft, lie, grip and flex of the shaft suited their style. An individual club was produced - a special craft indeed, very much more personal than to-day. The club was then stamped with the name of the Clubmaker and golf club. Many of these early clubs are highly collectable. Pollok has three clubs made and stamped by two of our early club makers - C S Butchart (c1898) and Hugh Morris(c1919). As golf expanded, mass production eventually took over and the art of club making was soon lost .

The Club advertised for a Professional in 'Golf', 'Golfer', 'The Scotsman' and 'Glasgow Herald' in 1897.

*WANTED, Professional (who must be practical Club Maker) for Pollok Golf Club, near Glasgow;*

*membership 400; workshop provided by Club;*

*Course and Greens not to be under his charge.—Apply by letter, stating age, experience, and subsidy expected to Mr. JOHN WATSON STUART, Hon. Secretary, 88, St Vincent Street, Glasgow.*

Being a prestigious Club, this post attracted considerable interest. A short leet of six, including Douglas, was drawn up from the 37 applicants. Interestingly, before the post was filled, Ben Sayers of North Berwick sent the following pithy telegram –

*'if situation not filled, excellent clubmaker and player calling on you to-day. Butchart name. Secure him. Sayers'.*



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Four applicants were chosen for interview and to play nine holes. While Butchart and Stephenson were the better players, Stephenson, still less than 20 years, was too young.

In December 1897 **Cuthbert Strachan Butchart** of Carnoustie and North Berwick was appointed. A new workshop was erected, the existing room being used to expand the bar accommodation. **Butchart** was a popular Professional and talented Clubmaker, a good player he was invited to many professional competitions. Members became restive that he was spending too much time away. Committee minuted '*recent absences of the Professional, permission should be asked and granted*'. Sadly in 1899, **Butchart** resigned and moved to Royal County Down in Northern Ireland. A serious loss for Pollok, **Butchart** had a distinguished career, moving to London to manage and later own a wholesale company - the London Golf Supply. Now a well known clubmaker, interestingly **Golf Illustrated (1908)** records '*It is this combination of theoretical knowledge and practical ability which has served to make C S Butchart clubs so popular among golfers*'. Butchart won the German Open and many other competitions. He became the professional to the Berlin Golf Club designing several courses in Germany. Interred during the First World War and released in 1918, **Butchart** emigrated to America. There his career took off, re-entering the club making business, he produced a large number of bamboo hickory shafts, not only on his own but also through the Butchart Nichols company. These shafts, made from six lengthwise segments alternating between hickory and bamboo, were widely accepted. Several professionals Tommy Armour, Gene Sarazen and others won many tournaments - Farrell won the US Open in 1928. Pollok GC is fortunate in having a Butchart putter presumably made in 1898, the hickory shaft is stamped *CS Butchart* but the head has been so finely polished the cleekmarks are barely visible. (2 photos – head of putter and shaft).

In 1898 Pollok granted the privilege of membership to Lt F G Tait of the Black Watch, now stationed at Maryhill barracks, who gladly accepted. Freddie Tait had just won the Amateur championship and has been described 'as the finest golfer never to win the Open'. He won many competitions and R&A medals. His painting, accompanied by his everfaithful dog 'Nails', hangs in the R&A's big Room. Sadly his death at Kimberley in 1899 in the South African war robbed Scotland of their best ever amateur golfer.

From 1899 to 1902, the club arranged with Mr Annan of the **Sportsmen Emporium** in 99 St Vincent St and one of the largest golf shops, to provide Pollok '*with a competent player of efficient workmanship and keep in the workshop a stock*



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*of clubs, balls and golfing requirements by well known players*. 'Suitable and advantageous arrangements were made and agreed'. Mr J Elder provided professional services at Pollok. Interestingly only Taggart, the greenkeeper, was allowed to enter the game reserves to retrieve golf balls and was given 1d for every

ball handed to Mr Annan, crediting the Club at 3d per ball. In June 1901, James Braid, who had just won the Open at Muirfield, played an exhibition match at Pollok with Harry Vardon, J H Taylor, and Sandy Herd. Inexplicably Mr Annan dismissed Elder in 1902 who was required to leave Pollok.

Members were very displeased, **J Elder** was soon appointed Professional and Clubmaker continuing until 1918. A top class player, Elder entered the 1906 Open Championship at Muirfield. He played regularly in the Glasgow and District Professional Championship, **once coming second, by one stroke. Had he won, the Championship would have been held at Pollok.** By 1906 Pollok was moving forward, with three green keepers the course was greatly improved. The horse drawn mowers were withdrawn and mechanical mowers purchased - Pattison Wood Rollers for the greens; later a Ransome motor mower and a 16 inch Shanks mower were acquired. Elder also supervised the caddies. Ladies, forever a controversial topic, were again allowed to play as guests of members, sometimes at busy times. Elder was requested to monitor the situation. At a stormy committee meeting **'lady guests were banned from playing at any time!'** Retrieving balls lost on the course caused problems. Elder could not continue to pay the Club 2/6 per dozen for guttie balls lost on the course many of which were remakes. The club accepted his offer of 1/6 per dozen. Shortly after this, members themselves could enter the game reserves.

J H Irons, on the waiting list for several years and about to be resident on the Pollok estate, became a member around 1905. Jimmy Irons was one of Pollok's best ever golfers, handicap +5, representing the Club on many occasions and, between 1920 & 1926, five times winner of the club championship- the Victory cup. The club recently purchased his replica of the Victory Cup. The club paid two guineas to David Adams for professional advice on the siting of bunkers. The Accounts of 30/11/1911 record 'sale of Horse £7.00 and purchase of 6.8 HP motor mower £121.17.6'. 'The new Clubhouse was opened by Mrs J Campbell Murray of Haggis Castle on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1912. The structure having been completed for the sum of £3,110.03.02'. (Annual report 23.12.1912)

During the 1914 – 1918 war, 27 members were with the Armed Forces and not required to pay the annual subscription of two guineas. Competitions were held for



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the Belgian Relief Fund, Red Cross and other charities. Pollok House became a convalescent hospital, wounded forces and staff could play on the course free of charge. Lady Stirling Maxwell was most grateful for the members' support of cigarettes etc. Members were encouraged 'to buy British'. Permission was given for 2/6 Battalion of Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders to manoeuvre on the course. With only two part time staff available, course maintenance was greatly reduced. The Renfrewshire Food Production Board recommended that part of the course at Hags

Castle be cultivated but Pollok was not considered suitable. This led to lengthy discussion, at times acrimonious, on merging the courses and membership. Hags Castle did not expect Pollok *'to introduce their lady members'* and complained – Pollok was not requested to make *'anything like equality of sacrifice'*. All was resolved when the Food Production Board decided not go ahead with cultivation at Hags!! In 1918 Elder and Johnstone, the greenkeeper, started work of *'national importance'*. Elder returned for work on Saturdays, and was awarded a testimonial in recognition of his lengthy service.

In 1919 **James Hobbens** was appointed Greenkeeper for a few months taking over the repair of clubs and sale of balls from David Adams. In May 1919, **Hugh Morris**, sometime of Eastwood and Williamwood and now at Bogside, was appointed Greenkeeper with a free house, gas and water and to repair clubs in his spare time. Our respected member Jim Semple generously presented Pollok with two clubs owned by his grandfather James Edward Gracie, a founder member. These clubs are stamped Morris and Pollok (photo – head stamped 'Morris' 'Pollok'). Later in 1919, **David Adams** was appointed clubmaker before going on to Gleneagles in 1920.

In 1919 the members were looking to improve the course. Having been unable to secure Tom Morris for the original layout, the Club sought out the best and commissioned Dr Alaster Mackenzie of Leeds. Dr Mackenzie was a physician, an avid golfer who soon became involved with the famed architect H S Colt. Among his best designs were Moortown, the Eden at St Andrews, Lahinch, Royal Melbourne, Cypress Point and, along with Bobby Jones, Augusta National. Perhaps his best known work is the pen and water colour map of the Old Course. The estimated cost was £1,500.00. A loan and a levy of £5.00 per member were approved, in addition several individual members offered to meet Dr Mackenzie's fees. These alterations went ahead in stages, Jimmy Irons (+5), was much involved, groups of holes were featured with members' approval; Dr Mackenzie, now in America, made repeated visits. An arrangement was made with Sir John Stirling Maxwell and the lease

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extended by 21 years. The restructured course was eventually opened in April 1924. A scratch score of 75 was approved by the R&A. Later Jimmy Irons held the course record at 73. Two years previously, in 1922, the members not content with redesigning the course decided a major overhaul of the clubhouse was necessary '*little having been done in the war years*'. Clearly the club was well funded, then the entrance fee was £10.00 and subscription was £3.00.

With the Open Championship being held at Troon in 1923, Pollok wrote to the R&A - '*privilege of the course would be at the disposal of those taking part during the period of the match*'. Permission was also given for an exhibition match by Walter Hagen, the Open champion, and George Duncan, a past Open championship. In 1923 at Lady Stirling Maxwell's request the club raised £142.00 at the Autumn meeting for the Samaritan Hospital. James Carruthers the eminent Edinburgh clubmaker and sprinter made an inventory of the Club's effects.