



# GOLF

*Roddy McIntyre*

Mr Robert Purdom, solicitor, banker and Hawick Town Clerk, founded the Hawick Golf club. The first record of 'Golf' in Hawick was an advertisement, which appeared in the local press of 11 August 1877: "*All parties willing to support the introduction of this game are requested to meet in Mr Purdom's office, National Bank, on Monday evening, at seven o'clock.*" The meeting on Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> August, was attended by only three gentlemen: Mr Robert Purdom, Mr Charles Taylor, teacher and Mr John Manuel, Burgh Surveyor; all men who knew and played the game. They resolved to secure ground for the course and to immediately form a club. Following the meeting, an application was made to the Town Council for the privilege of using part of the Vertish Hill to form the golf course.

The Town Council minutes of 16 August 1877 stated the following: "*A request by a proposed Golf Club for leave to play on the Vertish Hill was granted on the understanding that no damage would be done.*" An account of this transaction appeared in the 'Hawick Express' on 22<sup>nd</sup> September giving the following details: "*The Vertish Hill has been laid out with nine holes, and forms a delightful golfing course. The putting greens are rather rough as yet, but this will be remedied in time. The Hawick club already has 20 members, but, as it will require some more to be in full working order, we shall be glad if we have the effect of creating an interest in the game and bring out some new players. The game can be played nearly all year round; it is not difficult to learn, and after a few rounds, players generally acquire a strong liking for it. In conclusion, we wish the game of golf every success in Hawick, and recommend it to old and young as a most healthy recreation; and, indeed, if the Golf Club does nothing else but induce more of the inhabitants to go out and enjoy the magnificent view and fresh breezes of the Vertish Hill, it will confer a great benefit on the town, this unequalled 'public park' being at present far too little appreciated.*"

Although the club was formed within a week or so of the meeting held on 13 August 1877, the rules were not passed. No office bearers were elected until 15<sup>th</sup> February the following year. The first office bearers for 1878 were:

General Scott, Hoscote, Hon. Captain  
Robert F. Watson, manufacturer, Captain  
Robert Purdom, solicitor, Hon. Secretary & Treasurer  
Charles Taylor, teacher  
James Henderson, manufacturer  
George Grier, solicitor  
John A. Turnbull, draper

The original rules were laid out on the 15 February 1878 and stated the following:

#### OBJECTS OF THE CLUB,

*The club was formed last year for the purpose of introducing this popular game in Hawick, and already numbers thirty members. A golfing course has been laid out on the Vertish Hill, which combines the pleasure of the game with the enjoyment of the finest views in the district.*

#### ENTRY MONEY,

*The entry money has been fixed at 10s, and in future years, it is hoped that only a small annual levy will be required to keep the ground in good order. The ground is, however, open to all players, and those wishing to learn, whether members of the club or not. A set of golf clubs and balls may be had through any of the members, the cost being about £1.*

#### DAYS OF MEETING, (Organising matches)

*In order to ensure a sufficient number of players, the committee have fixed the following days for meetings of the Club members on the Vertish Hill (weather permitting). All year round on Saturdays*



at 3 o'clock; from April till October, on Wednesdays at 6 o'clock; on all other days and hours players may arrange privately.

**RULES, LENGTH OF COURSE,**

*The game will be played according to the rules of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, a copy of which can be seen on application to the Secretary.*

*The committee also recommend that an ordinary round or game shall consist of the present course of 11 holes; and that, where a longer game is desired, this should be played by going twice round the wood, making 15 holes in all.*

*Players will oblige by using the stiles, so as to preserve the fences.*

*Teeing on the putting greens or standing too much on these in damp weather should be carefully avoided.*

*It is understood that boys carrying clubs are entitled to twopence for the ordinary round, and threepence for the long round.*

*NB.- Members are expected to introduce new members, and also to bring friends out to play when convenient, with the view of giving the game a secure footing in the town."*

Hawick Golf Club has the honour of being the oldest established golf club in the Borders. Even in the club's infancy members realised the importance of having a clubhouse, particularly as members were obliged to carry their 'implements of war' to and from the Vertish Hill each time they did battle.

In the early days of the Club, the members had no clubhouse accommodation. It was not until the latter part of 1880 that a house was rented from Mr David Scott, stonemason. This building was situated at the foot of Burnflat Brae and was small for a golf clubhouse. Over the years this clubhouse was modified in size. However, due to ever-increasing membership, it was decided that the club required a larger purpose-built clubhouse. At the Annual General Meeting held on 18 October 1893, the club captain suggested that, with the assistance of the lady members, a bazaar should be organised with the proceeds devoted to the construction of a new clubhouse.



*The opening of the clubhouse*

A very successful bazaar was held in April 1894 in the Exchange Hall which was fitted out to replicate a street in Cairo. Held over three days, this raised £697, a magnificent sum for that era, which enabled the new clubhouse to be erected where it stands today. The land was feued to the Club by his Grace the Duke of Buccleuch at the exceptionally low rate of £10 per acre. The clubhouse has a splendid elevated location, with an excellent view of the Vertish Hill. It was constructed in a 'Swiss style' and consisted of clubrooms for both the Ladies Club and the Hawick Golf Club (Gentlemen) both on the ground floor and on the first floor a house for the 'keeper' (Club Steward). The Right Hon. the Earl of Dalkeith officially opened the clubhouse on 24 May 1895, in the presence of a large crowd.

The original membership of 1877, so far as can be ascertained, numbered thirteen and by the end of the first year had increased to forty. The next available record we have is of the Annual General Meeting of 9 October 1882, where the number is given as sixty-five, four being honorary members. These numbers fluctuated over the first few seasons. In an effort to increase the membership, circulars in 'praise of the course' were issued to a large number of gentlemen in the town and district. This appears to have been a successful ploy with the club showing an annual increase in members. By October 1897 the club had increased its membership to 212.

The most frustrating game known to man, golf, has always tested a player's patience. Hawick first appointed a chaplain in 1880. There was however, a period in 1884 when this position became vacant. Knowing the propensity of golfers to use improper language, it was stated at the time that it seemed a pity that the office should be allowed to remain vacant as a Chaplain may have had a restraining influence on players. A good deal of sympathy with players' trials and tribulations was shown by members of the clergy as the following incident proves. A prominent member of the club was engaged in a friendly game with a local minister. All was going well until the players reached the 12<sup>th</sup> green. In playing the next hole, it went horribly wrong, with the ball landing in a clump of whins. After several attempts to move the ball, the player appeared ready to explode with rage. The minister who was calmly watching this display, anticipating his opponent's apparent desire, at once remarked, "*if an oath will relieve ye, dinna mind me.*" If profanity had an influence on the flight of the ball, the game of golf would be played far better than it is!

Hawick has always produced golfers with a very competitive nature. The first recorded competition was played on 8 October 1881. It was originally intended to engage two professional golfers to play an exhibition match. Bob Ferguson and the famous Ben Sayers were approached, but their fee was considered too high. As an alternative, an open competition was organised, which was won by Mr A. M. Ross with a score of 89. One of the earliest trophies, the 'Renny Watson Cup' was presented to the club by Sir Renny Watson, Glasgow. This old trophy, which is still keenly played for today, bears the inscription: "*Presented to Hawick Golf Club by William Renny Watson, October, 1878*". One of the stranger medals played for was the 'Bombay Medal'. On Christmas morning, 1882, Mr Thomas Purdom received from a friend, Mr Thomas Lang (grandson of the Revd. Mr Cochrane, at one time parish minister of Hawick) a Christmas card with various golfing caricatures. Mr Lang was the Indian Secretary of the Standard Assurance Company Bombay, as well as being a member of the Bombay Golf Club. Mr Purdom in acknowledging the card challenged the Bombay Golf Club



to a match. The match was to be played on two holes, on both courses, on the same day and at the same hour, with the same amount of players representing each club. Unfortunately, the Secretary of the Bombay Club informed the Hawick Club that the Bombay committee could not see how such a match could be satisfactorily arranged. To show that they appreciated the gesture however they informed the Hawick club that a silver medal was in preparation for presentation. The medal arrived in due course and was first played for on 28 April 1883, the winner being Mr Bennet, with a score of 89 less 4 - 85.

As well as the weekly and monthly medals, the club played regular matches with the other clubs who formed the Border Golfers Association. Unfortunately arranged fixtures were not always kept. The extent to which visiting teams should be entertained was brought up at council. It was customary in the first matches played to entertain the visiting club to dinner, the home players bearing the cost, before it was decided to follow the example of the other Border clubs and offer only light refreshments. In addition to competitive matches with Border clubs, Hawick golfers travelled farther afield to the likes of Musselburgh, Dalkeith and Carlisle, with varied success.

Unlike today, caddies were an integral part of Hawick Golf Club. An old player was overheard saying, *"a good, civil, well trained caddie is half the game, and to get such has been the desire and aim of the Hawick Golf Club for some years."* With this aim in mind, a registration scheme was introduced in September 1894. Under this scheme, caddies who wished to register had to first apply to the secretary, who submitted the application to a small subcommittee. If successful, the young caddie had to deposit 6d to obtain his official caddie's badge, which he had to wear when carrying out his duties. His name, age and address would then be entered in the Caddies' register.



*The caddies in 1888*

The 6d deposit paid by the caddie had to be repaid when he no longer wished to 'loop a bag'. The tariff for a caddie, when the club was formed, was 2d for a round of eleven holes; however, when the course was finally set out with eighteen holes a fee of 4d was set, with 6d paid for looping during any competition.

Like many sports of the time golf was a male dominated pastime. Hawick Golf Club was no different. It was not until late 1892 that ladies started to play golf on the Vertish Hill. At a council meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, Mrs Laing, Springbank, intimated the formation of a Ladies' Club and requested that alternative tees be provided for the lady golfers. This was agreed with an annual subscription of £5 being set. It was agreed that the Hawick Golf Club would have no say in the management of the Ladies' Club. The council however



*View from the 13th tee*

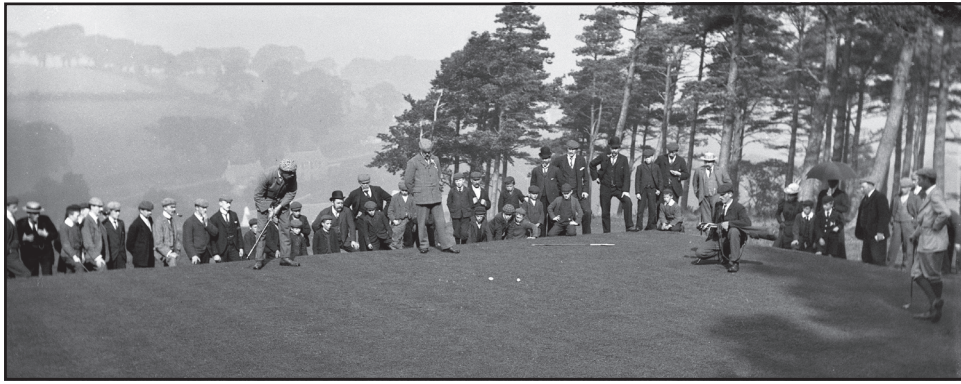
stated: *"The council are willing to do everything in their power to promote the success of the Ladies' Club, but the club must be put to no expense in the matter. The council reserve the right to close the course whenever they find that the subscriptions do not cover the cost of upkeep."* This arrangement was not satisfactory to the ladies and on July 1893 the ladies approached the council and it was arranged that they should pay an annual sum for the upkeep of the course instead of allowing the Hawick Golf Club to collect their subscriptions. Today, the Hawick Ladies' Club have the same rights as the male members, paying the same subscription. As with many clubs it is the Ladies' section of Hawick Golf Club who are at the forefront when it comes to fundraising. It was owing to the formation of the Ladies' Club and the influx of new male members that the accommodation provided at the club came to be entirely inadequate. It was also a great drawback that the course had only twelve holes rather than the accepted eighteen.

Since the formation of the club, the only source of revenue had been from members' subscriptions, unlike today where revenue is raised from visiting golfers, bar revenue etc. The subscriptions in the early years barely covered costs. However, the council realised the need for a larger purpose built clubhouse, one that would satisfy the needs of both lady and gentlemen members and the requirement to create six further holes.

As the worldwide popularity of golf grew, the Hawick club saw its membership increase to the extent that it was regarded as one of the largest and most popular golf clubs in the south of Scotland. As club membership swelled, it has been necessary to extend the clubhouse over the years, resulting in the appearance it has today. Nevertheless, the building maintains the same stylish frontage that was constructed in 1895.

The Vertish Hill has seen many well known players guide a golf ball around its old course, none more so than the famous course designer, five times Open winner James Braid. On 25 September 1901, Braid played an exhibition match on the Vertish with the great Harry Vardon. After completing the match he was asked to cast his eye over the Vertish Hill, with a mind to making the course a stiffer test of golf. The golfers of today are fortunate to play a course that has been partly shaped by a design visionary who gave golf the famous Carnoustie links and the renowned Gleneagles courses.





*James Braid against Harry Vardon exhibition match 1901*

Over the years, Hawick has produced several very talented golfers; Syd Telfer, Alan 'Abu' Ballantyne and Judith Anderson to name but a few. Between 1946 and 1962 Syd Telfer won the championship twelve times.

The dominant force in today's Ladies' section is Judith Anderson, who has won the Ladies' Club championship twenty-one times, a feat surely never to be equalled. Judith has also won the Border Ladies' championship ten times and has managed the Scottish under eighteen and under twenty-one Ladies on several occasions.

The male golf section at Hawick has always generated more than its fair share of single digit golfers. Is it the stiff test of the Vertish Hill course, or the dogged determination of the Hawick golfer that fashions such talent? When it comes to a golfer who has the combination of talent and determination, Alan 'Abu' Ballantyne certainly fits the bill. Since winning his first club championship in 1985, Abu has been a constant feature in club competitions, winning numerous trophies and nine club championships. He holds the club record for a low round of 61 and having shot a 59 during a winter round, he has attained the 'holy grail' of golf - a sub 60 round. Alan has also won the Borders Golf Stroke Play and has won the Borders matchplay four times, setting many course records along the way, demonstrating he is not just a 'one track pony'. The Club itself has also seen success with numerous victories in Borders team events, demonstrating a strength and depth in talented golfers.

The success of a club can only be assured by nurturing young talent. At Hawick, the junior section has always thrived. To ensure this trend continues, in 2010, the club introduced a Junior Golf Academy. This was designed to foster new talent and bring golf to a whole new generation. Several club members have now attained junior golf teaching certificates and are now coaching the young golfers of Hawick, ensuring the continued success of the club. There is no better satisfaction for a coach than to see the delight on a youngster's face when he finally makes sweet contact with the ball and to know that another player has been hooked on the game. Hitting the ball is the fun part of it, yet the fewer times you hit the ball the more fun you have!

Local knitwear firms have over the years seen numerous famous golfers visiting their factories to discuss sponsorship and try the latest fashions. Sir Nick Faldo was regularly seen on TV wearing the famous Pringle range, while Gary Player sported his famous black attire with the Lyle and Scott eagle emblazoned on his chest. Colin Montgomerie



*Sir Nick Faldo*

could often be seen striding down the fairway in his famous saltire pullover. When visiting Hawick to try on the latest ranges, they took on the challenge of the Vertish hill.

In 1989 Sir Nick Faldo and Tony Jacklin visited the club to take part in an exhibition match. Club members Warren Renwick and Ian Oliver also had the honour of playing in this four ball match. Nick Faldo again strode over the Vertish, when he played in an exhibition match in 1993 with Colin Montgomerie. Both of these matches were witnessed by large crowds, the biggest seen on the hill since the famous match between Vardon and Braid.

In recent years, golf clubs have seen a decline in their memberships. This however was not the case in the 'halcyon days' of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Because of the volume of golfers who wished to tee off on any given evening, a starter was employed. The first starter was Mr Jimmy Gray, who saw a constant stream of four balls leave the 1<sup>st</sup> Tee between 5pm and 7pm. Saturday medals would see 100 to 150 golfers playing and these numbers could swell to 180 for the larger competitions.

"*Golf is thirsty work*" and the 19<sup>th</sup> hole was put to good use. The clubhouse was especially busy on Sunday afternoons where the male members had their refreshments in the back of the hall, known affectionately as the 'gang hut'. It was quite common for the order to be 5lbs of chips and twenty-four forks with copious amounts of ale to wash down the food.

What is the draw of the Vertish Hill? Is it the views, the camaraderie of one's fellow golfers or is it simply that once the game gets under the skin, it's an itch that can't be scratched? No-one will ever have golf under their thumb, no round will ever be so good it could not have been bettered. Perhaps this is why golf is the greatest of games. You are not playing a human adversary; you are playing 'old man par'. Long may golf continue to be played on the 'humphie backit hicht' of the Vertish Hill.

**Photo Credits**

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 The caddies in 1888 - *Hawick Museum Collection* View from the 13th tee - *Ian Landles*  
 Braid and Vardon match - *Hawick Museum Collection* Sir Nick Faldo - *Hawick Golf Club*