INTRODUCTION: ABOUT GOLF HISTORIES

You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

Abraham Lincoln, 1809 - 1865

In 1982, Steven van Hengel, a Dutch banker, published a new interpretation of golf history that went off like a bomb in the golfing world. According to van Hengel, golf, rather than having Scottish origins, had begun at Loenen aan de Vecht in the province of Utrecht, Holland, precisely on Boxing Day, 1297. Groundwork for the acceptance of his thesis had been well-laid. Peter Dübereiner, contracted to write the Foreword to Early Golf, penned a glowing endorsement that surrounded the book in an aura of credibility and respectability: ‘To the field of early Dutch golf, and that means early golf no matter how the nationalistic Scots may squirm, the ultimate authority is Steven van Hengel… Every fact which is hall-marked ‘SvH’ carries a guarantee of proof, it is unalloyed by guesswork and speculation’. Peter was not alone in his enthusiasm. When it learned of van Hengel’s conclusions, no attempt was made to confirm his quotes or alleged facts. The Scots offered only sporadic token resistance to the kid-napping of their ‘priceless sporting heritage’. Silence, or at best, whispers – not ‘quotesor alleged facts. The Scotssmugness, or contrived conclusions. No attempt was made to confirm his van Hengel’s original sources, which didn’t smell right. Perhaps it was van Hengel’s smugness, or contrived conclusions, or inconsistencies, exacerbated by an unconvincing, meagre and insular bibliography. His conceit of writing the book in English was annoying and often, confusing.

When I discussed my reservations with Richard Leech, a highly experienced publisher of scientific texts, he urged me to verify van Hengel’s original sources, which boiled down to a limited body of literature, a map and a handful of relevant historical documents. During the next several months I enlisted the aid of archivists, experts and historians in the Netherlands, to test the foundation of the Dutch historian’s argument that golf (or ‘celf’ as he termed it) had been played at Loenen aan de Vecht, in 1297. Their research confirmed my worst suspicions. Golf had never been played there. The historical works he cited to prove that it had, contained no such references and the ‘Map of Loenen with the golf course’ which he published on page 17 of Early Golf was a pure fabrication – a doctored Ordnance Survey map.

In 1997, I attended the sham 700th anniversary celebration of golf at Loenen aan de Vecht, where I seized the opportunity to discuss van Hengel’s hoaxes with key figures of the Netherlands golf establishment. My questions and comments were met with embarrassment and evasion, accompanied by awkward laughter as they explained that the ‘history’ was meant to be just a bit of good fun. It wasn’t until the December/January 2002, 3 issue of Golf Journal, that an official retraction of the claim that golf had been first played at Loenen, was printed. The apologia was written by the distinguished historian and bibliophile, Dr. Ayolt Brongers, who over the years had been on the receiving end of abuse from the Dutch golf establishment. By 1988, when I began to research Golf Through The Ages, 600 Years of Golfing Art, I had read everything SvH had published, from his initial mimeographed 1972 booklet, through the exhibition catalogue and subsequent editions of Early Golf. On the surface, his book seemed to be a logical launching pad for the definitive iconography of golf history. Unfortunately, there is still a misleading Dutch Wikipedia entry accessible in Internet that continues to tiptoe around the bogus history.

In less than a year of intensive research, I had become a cynic about everything that had been published on the origins of golf, which, unlike football, tennis, Pallone and even billiards, had traditionally been ignored by ‘serious’ historians. Over the following thirteen years, as well as reading most of what passes for golfing history, I immersed myself in every field remotely associated with ball games, literature, ancient texts, works of art, manuscripts, documents and sporting antiques by the thousands. It quickly became evident that the historical equivalent of Ponzis schemes didn’t begin with Early Golf. Now, for the first time ever, a leading international publication will publish an unbiased history of where golf began, how it evolved and the role that Scotland played in going the Royal & Ancient gene into finishing touches before expatriating it to the world.

GOLF THROUGH THE AGES • 600 YEARS OF GOLFING ART

The first in an exclusive six-part series, Golf – The True History, commissioned by Golf International, has been written by the distinguished sport historian, Michael Flannery. The author of Golf Through The Ages, 600 Years of Golfing Art, for the first time ever, a leading international publication will publish an unbiased history of where golf began, how it evolved and the role that Scotland played in going the Royal & Ancient gene into finishing touches before expatriating it to the world.

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The Early Days of Sport

Part One: Was Scotland the Birthplace of Golf?
Early Days, From About 1100 To 1460

Item, it is ordanty and decreyt... that ye fut bawe and ye golf be utterly cryt done and not sayt.

The James edict, designed to enhance the defence of Scotland and expand his sphere of influence, harboured the innocent words, ‘fut bawe and golf,’ a fact that attracted neither attention nor interest for the next 400 odd years. Finally spotted by some keen-eyed Victorian historian, these two words – particularly ‘golf’ – were used to put an enduring spin on golf history.

The fateful document in which the word ‘golf’ first appeared, was Act of Parliament number 338, a hand-written manuscript published in Edinburgh, 6 March, 1457. It was entitled ‘Anent Wapinshawing’ – of the practise of arms – and read:

‘...that ye fut bawe and ye golf be utterly cryt done and not sayt and that ye bowe markes be maid at all parrch kirkes apear of battes and shuting be utryb yh sunday...

or, in Modern English:

‘...that foot-ball and golf be utterly condemned and stopped and that a pair of targets be made at all parish kirks and shutting be practiced every Sunday.’

It’s worth taking a moment to examine James’ sparse words, for the first known written use of ‘golf’ created a virtually unsalable legend. Generations of historians and writers seized on the decree and cited Act number 338 to support the idea that an early target sport, similar in nature and form to the Royal & Ancient, was already in place by the fifteenth century and popular enough at that time to warrant its prohibition, not once, but again in the acts of 1471 and 1491. As we shall see, there were such clubs and games, but not in Scotland.

Despite the absence of any documentation showing that a golf-like game had been played in the British Isles before 1457, we find ourselves in the absurdity of the ‘fut’ and ‘golf’ rush, as if the birthplace of golf. In 1956, writing in The History of Golf in Britain, Guy Campbell, captured the absurdity of their conclusion to fantasy and wishful thinking:

‘And before this Act...nothing? Nothing at all! Indeed, but for this embargo, so far as Scotland is concerned, it is as if the game might never have been... A game that was such a natural obsession must have had an origin... but since... Scottish lore can supply no reference either to myth or origin, we must seek a line elsewhere. Fortunately, this can be found on the Continent...’

Incredibly, Campbell’s analytical and inductive conclusion was met with disdain by the Scottish golf establishment. Over the next fifty years, not a single native golf sector ventured to tackle the vast resources of European history, literature and art, to test Sir Guy’s conclusion. Shackled by a lamentable lack of academic curiosity and enveloped in a fog of dogma, vested interest and torpor, Scottish golf historians doggedly continued marching to their own drum – oblivious to the conclusions of contemporary research. For them, the golfing sun will forever revolve around Caledonia.

James had made it clear that time freed up from ye fut bawe and ye golf was to be devoted to archery practise. In the context of thirteenth and fourteenth century warfare, the longbow had a well-deserved reputation for levelling odds in key battles. June 24th, 1340, at Sluys, a battle that determined control of the Channel during the Hundred Years’ War, English archers devastated their ship-borne enemy, killing an estimated 20,000 French soldiers. Six years later at Crewe, English bowmen concentrated their firepower of ‘swollen tail’ arrows at five rounds per minute on the enemy’s horses. Without their mounts, the knights’ destructive potential collapsed like scotch in a cold breeze. The vastly superior French force was slaughtered.

To survive in Scotland’s volatile fifteenth century political climate required a far ranging intelligence network and the cunning King was well informed. James would have been aware of the lung tumultuous history of ‘foot-bawl and golf’ in France and the Low Countries. Known on the Continent as soule and soule à la crosse i.e. cross, chole, chole, kolli, kolhpelen, toosil der der, kolli, for centuries these violent games had been perceived as a threat to political stability, and had...
traded death, injury and destruction in their wake (see illustration above).

Their popularity went back to the early Medieval Ages. In 1147, a French lord, in riddled with a charter of donation for his local church, laid down certain conditions, in particular that, together with a notional sum to be paid directly to him, the church would present him with seven footballs (ballesin1 of the greatest dimensions). In 1378, sole was traditional enough to be described as so ancient its origins are beyond memory.

Sports, particularly the unrecorded recreations of contemporaries, were viewed with scepticism and disapproved by authorities everywhere. In 1261, as documented in Grandes Chroniques de France, the French became the first to blow the whistle on violent ball games, with a proclamation that would provide a model for monarchs, the church, and municipal authorities for years to come. At the heart of the edict was the contention that ball games interfered with the regular practice of arms - which could have serious consequences for countries hell bent on taking over others - or defending their own sovereignty. The model for the James edict had already been in place for two centuries.

In 1314, the English King Edward II, who few took seriously not least, because of the pleasure he found in common labour and his love for friends, but also his habit of riding around London with a lion in his cart decided to head north to bring the unruly Scots permanently to heel - something not even his father, Edward I, Longshanks, a fierce warrior who earned the epithet Maleus Scotorum - Hammer of the Scots’, had managed to do.

To eliminate one potential distraction from this high profile, well-organised campaign, Nicolas Farcione, the Mayor of London, decided to chase football out of his bailiwick. It concerned the game in the City through certain tumults arising from great footballs (grosses pelotes de pe), which resembed baseball. The earliest record known was published. One passage captures the mad dog nature of football: ‘As concerning football playing, I protest unto you it may rather be called a friendly kind of fight than a play or recreating, amusing one another when practising than a frolic sport or pastime. For doth not everyone in wey for his advaurence, seeking to overthrow him, and to pick up with might and despite, though it be upon hard stones… So that by this means, sometimes their necks are broken, sometimes their backs, sometimes their legs, sometimes their arms one part thrust out of joint, sometime another; sometime the nose gash out with blood, sometime their eyes start out and sometimes hurt in one place, sometime in another.’

The truth is that ye fat bawe and ye golf were two sides of the same, badly-tarnished coin. The French historian, Jean-Michel Meld, lumped them together under the French term, soule: “The brutality of soul, a game played with the hand, foot or cross (a hockey-like club explains its frequent mention in letters of remission (a legal document) which permits one to form a rather precise idea of the game. It consists of two teams, sometimes one player combined with the possession of a large ball of wood or of a ball of leather filled with moss and straw, to carry it a place determined in advance. The players, their adversaries record their own sides... These games were bloody and often deadly.”

Played by medieval commoners, the ‘games’ were most often multiclass scenes with no semblance of team play - all glory accrued to who ever scored the goal. At any stage, anyone could join the fray and attempt to wrest the ball away, knees and feet to achieve his aim - often a golden opportunity to repel old scores and grudges.

Despite their shared brutality, there was a vital difference between sole and sole à la croise (soule played with a cross). The introduction of a one-piece wooden club with a curved hockey stick like head, meant that the ball had to be struck with a club to propel it - instead of being carried, thrown or advanced with the foot, fist or knee.

This marked a significant turning point in the evolution of ball games - a move from what the French termed les jeux de force (games of strength) to les jeux d’adresse (games of skill), a first step towards golf. From the earliest-known depiction of a croise (about 1260) we see that the club was swung with both hands to generate maximum power - a primary characteristic of the game that would emerge centuries later as Scottish golf.

By now, the reader can forgive for thinking that a medieval spectacle couldn’t even walk past a punny-pitching match without getting at least one black eye. Yet for over 700 years a number of non-violent ball games flourished throughout Europe. These included bowls, ball bowls, skittles, clubs (also so-called ringball, badminton, hand-تهم (jeu de paume) and handball games. Balls were tossed back and forth and sticks, balls and discs, thrown at targets. There were also batting and fielding games, some of which resembled baseball. The earliest known illustration of such a game, showing a crosse similar to a shepherd’s crook being used as the bat, is an illustration in Bede’s Life of St Cuthbert, about 1120.

Centuries characterised by violence when played by commoners often took on a different character in the hands of landed gentility, aristocracy and royalty. Jeanne d’Evreux (1310-1371) third wife of King Charles IV of France was documented as having played the hockey-like game of croise using a silver club. Played in schools throughout the 19th century, hockey was a favourite travel companion. In the mid-19th century, John B. Hubert, founder of Ave Maria College of Narbonne, in Paris, encouraged his wards to play the old popular games of French folklore. As a marginal note in a college record dated 1346, singles out Crocet/Crosse played with a curved club shaped like a hockey stick, among traditional children’s games (Les jeux des Enfants).

Another sport turned in the hands of the aristocratic was the ancient game of sole and football, which undermined a dramatic transformation when adopted at the court of the magnificenter all round athlete, Henri II. The French king’s matches against the intrepid M. Lalau played regular fixtures at Le Puit aux Clercs in Paris. The bishop featured his Majesty the poet Pierre de Ronsard at his side – Henri’s Hurricanes clad in white uniforms, Lalau’s lads in red. Farther south in the city states of Florence and Venice, the Medici had already turned up soule known in Italy as calcio or calcio in new floyre, rules and enough magnificence to rival the Superbowl.

Despite interdictions, sole and croise continued to be popular through centuries – the players sometimes dressed to kill, sometimes in rags – until the two ancient ball games eventually petered out in the late 19th century in Britain, the most sports-mad region of France. But Soule and Crosse, despite their popularity, were not everybody’s cup of tea. As society developed, games that required tactics, skill, and custom made playing equipment emerged and by the late 13th century, change was in the air. Club and ball target sports – each team or player with his own ball – became increasingly popular.

Centuries before the first reports of similar games in Scotland, golf was in the making in France. The earliest documents and artwork depicting golf-like games come from Paris and La Touraine, which most of us know for its Loire Valley. There was a historical inevitability as to why the ‘honneurs to l’Arlette’, fertile, prosperous and cultured - had the honours as the birthplace of golf.

The story begins in Paris, the Greatest City of Christendom where, in 1295, we pick up the first thread of early golf, and begin to unravel the game’s complex fabric as it passed from France, through the Netherlands, Flanders and Italy, over more than three centuries before reaching Scotland’s shores.
Background. In Part I, was Scotland the birthplace of Golf? We saw that the famous 1457 edict by King James II, had nothing to do with golf but was, instead, directed at the violent hooliganism that had plagued the continent since the thirteenth century, and became a threat to order and archery in Scotland. Peaceful club and ball target games had, however, long been documented in France. In this chapter, we'll draw upon unknown documentation and beautiful images to tell the story of the emergence of early golf-like and other important ball games in the Kingdom of the Franks.

Our story begins in Paris, which derives its name from a Celtic tribe called the Parisii, who pitched camp on the banks of the Seine about 250 BC. The Romans, who conquered the city in 52 BC, called it Lutetia Parisiorum, Lutetia of the Parisii. Around 360 during the brief reign of Julian Apostate, the name Paris was adopted. Until well into the Early Middle Ages, Paris was little more than a small provincial centre, but that was to change radically when it became the capital of the Franks.

Two barefoot boys, one with his cross and its target variants. Thanks to precise 700 year-old documentation, we have our first concrete proof of the existence of early golf-like and other important ball games in the Kingdom of the Franks. The prolific letter writer, Petrarch (Francesco Petrarcha 1307–1374), father of lyrical poetry and Italy's earliest Renaissance Humanist, put pen to parchment to record his initial reactions to Paris in 1326. He wrote: "I was so far forward that he strake a stroke with his sword, yea and more than four, and fought valiantly and so did his company; and they adventured themselves so forward, that they were there all slain, and the next day they were found in the place about the king, and all their horses tied each to other."

What was it about Paris that made it so special in the medieval world? Thanks to Hervé Pierre Joseph François Gérard, who in 1817 edited a copy of the original manuscript containing Le Rôle de la Taillée, we have a clear picture of a highly advanced culture - a virtual bible for sophisticated ball games. The Taillée, which includes a detailed listing of addresses, trades and professions, is a godsend as a historical starting point in tracking down the origins of early ball games, including tennis, billiards and, of course, golf.

The statistics, anything but dry, reveal a great deal about the lifestyle of medieval Parisians, its quality, and the importance of sophisticated recreation, evidenced by the number and variety of artisan club and ball makers. This booming mini-industry employed 17 full-time masters and assistants to provide adequate supplies of tennis balls (étouves), for jeu de paume (the game played with the palm), and specialist dubs for ground billiards, the hockey-like game of crosse and its target variants. Thanks to precise 700 year-old documentation, we have our first concrete proof of the existence of professional equipment makers for precursors of noble games which would be played throughout Western Europe for centuries.

An analysis of the sporting trades reveals thirteen male paumiers or ball makers, and one woman paumière, possibly the keeper of a court. In one instance, members of a large family all made balls in a single atelier. Jehan, Thomas, Guiraut, Jehan le vie and the elder Thomas and La Filleure (son of Thomas), all registered outside the city walls at La Queste du Temple, were taxed
individually as paviours. The existence of two generations of pavers is particularly interesting, since it indicates that the tradition of ball-making dated back at least one generation before 1292.

The first evidence of early golf is in the form of a single billardier (named Nicolas) who made long-shafted clubs for billiards which, until about 1480, was played on the ground, the ball propelled through arches with a push shot. Confusingly, this trade also made another type club known as the billart, which was used in golf-like target games. The presence of two crossetiers (Thomas and Pierre), makers of the hockey stick-like club, the crosse, takes us another big step towards establishing the existence and popularity of multiple early golf variants.

**BEING FRENCH NOT ONLY BALL GAMES BUT FOOD AND DRINK WERE WELL-REPRESENTED.**

According to the French historian, Jasseron, the crosse-tiers’ task was to meet the needs of the ground, the ball propelled through arches with a push shot. Confusingly, this trade also made another type club known as the billart, which was used in golf-like target games. The clubheads, similar to those we will encounter in a later period, were crafted by 116 goldsmiths and 6 gold makers; 4 gliders and 5 enamellers. To round off Gerard’s list were 49 Lombards, as bankers, lenders, and money changers were known; 2 fourriers or priest’s concubines, 26 coffin makers (22 of them, curiously, worked, hangman). 26 coffin makers (22 of them, curiously, worked, hangman).

The first of the early golf games were played by the common people, who would rather cause mischief than make themselves useful—those who throw or shoot, who make themselves useful—those who throw or shoot, who make themselves useful who would rather cause mischief than make themselves useful—who throw or shoot stones, arrows, and various other missiles at the crows, pigeons and other birds that nest or perch in the walls and recesses of the church. Not only that, but they play ball-games inside and outside the church, and engage in other destructive games, breaking or seriously damaging the glass windows and the stone carvings in the church—and also expose their souls to grave danger.

Since the simple, inventive games played by the commoners, were of no interest to the aristocrats...
racy they are are un-documented. Therefore, to answer the question about the role of peasants generally, and shepherds specifically, in developing golf-like games, we must use our imagination and extrapolate from what we know. 

The earliest comprehensive records of ball games are found in French medieval letters de Remission legal documents drawn up to plead for charity in royal courts. Jean-Michel Mehl, who analysed tens of thousands of these letters, concluded that in 6-7% of all cases the deaths and injuries which had resulted in sentencing were caused by ball games. These documents offer an invaluable source of insight into the status of the players, manner of play, terminology and equipment. While most of the earliest records refer to brutal hockey-like games, the DNA of golf was well established. The skill needed to strike a stationary object accurately to a target was part of the shepherd’s job description. Violent de Duc, the architect who rescued Carcassonne from ruin, then supervised its restoration, wrote: “Until the XVIII century, shepherds carried a club terminating in a large end, or crook, in order to strike clubs of earth to drive breakaway lambs back to the flock.” In 1933, the brilliant young German sport historian Albert Wettwer, concluded that the genetic material for both hockey and golf was present in fourteenth century games played with a crook and a relatively small, solid ball.

By the turn of the fifteenth century, we read of the first florid tonguing of golf in judicial documents that reveal a flagging game that was both experimental and evolutionary. In 1426, a letter of remission records that the purpose of a game of Grande or Longue Roale (the long ball game) was to reach a neighbour- ing village ‘with the fewest strokes of the wooden ball savee to mouts du cros de la boule de bois’. A 1449 document reveals a more flexible variant: the winner could be ei- ther the first player to reach a distant goal, or the one who took the fewest strokes to get there. In other forms of competition, matches were decided by the longest drive – a practice that we will see continued in pall-mall. Both singles matches and teams of as many as 6 players were popular.

Mehl notes that players were obliged to play around obstacles or turn them to their advantage, which as we know, is easier said than done. This is precisely the reason why, in 1398, a match begun at midnight ended at sunset. The bawled rule of golf – playing the ball where it lies – found favour with early French golfers. In 1384, in the backbowl of Melun, a player whose drive had strayed into a pile of stones, brazenly attempted to replay the shot. The ensuing dust-up confirmed that this was a breach of playing etiquette. Before the emergence of man-made goals, first illust- rated in 1450, the ultimate scoring stroke was often played to a boundary stone or a convenient landmark. Early golfers, in some instances, insisted on playing to an elevated target – sometimes a mark on a tree trunk or a church or graveyard door.

In a prayer book illustrated in Paris about 1400, for the first time we see a game in which each player has his own club and ball, playing a match without physical opposition. The two players, a young man (left) and an older, white-haired man, are dressed in simple tunics indicating their peasant status. Their ball and clubs (the croose) are crude, lacking the finesse of artisan made products, but the young man’s swing is practiced, hands to- gether on the shaft, wrists cocked. The older man has his right hand raised, signalling caution – a silent Fore. There are too few clues to enable us to decipher the message and its symbolism.

Thirty years later, ca. 1460, we hit pay dirt – the first unequivocal depiction of early golf being played in both a short putting variant and a multi-club long game. For the next 20 years several more images surface, all from La Touraine, best known for its paradisiacl Loire Valley. There is a satisfying symmetry to finding the earliest evidence of golf-like games in the Loire region, for while the Capets governed from Paris, La Touraine was the traditional residence of the Capetiennes lords and their allies, home to France’s most beautiful and famous chateaux.

These depict an exquisite prayer book known as La Duchesse de Bourgogne (The Duchess of Burgundy), a former owner, and are attributed to Jean Fouquet and an anony- mous Master of the School of Tours, the cul- tural centre of the Loire, and capital of the Touraine. The first early golf game illustrated is a putting variant of Pallemen, shown in the context of a Nativité. Two shepherds holding clubs stand up Ward the herald Angels announcing the Virgin Birth, while three others, each with his rounded wooden ball and putter – a mallet or billard, compete in a peaceful contest on a smooth path, putting to an elevated ‘green’ cropped close by grazing sheep. The pin – known as a ‘piquet’ – has been firmly placed just off the path on a point of the green where, with the difference in height, the ball is bound to spring off course. The purpose of the game (like bowls, which probably had a formative influence) is to leave the putt as near as possible to the pin. It’s not until 1500 that we see, for the first time, a hole being used as the target goal on a green in Flanders.) The pin – known as a ‘piquet’ – has been firmly placed just off the path on a point of the green where, with the difference in height, the ball is bound to spring off course. The purpose of the game (like bowls, which probably had a formative influence) is to leave the putt as near as possible to the pin. It’s not until 1500 that we see, for the first time, a hole being used as the target goal on a green in Flanders.)

The mail, the first known two-piece golf club, has an exotic shape and an equally ex- otic description. It is a socket joint paral- lelepiped, the wooden head composed of three sets of nearly parallel planes. A similar club appears as a putter in the second semi- nal image of early golf, the February calendar page of the same prayer book, dedicated to celebrating Candelmas and the arrival of Spring (in the Middle Ages, 2 February). But here, it is only one of two variants being used in a multi club game, together with our old friend, the croose. The club with the curved head is used to play the initial drive (voile) and elevated approach shots, while the mail is reserved for putting. Two teams of four men, each with its own ball, are shown putting to piquets. Another team of four plays up to the green from the distant background.

IT MAY BETHAT THE END OF THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR ENFORCED GENTLE PURSUITS

Captured in time, fire and half-centuries ago, we have our first clear picture of an early form of golf, a multi club game, each team with its own clubs and ball, playing a station- ary ball without physical opposition over long distances, to terminate in a putting stroke to a pre-agreed target. Mysteriously, despite the apparent appeal of the game, by the mid-1470’s depictions of ball games are rare. Perhaps the end of the Hundred Years War (1337- 1453) that had raged over La Patrie, devas- tated the countryside, led to occupation and terror at the expense of farms and out- laws, had encouraged new forms of harmo- nious and refined sports. Perhaps the benevolent effects of the Renaissance acceler- ated evolution of club and ball target games, through new concepts and improved equip- ment that extended their parameters. Whatever the reasons, the next stage of evolution did not occur. Instead, perhaps, as- qually the richest and most diversified in golf’s history, manifested in two very different forms of early golf. One was Flemish-Coll, a single club-game played only with a crooss, the other, Jeu de M aul-Pall-Mail, was played with a wooden ball and mallet. Known as ‘The Game of the Upper 10,000’, Mail-Pall-Mail would capture European society and pro- duce the grandest and most beautiful courts and alleles ever built – their name lingering today.

These two games would bequeath golf a num- ber of its priceless characteristics including the concept of harmonious cross country play, re- fined skills of execution, putting, entering to a hole, and rules and etiquette – an enduring blueprint for popularity and prestige.

At another time playing at golf, a play not unlike to pale maille, whilst his schoolmaster standing talking with another, and marked not his happiness warning him to stand farther off, the prince, thinking he had gone aside, lifted up his golf club to strike the ball mean time, one standing by said to him, “Beware that you hit not Master Newton”; whereunto he, drawing back his hand, said, “Blad I done so, I had but paid my debts.”

Joseph Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England (1841), quoting Harl.MS., the Turk’s Head at Cornhill, there was talk of dons as hot as they usually were in June. In a mysterious plot against the new ‘Reformation’ government, and more still, about Nature gone mad. The bewildering climatic change had grave implications for farming, the merchant fleet, depended on home-grown wood. The Masster of Charterhouse, hishighness warning him to stand farther off, stood talking with another, and marked not unlike to pale maille, whilst his schoolmaster ‘At another time playing at golf, a play not unlike to pale maille, whilst his schoolmaster standing talking with another, and marked not his happiness warning him to stand farther off, the prince, thinking he had gone aside, lifted up his golf club to strike the ball mean time, one standing by said to him, “Beware that you hit not Master Newton”; whereunto he, drawing back his hand, said, “Blad I done so, I had but paid my debts.”

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bosun her boles took off in a low slaming flight, touched the surface, bounced slightly and continued skipping, then rolling down the alley, before it slowed and stopped. ‘Denned fine shot, Janey,’ said his brother, as he stepped up to play his own Début or Volée’. An impressively Pepys recorded the event in his diary, echoed in a cipher that wouldn’t be cracked until 1625: ‘To St James’s Park, where I saw the Duke of York playing at Pelmene, the first time that I ever saw the sport.’

The poet Edmund Waller, another who had seen the future king in action on the mall, penned an account unlikely to cause royal displeasure: ‘To see our Prince his matchless force employ In his mighty and graceful Aim, Vittour and youth in all his motions see. No sooner has he touched the flying ball, But ‘tis already more than half the mall. And such a fury from his arm has got, As from a smoking culverin’s ‘wree shot.’ Waller can be forgiven his attempt to curvify favour from the most influ- ential of patrons, but his account of Charles’ tee shots is wildly exaggerated.

Swinging a ‘mail’ that weighed some two pounds to drive a ball weighing between 5 and 7 ounces, required power, technique and timing. Despite the fact that the rules permitted the use of a tee made of dirt or a rolled card for the initial drive, it was unlikely that amateur players, such as the Stuart princes, could have driven more than 70 – 100 yards. When compared to the greatest of the professionals, Louis Bruyn, an 18th century master from Provence, who drove a series of balls 400 paces or 300 yards, to end grouped within a foot of each other, this was very good, indeed.

But Pall-Mall, as the game was known in England, wasn’t just about distance. The width of the alley was also an issue. To provide shade, the noblest of the sides to proponvies were not adverse to improving the lie of their caddies, like their Scottish descendents, philologist, Du Cange, was old hat in France: ‘It is as much of a place of mail’ the game was played in the city. ‘Tir.’ Treaditionally, the ball was faced, douched, or put in the ‘touche’, and on foot during the fourth Crusade (1204) which ended in Constantinople.

The early presence of mail à l’achicane in Paris, Toulouse, Bagnéres and Comminges, is well-documented. As M. Sudry, the author of Le Noble de Mail de Montpellier, wrote: ‘The noble game of mail is extremely ancient: Most of the rules of play having been lost through the lack of use; the Gauls attempted to conserve the game in the rules of their ancestors, for which they interpreted the terms and inserted them in L’Académie des Jeux.’ The original French rules may have been lost, but Les Lois Du Pallmaid in the Biblio- theque Nationale de France, dating to before 1655, provided guidance and clarity to modern Scottish golf when the first rules were drafted in Edinburgh at 1744. Golf would not be golf without the trail-blazing of ze maids. Its substance and spirit are based on the royal and ancient French game which contributed the concepts of un- opposed singles or team matches – each player with his club and ball – caddies, pros, clubhouses, penalties, handicapping, the cry. What is now known as ‘golf’ developed its own language, as well as its own rules, which were added as the game evolved.

France, boules made in Naples of medial roots were state of the art, although boxwood was also popular. In England, balls were made of chestnut or boxwood roots. Seasoning balls until they were properly dried and steady enough to resist splitting, was a long and elabor- ate process including storing in sacks of dry linen – believed to possess the right hu- midity – and playing them in over months with progressively stronger strokes.

Unlike early attempts in Scotland, when wooden balls flew irregularly – at all – French balls offered amazing accuracy. Coupled with artisans crafted well-balanced clubs having shafts of date palm, and heads fashioned of medial wood (or later, evergreen oak), good players, particularly professionals, could drive 2000 yards or more, and keep the ball in play within the narrow confines of the mall. In the middle of the mall was a post or a pivot (a swivel-mounted iron ring), while at each end was either a stone, known as le Pierre (which the ball had to touch) or an elevat- ed arch, the archet or fer, through which players were obliged to play the scoring shot, or passe – the equivalent of hitting out in golf. This stroke was taken with a small steel ball (balle), scoped up in the smooth motion through the ‘horns’ of the archet. Pall-Mall was played on the mall in two vari- ants. The usual was a game contested either as a singles match (un tour) – in the manner of the Roy, or King, or as a team match (en partie), ending with a scoring shot to the archet, the other variant was a long driving contest (au grand coup) in which the rules specified the use of a fee for the initial drive, and hand- capped weaker players through advancing them to take their drive opposite a designated tee. If the players were even when they reached the end of the mall, the player whose ball landed the farthest beyond the archet on the next shot won the match.

Simple arithmetic shows that getting a start time on the Old Course today, is a piece of cake compared to booking a match of pall-mall in the 17th century. St James’s new mall, even though it was 800 yards long, could probably have supported no more than four or five matches at any given time. Since social order in the Renaissance and Reforma- tion was based on the scoring target, and visit the Netherlands, the scoring was different. In the Netherlands, grand, and for commoners, nil. Fortunately, there was an alternative, the ancient French variant mail à chacune (pall-mall played in the manner of polo) a sport the Crusaders are doc- umented as having seen played on horseback and on foot during the fourth Crusade (1204) which ended in Constantinople. The game, according to the 17th century philologist, Du Cange, was old hat in France: ‘It seems that these people (the ‘Greces’, observed by the Crusaders playing Tzykanion) owe the origin to our French, and basically it wasn’t a change anything other than that still in use in Langue- doc, which one calls the game of mail, except that in Languedoc the game is played on the countryside and on long pathways where one drives a boxwood ball with a small mallet at the end of a span of length of proportion of...”

[Image of a player placing his ball on a tee observed by his partner while a boxwood (portlèves) with a rack full of reserve balls. Landscape with Men Playing Mail à la Chicane (detail). Pall-Ball 1624. Courtesy Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Golf Through The Ages]
Golf
THE TRUE HISTORY: PART IV
BY MICHAEL FLANNERY

About 1470, visual evidence of the early golf-like sport, pall-mall, ceases. However, in a most satisfying, amora-like fissum, two ball games emerged to fill its shoes. The first was pali-mall – in French, jeu de maill, or simply maill – played with wooden mallets and balls and a putter shaped like a long spoon known as the leve. The other was Flemish golf, a single club game played with a sheep-herd crook-like club and small ball. Each would contribute essential elements to the new game of golf that would emerge in Scotland towards the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In 1907, James Cunningham in cooperation with the distinguished golf writer, Andrew Lang, one of the most important literary figures of his age, decided to bring his talent to bear on an English translation of Nouvelles Regles Pour Le Jeu De Maill (New Rules for the Game of Mail), 1717, written by the French professional, Joseph Lauthier. The publication of rules for popular recreations accepted the establishment that had long been a French tradition. As witnessed by the 1292 Taille de Paris (Part I of this series), with its unique documentation of the earliest artisan club and ball makers, the French can no more resist researching, analysing, recording and publishing data about their society, than a chat, crime. One can imagine William, said from the beaches of Hastings still dump on his spurs, rubbing his hands while admiring his new conquest and thinking: ‘Best get started on an inventory of this island and publish it in the Doomsday-Book’. Projecting potential tax revenues from a new fiefdom of other conclusions that could and should have been drawn from Lauthier’s text. Smarring from the reverse Waterloo, Lang, in the best fox and grapes tradition, sought solace in his oft-quoted, appallingly parochial statement: “The history of golf as it should be done demands a thorough study of all Scottish Acts of Parliament, Kirk Sessions records, memoirs, and in fact Scottish literature, legislation, and history from the beginning of time.” This was, of course, sheer nonsense and not worthy of a historian of Lang’s stature. Worse yet, the chauvinistic false scent encouraged generations of golf historians to waste their time following Lang’s advice, when there was really nothing other than the history of Scottish golf to be found in the documents and literature he recommended. Although Lang never offered an explanation as to why he and Cunningham continued the project, one is tempted to think that finally two members of the British golfing establishment had grasped the fact that golf was not Scotland’s Immaculate Conception, but the product of a long club and ball game evolution. Pall-mall, the last tangible link in the ancient sporting chain was a logical starting point. Then, too, there was a romantic side to mail that would have appealed to Lang. Hadn’t Mary Queen of Scots celebrated the assassination of her husband, Lord Darnley, with a round of pall-mall in the fields nearby Seton?

Alas, poor old Cunningham had to make much ado about a text that defied golfing logic. Following a competent translation of Lauthier’s Foreword, the content becomes increasingly cryptic, as reflected in Rule XIII: “When one player is at three more and another is about to play one off three, being in the one playing three more has no need to shoot because he is not longer in it.”

Eventually, Cunningham and Lang, putting Nouvelles Regles’ tougher passages, limped through the round and their wee translation, New Rules for the Game of Mail, was published at St Andrews in 1910. Lang’s Introduction (tainted by an anti-Semitic at - tem pt to show the influence of mail in the staple of recreation for monarchs and aristocracy throughout Europe. Emphasising the game’s importance is Letters sulla pall-maill magia letter about pall-mall, ca. 1553, written by Bartolomeo Ricii to Count Al fonso Calcagnini, nephew of Alfonso I, which contains the earliest detailed description of playing equipment for the game. The ball had to be perfectly turned, as large as, but not much more than a round egg, and made of a hard and solid wood, from cumbulus, sorbo, olive and other trees of that nature. The size and shape of the ball made it easy to drive. The mallets described by Ricii differed from those used in the rest of Europe. Instead of having two flat faces with varying loft, the early Italian mallets had only one lobbed face for driving the ball, while the other was crafted with a small cavity – perhaps for a scooped and hurled scoring shot, or for getting out of bad lies.

Over the next two hundred years, artisans from Montpellier to Naples and Avignon to London experimented with woods including chestnut, boxwood and boxwood roots, medlar, ash, date palm and evergreen oak to perfect the playing characteristics of their equipment. The results were sensational: Carry was progressively longer – important on the mammoth mallets of Den Haag, Tours, London and Turin, all of which stretched 1000 yards or more. Balls flew truer – vital on alloys a skinny 10 – 14 feet wide, with low walls that kept only errant rolling shots in play, and rules that levied stiff penalties for out of bounds.

But there was a worm in the apple called mail. Equipped with high-tech equipment and perfectly tended, state-of-the-art surfaces, balls which were once a challenge became a piece of cake for better players – particularly the press/paladiumers. Un - estably, a parallel with modern professional golf springs to mind) Rather than solving them, expertly balanced and matched equip - ment exacerbated mail’s problems. As play became more and more predictable, specta - tor appeal diminished. Wagers – a feature of the game so important that they are addressed as the very first rule of the pre-1650, Les Lois de Pall-Mall (The Laws of Pall-Mall) – dried up. Gimmicks, including running after each shot, were introduced. The medi - cine wasn’t strong enough. The once healthy pattern was in terminal decline.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 78) wrote: ‘The game is extremely tiresome and subject to many drawbacks. One frequently sees people crippled by being struck by the ball; others succumb to pleurisy which lands them in the grave. The Turks, who have seen the game played here (France), say that our people are absolutely crazy to propel a wooden ball with powerful blows and then run madly after it, to drive it again from the place where it stopped.’ The philosopher’s
final salvo was devastating: ‘Of all the professions, it (that of the pale-
martert) is the most useless! A skil-
ful player is no more than a desppicable layabout.’

Much like poodles, once admired as
fine hunting dogs, mail had become overbred; its sportive soul and irre-
sistible charm had been progressively
suffocated by fulsome etiquette,
pedantic rules, perfect allies and the
diktats of fashion. Lauthier added to
the malaise, when he carped: “… it is
not pleasant to see persons of quality
wastcoat or without a wig’. When it
came, confirmation of the game’s de-
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flamboyant, an ornithological
Hieronymus Bosch painting of the ‘Seven
Deadly Sins’. The subject is a hungry colver
probable, perhaps with a rough ball
and a tennis-sized ball
lie on the beaten dirt floor.

The next insight into Flemish colf is an
eye opener – a ‘Ternaek Moment’ in the
history of golf. For generations, the Scottish
establishment has contended that the distinctive ele-
ment that sets golf apart from all other earlier
club and ball games is the putted scoring shot
to a hole. An illumination from a Flemish
prayer book dating from about 1480, depicts
a kneeling golfer (the classic putting technique
in Flanders), stroking a ball into the hole on a
frozen canal. A copy of this scene painted in a
h breviary some twenty years later, confirms the
existence of putting in Flemish colf. Other de-
pictions – petering out about 1570 – show colf
be ing played on ice and on land. Thus, two-
hundred and sixty years before the earliest pic-
ture of golf in Scotland (‘View of St Andrew’s
from the Old Course’ ca. 1740), we have unin-
contriveable evidence that putting (as well as
driving and approach shots) was an integral
part of Flemish golf.

The Flemings, who would eventually take
their recreations with them as their diaspora
led them to Scotland and St Andrews, itself,
had developed a game model based on an op-
posed cross-country play, terminating in a
putted strike to a hole that was very close to
the structure of golf, as we know it today. The
major flaw was that their kolf – a one-piece

   “Madam, please keep
your eye on the ball!”

The first half-season, 17th century Flemish
colf, playing on ice and on land.

HISTORY

MICHAEL FLANNERY

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wooden club, first illustrated in a match of hockey ca. 1230 - was severely obsolete. Compared technologically to French-built mallets - particularly those from Montpellier, the Rolls-Royces of playing instruments - the Flemings were still driving on carts. But change was in the air. Just a quick skate away were their Low Country neighbours, masters of metal technology. The Dutch would herald in a new era of club making, using steam to bend and shape wooden shafts, while introducing the use of alloys and metals for clubheads, technology practically unknown in rudder European ball games.

The Netherlands

When not exploring, trading, colonising, fishing, painting, leading the wave of Humanism illuminating Europe, planting bulbs, firing kilns, making lace, being pious or celebrating boisterously, the Dutch somehow always in step with the times - were playing games. Their recreational cornucopia is recorded in paintings, drawings, watercolours, engravings, sculpturers and ubiquitous tiles known as wandtreden. The games included tennis, ringball (beugelen or clooten), nine pins, bowling, stone throwing, badminton, sailing on beaches in wooden boats, and at least three variants of kolf (or colf), a single club game played year round.

‘Als het hard vriest, kolfmen op het ijs.’

The old proverb summed it up: ‘When everything is frozen hard, one plays kolf on the ice.’ Winter in the Netherlands, was a time for sporting activities, skating, strolling, sledging and socialising. Intoxicated by nature, the Dutch, en masse, took to the ice. The vast surfaces created by frozen rivers, inland seas and lakes, inspired new variants of kolf, which, when played on ice was called ijskolf, or kolf op het ijjs. Some of these were based on pall-mall played from the early 1600’s on grassless, tree-shaded malls (the maliebaan) in Amsterdam, Utrecht, den Haag and other Dutch cities.

The same basic short and long variants they enjoyed on land were transferred to the cold unforgiving slippery surface that was the focal point of Dutch life until early spring. The equipment for the short variant of kolf on ice was the same as on land: A sheepskin-covered wool-stuffed ball called a kolfbal or cloot (which was also used for hand-tennis) and a kolf, its curved head clad in a shroud made of pewter, lead or a base alloy of lead and tin. Played to improvised targets such as a stick or rowing-boat, or to a purpose-made target such as a stake (the student) or post (the paal), anchored or frozen in the ice. Kolvers are usually depicted playing in ordi-
EARY SCOTTISH GOLF HISTORY IS VIRTUALLY INOUENT – a historical haggis made up of scraps from letters, laws, accounts and diaries, a se ries of documentary nodds and winks that leaves the reader to interpret whether it really was golf, as we know it, that was being dis cussed. Since there are no artifacts pre-dat ing the eighteenth century, nor are there pictures of golf in Scotland prior to c. 1740, we have no clear impression of the Scottish game in its formative years. Was it a multi club game? Was it played cross-country? Was golf played on iced surfaces in winter? Did it involve putting to a hole? What kind of play ing equipment did it use? For answers we must turn elsewhere.

History demonstrates that like food and drink, legislation, medicine, music, clothing, transportation, literature, science and prac tically everything else, golf would have adopted characteristics from both earlier and contem porary models to form its nature. One of these, we know, was pall-mall, a passion of Scottish royals and nobility throughout Europe, a club and ball game which closely influ enced the manner in which golf would be played. But let’s turn the sport historical rid
dle around. Is it possible that golf, as played in Scotland over four centuries ago, was no longer derivative but, rather, already served as a role model for ball games popular in neigh bouring countries?

To find the answer, we turn to the Nether lands, the year-round game known as kolf or colf and the three ’Am: Afferden, Avencampo, and ’s Amster damen colf. When analysed together, these most diverse elements provide an astonishing insight into what may have been the state of Scottish golf in the 17th century.

Our story begins 464 years ago in Has burgh, a sleepy hamlet in the Netherlands province of Gelderland. The stately medieval buildings, pastoral landscape and broad river caressing its shores, paint a deceptive picture, one that conceals brooding political unrest that would soon erupt into seemingly endless warfare.

The Netherlands was on the brink of an era of turbulence and bloodshed unprecedented in its history. In 1543, under the rule of Charles V of Habsburg, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and Duke of Burgundy, the Duchy of Guelders (Gelderland) had been the final regional sheep to be herded into a politi cal flock known as the “Seven Provinces” – a minute part of an empire that would eventually span four million square kilometers. The move was an early step in a volatile religious and political policy that in 1568, would ignite into the devastating “Eighty Years War”, which in its bloody terminal phase, ran in parallel with the Thirty Years War.

Bent over his sturdy oak desk, the thoughts of Pieter van Afferden, a 35-year-old Dutch schoolmaster, were far from war. After years of research and writing, he had finally com pleted Tyrocinium lingue Latinae, an ambi tious Latin-Dutch phrasebook, to which, in the manner of Renaissance Humanists every where, he signed his Latinized name, Petrus Aphærdanus. His thoughts may have been troubled. Was the subject matter sufficiently diversified and stimulating to have broad popular appeal? Would his fellow burghers be interested enough to buy the phrase book? Would he find a printer of stature, who was prepared to make the substantial investment in paper, typesetting and bindings, and then promote and distribute the work throughout the Netherlands and the key foreign markets where scholars played a decisive role in successful sales?

Afferden had already contacted Johannes de Laet, a highly influential publisher and di rector of the Dutch West India Company. The imprimatur of the distinguished geogra pher and cartographer would practically guarantee success of any work. And in his heart, the young author felt that Tyrocinium filled a vital niche in the book market created by Gutenbergs introduction of movable type in the Europe print industry. Mechanical printing had dramatically reduced the cost of books, while making them accessible to a broad public, and demand for self-improve ment works was becoming. Pieter van Aff erden was certain that the content and novel format of Tyrocinium filled a vital niche in the marketplace.

Instead of adhering to the largely inflexible word and definition structure of the recent dictionaries written by Murmelles, Curius and Pahlandius, Afferden’s didactic work ac tually facilitated the use of Latin (the lan guage of the educated class) in daily conversation. Its 47 numbered chapters of ferred complete phrases for a range of topics that covered the daily spectrum: health and home; meat, fish, bread, milk and beer; school and schoolbooks; animals, birds and insects; shipping, commerce, divine service and the royal court. The final four chapters, De Luca (The Games) were the icing – a ‘How to Play’ manual with terminology, rules and etiquette for the most popular of Dutch sports, including ball throwing to a hole; tennis played with the palm and racket; the wildly popular ancient game of ringball or croquet – the longest chapter in De Luca, and, for the povertiness of sport, Dutch kolf, pre sented as a dialogue between players. Chap ter 24 gives us a strikingly detailed picture of early golf in the Netherlands, including ban ter that wouldn’t be out of place on the Old Course, today.

Although Johannes de Laet had died in 1549, the first Latin-Dutch edition of Ty rocinium was published under his imprint in Antwerp, 1552. The work soon caught the eye of Johannes Gynmich of the famous Cologne printing dynasty, who followed up in 1575 with the first Latin-German edition. Ty rocinium was a runaway best seller. By 1635, fourteen Latin-Dutch and nine Latin-German editions had been published. There is little doubt that its success in the Netherlands and Germany was due in part to Chapters 21-24, De Luca devoted to the most popular adult ball games of Holland, equally popular across the borders shared with Germany.

As the 25 phrases of the golf dialogue re veal, before teeing off players had to decide what type club they would play. The choice was between a club with a lead head (clava plumata), and a ‘tough and useful club’ (Clava limita) commonly, possibly a one piece wooden club such as that used in the Flemish game. The match – apparently stroke play – then began with a drive.

Examples of the test follow, with English equivalents of the Latin, German and Dutch phrases, offered from a golfer’s perspective: Move back a bit while I drive. Step back a bit, you’re in my light. What do you think of that? Not bad. That’s a great shot! Whenever the ball loses a shot, I’m not far from the target any way. I’m going for it (When the Aberdeen school master David Wordsworth, wrote his own golfing di alogue about 1630, he lifted this phrase almost literally for the golf text of his own Vocabulac.)

The match continues: Who’s up? Johan has the honour. But I’m playing first. No way, that’s not the way it’s done. You wait your turn. And finally, •
a phrase we can all identify with:

I didn’t play badly. It just wasn’t my day.

In Tyronium, we find clear evidence of a mid-16th century early form of golf. I.e. each player equipped with his own club and ball playing in the countryside without physical opposition or distraction, until the final scoring shot, described by one of the players: “Ick will den bal lichtelich in doon” (it want to stroke the ball in). Were they putting? If so, was it to a hole? From Illuminations in Flemish and French devotional books dating from about 1480 to 1530, we know that a hole on ice or on a green was used for the putted scoring shot in the game of cull. The Dutch, however, seem not to have adopted this practice. The word used in Afferdien’s text is ‘cuyl’, meaning ditch, hollow or depression, which in 1575 was translated into German as ‘Grub’. With the same basic sense. Chapter 22, entitiled ‘De-Sphaeris mis-sibulacs or cloot werpen’, describes a game in which the ball was thrown to a target hole. Here, Afferdien, always precise in his descriptions, uses the term ‘onkyme’ (a diminutive) rather than cuyl, to describe the target, a hole cut into the ground with a knife.

Clearly, the Dutch were playing a game which, seen in the context of Afferdien’s dialogue, had many features of golf. But was it truly golf as we know it today, or rather some variant of kolf played with soft balls and lead headed clubs – ill-suited for a true cross-country game? All known Dutch clubs at the time, were designed for short game variants, which is logical when we consider the limited, highly-aggressive variant of kolf played with softballs and lead featherballs. The second key figure in deciding whether or not it was a variant of collof, was the early 17th century, such equipment was available and used in long variants of IJskolf on the frozen courses created by the ‘Small Ice Age’. At the same time, we are aware that the Dutch tradition of kolf making was limited to two clunky variants, the most popular of which was based on a lead sheet which entered into a boom ing centre for sports and recreation.

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The ‘Mute One of Kampen’

Hendrick Avercamp (1585 – 1634), born in Amsterdam, was only a year old when his family moved to Kampen, a medieval village nestled along a dike near the shore of Zuider Zee. Hendrick’s parents were cultured and well-travelled. In Kampen, his father first held the town post of apothecary and later became its physician, ensuring a comfortable lifestyle and an opportunity for the 18-year old Hendrick to study art in Amsterdam with the Danish painter, Peter Bachus, where his silence in the studio led other students to nickname him ‘The Mute’. In fact, it was a birth defect that made him turn to his open air studio – its giant surfaces allowing him to communicate with his friends and family, and to earn a living from his artistic talent.

The nearby Zuider Zee (now IJsselmeer) was a birth defect that made him turn to his open air studio – its giant surfaces allowing him to communicate with his friends and family, and to earn a living from his artistic talent.

This leaves us confronted with a crucial question: how did the Dutch tradition of kolf making and playing change from the early 16th century to the early 17th century, such equipment was available and used in long variants of IJskolf on the frozen courses created by the ‘Small Ice Age’. At the same time, we are aware that the Dutch tradition of kolf making was limited to two clunky variants, the most popular of which was based on a lead sheet which entered into a booming centre for sports and recreation.

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Many of his works, including Poetry from a Spa, were based on his experiences. In 1657, Poetry (Poetry), which included a chapter entitled ‘s Amsterdammers winter - The Winter of the Amsterdam Citizen, a tribute to his birthplace, was published.

At the time, the poem, which contains a narrative of a typical point-to-point match of Ijskolf, was simply delightful literary entertainment. Today, it can be viewed as a golf-historical bonanza. The precise description of equipment and the manner of play, give us a vital insight into not just Dutch golf in the 17th century but, by inference, the state of early Scottish golf. A part of Chandelier’s text is devoted to the two variants of Ijskolf; a long driving game and a point-to-point contest, both played over an extended course. The first stanza translates as follows:

The golfer ties his cloaks up on an icy path, something rough to stand on. When alpenrode ice is snowless it laughs and muffles smooth tales.

The sides have been drawn, standing surely strikes his ash with lead weighted or his Scottish cleek of boxwood, three fingers wide, one thick, with lead in it, the feather ball from the ice, invisible until its fall observed by fore-caddies.

We note that two different clubs were used to drive the feather ball (pennebal), in the long variants of Ijskolf, both were weighted with lead in the Scottish clubmaking tradition. One type was probably made of ash (the Dutch word ‘esp’ was used, which could also mean maple – a wood available from Dutch Colonists in the New World), while the other is described as a Schotse Klik (Scottish cleek), made of boxwood, measuring three fingers wide and one thick. These are close to the measurements of the earliest extant Scottish long noses.

Both clubs must have been exciting novelties to warrant such precise description in a sporting culture that had been making kolf-stokken for at least 150 years. Judging by Avercamp’s depictions, the Scottish cleek - racy, elegant and exotic – was a thoroughbred in a stable filled with plough horses. Since the weight of the Schotse Klik was concentrated in the clubhead, and the shaft was long, thin and whippy, the Schotse Klik was played contemporaneously on the links of Scotland.

’s Amsterdammers winter continues with details of the wages. Each player kept a score notch on a slender stick (the kerfotik), the first scorecard. Failure to do so meant disqualification: For he who does not mind his tally-rod shall erase the sum altogether. Thus we see that Dutch ijskolfers suffered from the same difficulty of remembering all their strokes that has traditionally afflicted golfers.

Using a kerfotik solved the problem, while whistling probably helped high handicappers keep their hands warm. Long variants of ijskolf were contested by teams, although as seen in Avercamp’s art, in the first 25 years of the 17th century, singles matches were the preferred manner of play.

While Dutch documentation and pictures present us with a bountiful historical harvest, there are no images of golf balls or clubs in Scotland prior to about 1740, nor have any early clubs resembling the Scottish cleek survived - although some wooden clubs conserved from the 18th century closely resemble the type playing instrument depicted by Avercamp and, later, Jan Steen. The evidence, although circumstantial, is compelling. We may surmise that by the first quarter of the 17th century, the Scots had developed and exported a club with a weighted boxwood head, that in skilled hands, could drive a compatible ball so far in the air, that it was invisible from the driving point at its fall.

Based on the three ‘s’s - Altenen, Avercamp, and ’s Amsterdammers winter - we have a new perspective of what Scottish golf may have been at the beginning of the 1600’s: a single-club game played with an elegant long nose club (the Scottish cleek) and feather ball (the pennebal equipment designed for long drives and approach shots, both at the heart of the modern game. And Scots being Scots, while enjoying the game at home, managed to finance their pleasure and a wee dram after the match, by exporting clubs and balls to their neighbours in the Netherlands.

In the sixth and final chapter of Golf - The True History, we’ll take a look at the early days of golf in Scotland, its near demise and recovery; and its exportation to a welcoming world in the hands of Scottish ex-pats.
Revolution’, and the driving force in shaping new courses, clubs, and associations of working men, more public matches and golf encouraged growth in all directions: the hearty broth in the Petridish of Victorian percha ballextended the season from a single game, possibly played with two different types of clubs. Part of the problem confronting researchers in semantics. The word ‘golf’ encompassed two radically different types of games played at opposite ends of the social spectrum. One, the feather ball; played in churchyards, was a mad dog, foaming with gratuitous violence. Accounts of deaths inflicted by ‘golf’ appear in Breaching (1508), Sterling (1561), and Krâo (1632). David Hamilton writes of a 1639 incident in Falkirk, in which the victim had been struck with a “golf-club and nothing of him thairwith upone the face”. While blood flowed on churchyard stones, the royalty, aristocracy and even merchants, professionals, dervishes and army officers, had taken up the Golden Lab variant, a social game played without physical opposition. We can only guess at its exact nature, but documentation suggests a short game, possibly played with soft balls and shiny sticks, and a long game with artisan-made equipment, which Hamilton labels, ‘Noble Golf’.

More semantics – did golf become golf?

Our research into the origins and nature of early Scottish golf reveals a tentative evolution of an unopposed club and ball game – profoundly influenced by pall-mall, but also influenced by a variety of other physical features to serve as the ‘hole’, wouldn’t they – in the manner of the Dutch in ball throwing contests – simply decide to mark the hole with a knife and play to it?

The next problem would have been how to mark the hole so that it could be seen when playing an approach shot. On the beaches of Westward Ho! Devon, historic accounts refer to the use of gull feathers to mark holes, a target known to have been used in medieval bowls. Flag sticks or something similar, would have been the next stage in that particular evolution. As in the development of club and ball games we have studied, particularly in the hands of the people, golf could, of necessity, become a game of innovation with an elastic structure. It had to be affordable, accessible and enjoyable.

Elements not meeting these criteria would have been ruthlessly eliminated, replaced with others that did. Today, the game inched its way towards an unidentified goal, gradually curving as, with the help of historical and contemporary models, it adopted, changed and discarded equipment; modified the manner in which it was played and fiddled with its structure until a satisfying sport emerged that was compatible with the local landscape, climate, tradition and customs, technological competence, economics and recreational tastes of the Scots.
HISTORY

Golf – The True History: Part VI

Mysteries of the Early Game

Exactly when the hole appeared as the target goal of Scottish golf is unknown. First evidence of play to a hole is found in a Latin text for Aberdeen schoolboys, published in 1636. Even the origin of the verb ‘put’ is unclear. Writers who have argued Dutch origins for the word are simply dabbling in historical sophistry. The word ‘put’ was not used in any ball game played in the Netherlands. In fact, for years, the Scottish game used the verb, ‘tip’, to describe putting. We are equally ignorant about the emergence of the first purpose-built course, where it was and how many holes it may have had. The first appearance of man-made hazards is another mystery, as is the beginning of multi-club play. Even the date of the introduction of the feather ball, which dominated play for at least two centuries, is unknown.

The earliest account of Scottish golf comes from a Lord High Treasurer entry dated, September 21, 1501, detailing disbursements for the athlete, 29-year-old King James IV: from the sea day of September to the bower (bow-maker) of Sanct Johnston (Perth) for clubs & balls (£1 6s 8d) (£4 15s 6d). Unfortunately, the Treasurer’s accounts provide neither details of how the game was played nor its equipment. The use of the word ‘clubs’ neither confirms nor refutes the existence of iron rescue clubs during a multi-club game. Perhaps early clubs were fragile and subject to breakage. Maybe James ran a rental service for his noble guests.

It is most likely that the inspiration for a long variety of golf came directly from the Flemish single-club game of golf, as illustrated by a cross-country game from about 1500. As well as a number of mentions to Scotland – in particular, St Andrews – Scottish diplomats, merchants, agents and bankers all maintained ties to their counter-parts across the ‘German Sea’, and would have been aware of the popular recreations of their amiable, ball-game-playing trading partners. Flanders was, as well, a traditional exporter of finished goods to Scotland. ‘Noble Golf’, the antithesis of the game played by the poorer class, may simply have been golf, adapted to Scottish soil.

Further entries in 1503, less than a year after the king’s first recorded purchase of clubs, reveal the continuation of an ancient Scottish tradition of playing a pool game and ball game as an adjunct to Candlemas, the celebration of the purification of the Virgin Mary. February 3, James on a visit to Falkland Castle, wrote a letter to his cousin Edward, in which he lost ‘1ij French crowns’ (three French crowns, or forty-two shillings!). A later entry confirms that as in France, the game was played to celebrate the arrival of spring and Candlemas.

Only two days later on February 5, royal accounts record, ‘an item, for golf clubs & bailes to the King that he played with’, which cost nine shillings. James, no doubt, was already hooked and convinced that only he had the right equipment his permanent companion off the tee – a life-threatening slice – would disappear. And, that so-and-so Bothwell, was hitting ‘100 ells down the middle, as straight as a falcon’s dive’. A new custom-made club was the only answer. We can only guess at the bower’s sales pitch: ‘See here your Majesty, I just bought a fine and odd batch of St Rules yew saplings for shafts (only thing that’s whipperin’ is a River Dee lampyre) and a bale of baby peacock down for stuffing the feathers. High compression? Drop one on an oak floor and it’ll still be bouncing when you finish your port and join the ladies. Trust me, Jimmy, you’ll hit it a league.’

It is unlikely that Falkland, the vacation resort of the Stuart kings, had a golf course per se, but it would certainly have had adequate parkland to permit an ad hoc game, perhaps played in the manner of ma’d la chalice, with selected trees and stones as target goals. The major step needed to adapt the early target golf into the game we know today – the establishment of permanent courses broken down into stages, each terminating in a scoring shot – was still a good two centuries away.

There is no record that any purpose-built course existed in Scotland earlier than the eighteenth century. Rather, play as at Falkland Castle, was on private parkland or es-tates, or surfaces such as the common land set aside near all towns for recreation – sometimes on the low, sandy land separated from the sea by dunes, as known as links. St Andrews University conserves a parchment manuscript dated January 25, 1552, signed ‘Hum Archbypshop’ (John Hamilton Arch-bishop), incorporating a concept of common property reserved for, among other activities, the practice of sport by the citizens of St Andrews, ultimately to be manifested in golf and the Old Course. A diary kept by a James Melville, a student at the university from 1569-1574, shows that he and his classmates played golf there.

Dallying with Bothwell

More important to our hypothesis of what early Scottish golf may have been, is a document in which Mary Queen of Scots is cited by her half-brother, James, Earl of Moray, to have played ball games a few days after the death of her husband, Lord Darnley – claiming that she ‘indulged in sports that were clearly unsuitable to women’. Moray specified in the Articles he put before the Westminster Commissioners on 6 December 1568 (here translated into modern English) ‘Standing at Holyroodhouse for a few days after the murder, she then went to Seton, taking exercise one day right openly in the fields with pall-mall and golf, and at night clearly dallying (‘raushing her body’) with Bothwell.’

Well, it’s possible Mary and ball dallying may have considered unsuitable for women, but in France, where Mary was raised in the household of King Henry II and his wife, Catherine de Medici, it certainly wasn’t. Henry had masts constructed at all their residences and both he and his queen (a break-neck horsewoman) were passionate players of the game of mallet and link. Linking the two games is the obvious fact that this ‘golf’ variant would have been suitable for a Queen. Since Mary was seen playing both games, they must have had specific characteristics that lent them a distinct identity and made them equally appealing. Both were played in the fields near Seton Castle, which tells us that the pall-mall variant was mail à la chicane (the cross-country game), and the golf variant, long, or ‘Noble Golf’.

The fundamental differences between the two games lay in the playing equipment. Pall-Mall used a mallet and heavy wooden ball to produce a skimming shot where roll was the determinant of distance. Golf moved away from this to a light club and complimentary ball that produced a long, high shot, where carry determined distance.

The swing technique and the concept of playing without opposition to a pre-determined goal may have considered unsuitable for a Queen. Since Mary was still be bouncing when you finish your port, it was more suitable for a Queen. Since Mary was a woman, or put simply, the long iron rescue club of the Frugel Scots, when striking a feathery on its cover with an iron meant the end of an expansive ball. Worse yet, the ball had to be holed out before it could be replaced. Still the concept of multiple clubs had arrived.

A manuscript entry in 1652, ‘Bunker clubs, an iron club, and two play clubs (drivers) of my own’, and in 1663,

For mending bunker club 1s 6d.’

In 1636, a lively Latin-English phrase book modelled on Pieter van Afferden’s Tyrocinium linguae Latinae (1552), was published in Aberdeen. To make Latin more palatable to his wards, the author and schoolmaster, David Wodderburn, created dialogues about ball games, including golf. One passage reads:

Immo sta piota in Foream – the ball is gousted (possibly in a ditch).

Cedo facultatem ferreum – let’s have the bunker club; probably a heavy iron with a concave face, or a spur iron, both made by armourers or blacksmiths.

In the vocabulary of early golf, a bunker did mean sand-filled bunkers or traps, but, rather, was a generic term to describe all features of the course except for the ‘hole green’ (putting green) and the ‘fair green’ (fairway).

By 1691, multi-club play seemed to be well-established. Olive Geddes, drawing on National Library archives, writes that on April 27, 1691, John Mackenzie wrote a letter from his friend, Alexander Mourot, a Regent at St Andrews University, informing him that he had dispatched to him ‘some Sett of Golf Clubs’. A century later, Hoyle defined the standard set: ‘...the Common Club used when the ball lies on good Ground; the Scrape and Half Scrape, when in long Grass; the Spoon, when in the hollow; the Hicory Club, when it lies deep among Stones or Mud; and the Light iron ditty, when in the Surface of Chingle or sandy’.

The golfers’ search for suitable courses was rarely as successful as at Aberdeen. A 1641 account by Parson James Gordon describes the idyllic ground reserved for Aberdeenshire golfers: ‘Upon the east side of the citie and of Fattie today, “foottie” or “fit-
they were all gentlemen of independent fortune; having never felt the least alarm from tunes, who had amused themselves with this match with like-minded souls—often meeting in taverns near the links, where the round could be celebrated and wagers laid serve—to band together in clubs and play boisterous atmosphere did much to foster Goffe, bowling and archerie'.

Between the two rivers Don and Dee. Here the inhabitants recreat themselves with several kinds of exercise, such as foot ball, Goffe, bowling and archerie'. It didn't take long for men with the exception of the 19th century fisherwives of Musselburgh, golf was a masculine pre-serveto band together in clubs and play matches with like-minded souls—often meeting in taverns near the links, where the round could be celebrated and wagers laid on future challenges. The hearty, often boisterous atmosphere did much to foster the spirit of golf. Tobias Smollett wrote of the Leith Links Old Guard: 'Among others I was shown one particular set of golfers, the youngest of whom was turned fourscore: they were all gentlemen of independent fortunes, who had amused themselves with this pastime for the best part of a century with out having ever felt the least alarm from sickness or disgust; and they never went to bed without having each the best part of a gallon of claret in his belly'. Despite the quantity of claret consumed, club spirit (and eternal optimism) was captured in the toast proposed by the Captain of Muirfield Golf Club: 'Stiff shafts and hard hat's'.

The mid-19th century, the pre-serve of 'gentlemen', provided an ideal venue for men with a passion for golf. Their members— all from the same social caste—nurtured ideas, refined rules, and encouraged competition (within their peer group) through regular contests; the winners often rewarded with splendid trophies. They also exchanged tips on technique such as high approach shots with a spoon. David Stirk notes the ball, striking the ground just behind it causing the lofted clubhead to bounce up and forward sending the ball into flight. Poetry of the 'Royal Society O'Goffeers', at North Berwick in 1831, gives us a taste of early golfers' skills: 'The next stroke—a prime aint!—the ball’s deep down isn’t lifted out nately by help of the spoon'.

The LONG-OVERDUE ARRIVAL OF ARTICLES AND LAWS AT PLAYING IN GOLF In 1744, the urge to measure their mettle against the rest of the golfing world led Leith Golfing Society, later known as the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, to stage a Scottish amateur open tournament restricted to 'Nolesmen or Gentleman, or other golfers from any part of Great Britain or Ireland'. There was, however, a problem that first had to be solved. Despite some 200 years of play, golfers still lacked a code of rules to govern the rigorous and infinitely varied long game contested on the links, where lost and damaged balls, broken clubs, grazing animals and their dung, burns and whins, sticks and stones, rabbit holes and scraps, all influenced the outcome of scores and matches. The Honourable Gentlemen hastily hammered together The Thirteen Articles, rules which provided a common base for contesting the game. This was a vital step forward; one that provided the legitimacy and structure necessary to move golf from the realms of an interpretive ad hoc fringes sport, to an established recreation capable of being contested not just on a regional basis, but, even internationally.

Increasingly, the gentry realised that the caddies who carried for them—the first professionals—were often talented players in their own right, in fact, a damn sight better than they themselves and their peer group. Within a short time, high-stake wagers on matches between caddies were established, with the winner, while not sharing the purse, was still rewarded—sometimes handsomely—for his victory. Having established that the caddie/professional was not only a superior golfer, but sometimes exhibited signs of human behaviour and traits of intelligence that gentlemen believed were a monopoly of their class invested by a Divine Power, noblemen took another audacious step and arranged Pro-Am, best ball matches within their clubs, in which the professional partner shared the purse.

The timing was right. Not only had Victorians prospered and made all attempts by their betters trickled down to the working class, but tradesmen, proud of their skills and their vital role in the Industrial Revolution, asserted their rights to a lifestyle and institutions that emulated those of their betters, albeit, on a far more modest scale. One of these, fundamental to the development of the game and its exportation, was the golf club. September 29, 1843, the most famous of them all, St Andrews Golf Club, was founded. As Eric Clark tells us, its 11 original members, mostly tradesmen, ‘...included a Dancing Master and a Butler (George Morris, brother of Tom). At that time, a feather ball cost around 2/- (10p) and a day labourer might earn 1/- (5p). Golf was not a poor man’s game and our first members were men of some substance’. The founder members were soon joined by Allan Robertson, the finest golfer in the first half of the 19th century, and his friend and successor, Tom Morris. Allan’s inspiration and fiery competitive set the club on the path to championship dominance, while Old Tom’s example (four open titles) and guidance saw to it that players associated with St Andrews Golf Club would win 20 Open Championships between 1860 and 1902. Scots, and particularly St Andrews professionals, became a watchword wherever golf was played— even if their instructions could rarely be understood by their eager pupils. The game and its popularity spread rapidly. By the beginning of the 20th century, golf had advanced deep into the continent. Despite the best effort of the magnates who sought a monopoly on early golf in America, the fertile, meritocratic soils saw the gates stormed and the game wrenched from the hands of a wealthy few, to become truly a sport of the people. In many ways, it was an astonishing development in golf’s centuries-long history. But today, wherever golf is played, its soul remains in Scotland. We smell the faint salty tang of links flowers and grasses; hear the skirl of pipes; sense gulls hovering over golden beach on pristine featheries. Michael Flannery is the author of Golf Through The Ages—600 Years Of Golfing Art, and a member of St Andrews Golf Club.