

Golf and Gown at the Home of Golf

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Reprinted from
Through the Green,
the magazine of the British Golf Collectors Society
June 2023



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provides a synopsis of Chapter 2 from his book St Andrews: Camelot of Golf about the University of St Andrews and its relationship with golf

ST ANDREWS has many interesting features as both a town and a golf venue but, compared to other places, perhaps its most unusual attribute is the central role and influence of the University. The University shapes the personality and features of the *auld grey toon* and it also interacts with golf in a variety of ways. While this may be unsurprising given the University has been *in situ* for more than 600 years, I am unaware of any other major golfing location

*The word 'student' has been used rather liberally as in an individual who attended the University and generally the term has not been defined as in undergraduate, non-graduating, graduate, post-graduate etc.

which has a University at its core. Inevitably the University of St Andrews produced several firsts: students* and professors were playing golf many years before the Royal and Ancient was formed; the world's first student golf club was established in 1855 at St Andrews; the first prose book about golf was written by a graduate, Henry Brougham Farnie, in 1857; and, at the time in 1905, the youngest-ever winner of the British Amateur was a 19-year-old student, Gordon Barry, at Prestwick. Today, with scholarships and honorary degrees, the University has forged and maintains strong relationships with a cross-section of interesting golfers, past and present, leading to partnerships through golf which transcend sport and touch on aspects of the modern world.



Fig. 1: Student Golfers, by Thomas Rodger, c. 1880
courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland

Students

The University and the game of golf sit together at the very heart of St Andrews. Established in 1413, it is probable, but not proven, that the University pre-dated golf at St Andrews and Neil Millar has argued convincingly that the first recorded game of golf in St Andrews was around 1503.¹ The earliest reference to University students and golf dates from 1574 when James Melville, a student, complained about his father's lack of generosity in time-honoured fashion:

for archerie and golf, I had bow, arose, glub and bals, but nocht
a pурс for Catchpull and Tauern, sic was his fatherlie wisdom
for my weill.^{2*}

In 1642, a report by the University Commissioners at St Andrews encouraged recreational activities, including golf (or 'gouffe') for students and stated that only 'laufull exercises, as gouffe, archery, and other of that kind, which are harmless and do exercise the body' were permitted, whereas cards and dice games were forbidden.³ Between 1712 and 1715, the Mackenzie brothers, students at the University, wrote to their father about how they were playing golf up to three times a week, commenting about professors playing more in the better weather; clearly, golf was played regularly by members of the University many years before the formal establishment in 1754 of the golfing society which became the Royal and Ancient.⁴

There are sporadic references to student golf for the next 150 years, but it only became formally organised when the University Golf Club was established in early 1855. On March 24 of that year, 30 golfers played their first Medal competition (won by David Millar in 99 strokes).⁵ Membership numbers were around 30 students for most of the 19th century and, during those years, peaked at 60 in 1890.⁶ This represented very high levels of participation, given the number of students attending the University ranged from 130 to 200 in the years around 1880.⁷ From the 1860s the students played regular team matches against Perth, Leven and Montrose, occasionally against the Royal and Ancient, frequently against the Thistle Golf Club from the 1880s but not, apparently, against the St Andrews Golf Club whose membership was based around artisans.⁸

The School of Divinity provided many golfers and remained sizeable at the University even in the late nineteenth century, meaning it was not unusual for divinity students who were able golfers to enter the Church after graduation.⁹ These students certainly had plenty of time at the University to hone their skills on the links: a typical degree would take between six and eight years of study. Such individuals were also well-read and literate so several of them also became writers[◇] and, as David Hamilton has pointed out, 'The Reverend Golfers' formed an extremely influential golfing diaspora on and off the course.¹⁰

Writing about golf, often in entertaining and irreverent

*A modern English version is: 'for archery and golf I had bow, arrows, clubs and balls, but no money for tennis and drinking, such was the father's wisdom for my wellbeing.'

◇ Other Divinity students from the University who were published golf authors included Reverend JG McPherson and Reverend TD Miller.

terms, was widespread in the student community and featured prominently in the weekly student magazine, *College Echoes*, produced from 1889. For the academic year 1891/92, the magazine contained several references to golf, including a fictitious account of an imagined golf course that had been constructed within the University's St Salvator's quadrangle. There were also some bad golf puns:

Question: What do you call a 'Bad Drive'?

Answer: The bus to the station.

Question: What is a 'Dangerous Hazard'?

Answer: The degree exam.

In my book, I discuss various student writers who were influential in shaping golfing literature – Henry Brougham Farnie, Robert Forgan Jr, Andrew Lang, John Tulloch and Robert Fuller Murray, the poet – but for the purposes of this article I shall simply refer to Robert Barclay (1868-1904) because he was one of the most interesting people I came across during my research. Barclay (together with Andrew Lang) produced an interesting anthology called *A Batch of Golfing Papers* in 1892 which contained Barclay's essay on 'The Home of Golf'.^{*} The extended passage below highlights the quality of his elegant writing:

Golf without St Andrews would be almost as intolerable as St Andrews without golf. ... Here the children make their entrance into the world, not with silver spoons in their mouths, but with diminutive golf clubs in their hands. ... it is in truth a 'City of Golf'. ... in short St Andrews is the home and nursery of golf ... the very air seems to be impregnated with the game. ... At the tee with the brave old towers behind, the rolling waters of the bay to the right, and in front the mounds, and hillocks, and levels of the links, one feels he has reached the end of his pilgrimage to the Shrine of Golf ... And standing at the end hole ... with the feelings of one who has found life worth living.¹¹

The book was originally produced for the British market but was also published in the United States in 1897 and 1898. Barclay, a divinity student, became a minister in the Church. On the first occasion when he preached in St Andrews, allegedly Old Tom Morris came up to him after the service and said, 'Ye missed nae short putts that day Mr Barclay'.¹² Barclay with his keen sense of humour would have enjoyed the joke. Tragically, as the minister in the parish of Greenock, Barclay died young in 1904, aged just 36, under general anaesthetic which had been administered for a tooth extraction.¹³ Even today, students continue to write about golf and improve our understanding of various aspects of St Andrews.[◇] Consequently, over more than 150 years, student writers have forged St Andrews' reputation and explained its attributes to the rest of the world.

*This reference to 'the Home of Golf' is one of the earliest uses of this epithet as it only came into widespread acceptance after the 1970s

◇ For example, Julius, ME, *For the Good of Golf and St Andrews: the St Rule Club Centenary* (1998); and Horovitz, O, *An American Caddie in St Andrews* (2013). I have been told that Julius was a visiting student from America but have not been able to verify the fact, given she may have been non-graduating.

Another student, but from a very different background, Charles Blair Macdonald (1855–1939), was the ‘father of American golf’ according to the Florida-based World Golf Hall of Fame: the first American golf architect, he constructed the first 18-hole course in the United States, at Chicago; he established the USGA; and he was the winner of the first US Amateur Championship.¹⁴ Macdonald moulded golf in the United States for 25 years from the early 1890s, but none of this could have happened without his sojourn at the University in 1872. He resided with his paternal grandfather, William, an honorary professor at the University who occupied the chair in Civil & Natural History from 1849, so it was family connections at the University that pulled Macdonald to St Andrews, not golf.¹⁵ He was unaware of the game and initially referred to it disparagingly as ‘tiddle-de-wink, stupid and silly’.¹⁶ William, a member of the Royal and Ancient, introduced his grandson to golf and Charles then played regularly with the best young golfers of the town – including Young Tom Morris – and kept his clubs in Old Tom’s shop.* In the early years of the USGA, one of Macdonald’s great achievements was to maintain alignment with the R&A.

The University

In the second half of the 20th century, the University became much more engaged with golf at an institutional level. There were two key events: first, in 1976, a trust fund was created by American benefactors in memory of Bobby Jones for scholars in St Andrews and Atlanta; second, in 1984 during The Open, an honorary degree was awarded to Jack Nicklaus following his successes at St Andrews in The Opens of 1970 and 1978. Jones

*I believe, but am happy to be corrected if wrong, that Macdonald was the only living person to see both Young Tom Morris and Bobby Jones play golf and, he thought Young Tom possibly the more gifted



Fig 2: Jack Nicklaus, honorary citizen, 2022
Image by Gayle McIntyre, courtesy of the University of St Andrews

and Nicklaus were the best amateur and professional golfers respectively of the last 100 years, so, it could be claimed, these associations reflected the motto of the University – ‘Ever to Excel’.

Scholarships

Sometimes scholarships and bursaries simply enable a prospective student from an underprivileged background to attend the University, such as the 19th century students Peter Anderson and Findlay Douglas who, respectively, proceeded to exercise significant influence over the development of golf in both Australia and the USA. However, scholarships at the University linked to golf moved to a different plane in 1976, when the Robert T Jones Memorial Trust Scholarships (the ‘Bobby Jones scholarships’) were established by his friends to ‘perpetuate his memory in the hearts and minds of young people by creating a permanent memorial to his [Jones’s] sense of values and character’, with one trust in Atlanta for Emory students and another trust in St Andrews.¹⁷ The Atlanta scholarships offer a year in St Andrews for four students from Emory where, as a law student, Jones is remembered reverentially as ‘an internationally renowned golfer, Emory alumnus and extraordinary human being’.¹⁸ The Scottish arm of the trust provides support to four St Andrews students for study at Emory University, Atlanta: these scholars get at least one game at Augusta National; attend The Masters; and make a presentation in the clubhouse about their experiences to Augusta National members and trustees from the two universities during the tournament.¹⁹ Inadvertently, but very appropriately, this Trust has established a perpetual bond between the world’s two most famous golf courses: Augusta National, which Jones created, and the Old Course, which he adored.

John Knox’s underpants?

With unparalleled pomp and circumstance, surrounded by priceless medieval maces in the majestic Younger Hall, only at St Andrews can a respected golfer enjoy the unique privilege of receiving a Doctor of Laws by being tapped on the head, some say with John Knox’s sixteenth-century underpants (it is actually John Arbuthnot’s hat, dating from 1696), by the Chancellor or Vice Chancellor in a ceremony that celebrates 600 years of a pre-eminent University at the Home of Golf.* Nicklaus was not only the first golfer but also the first sportsman to be honoured in this manner by the University; as was noted in 1984, this was ‘a remarkable omission in view of the great and growing importance of sport and physical education in our civilisation’.²⁰

At that date, Nicklaus had won the previous two Opens played at St Andrews (in 1970 and 1978) and was the leading golfer of the era, having won a record seventeen (subsequently eighteen) major championships, including the modern

*Professional golfers who have received an honorary degree from the University of St Andrews are: Jack Nicklaus (1984); Gary Player (1995); Seve Ballesteros and Colin Montgomerie (both 2000); Peter Alliss, Nick Faldo and Peter Thomson (all 2005); Charlie Sifford (2006); Renee Powell (2008); Padraig Harrington, Arnold Palmer and Tom Watson (2010); Paul Lawrie (2018); Bob Charles, Sandy Lyle, Catriona Mathew, José Maria Olazábal and Lee Trevino (2022)

professional Grand Slam. This feat also linked Nicklaus with Jones, because he had not only become the first golfer to surpass the latter's 13 victories in Major championships, he was also directly involved in the Robert T Jones Memorial Trust as both a director since 1978 and as a donor to the St Andrews component of the trust.²¹ On the eve of the 150th Open Championship at St Andrews in 2022, and following in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin and Jones, Nicklaus was made an honorary citizen of St Andrews at a ceremony in the Younger Hall of the University where he chose to wear a scarlet gown, the required regalia for undergraduates.

Twelve years beforehand in 2010, Arnold Palmer was a particularly deserving recipient of his doctorate because his decision to play in the Centenary Open in 1960 reignited American interest in both St Andrews and the competition, while the year 2010 marked its 150th anniversary. Consequently, the 2010 honour bestowed on Palmer was awarded at the perfect moment: 50 years after his influential first appearance at St Andrews. The photograph shows Palmer receiving his honorary degree in 2010 alongside an all-star cast of golfers: to his right is equally deserving five-times Open winner Tom Watson, Pdraig Harrington (twice) on his left with Peter Alliss in the background. Palmer also gave his name to a University scholarship in 2013 and subsequently hosted its golf team in America at his Bay Hill course.

Honorary degrees can also be used to highlight important social issues such as equality, diversity and inclusion: in 2006 and 2008 the honorands were two distinguished professional African American golfers – Charlie Sifford (1922 - 2015) and Renee Powell (1946).^{*} These two awards by the University were ground-breaking in a sport that remained dominated, Tiger Woods excepted, largely by affluent white men and was perceived as restrictive. Sifford was the first African American to play on the PGA Tour in the States in 1960, momentarily making his debut aged 37, which duly led to the PGA of America's Caucasian-only clause being overturned in 1961.²² Prior to 1960, racial segregation in US golf was rigorously enforced in

^{*}In an interesting coincidence, in March 2022 Renee Powell became the first recipient of the inaugural Charlie Sifford Award from the World Golf Hall of Fame which recognises the advancement of diversity in golf



Fig. 3: Arnold Palmer: honorary graduate, 2010
Image courtesy of the University of St Andrews

ways that are difficult to comprehend today: although Sifford became a professional during the 1940s, he was required to play on the Black golf tour, winning the Negro National Open six times. The Laureation Address by astrophysicist (and golfer) Dr Kenny Wood recognised 'his achievements as a golfer, his perseverance in the face of injustice, and the dignity with which he has conducted his life'. Sifford's experiences and the poignancy of his 1992 book *Just Let Me Play* also inspired the creation of New Links St Andrews, an educational charity with a focus on under-served young people, which has supported Harold Varner III among others.²³

Powell was described by Professor Alan Cairns in the 2008 Laureation Address as follows: 'in Renee Powell we honour someone whose achievements transcend the world of golf and move into much broader issues of human rights, racial equality and the treatment of disadvantaged members of society'.²⁴ At Clearview Golf Club, Canton, Ohio, Powell helps minorities and under-represented groups through various golf programmes. Significantly, William Powell, her father, was the first African American to build, operate and own his own golf course.²⁵ In 2001, Clearview was added to the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior while the Club is run and managed today by the Powell family, pictured below in 1960 with Renee on the far right. In 2018, there was further recognition for Powell: one of the newest halls of residence in St Andrews, Powell Hall, became the first University

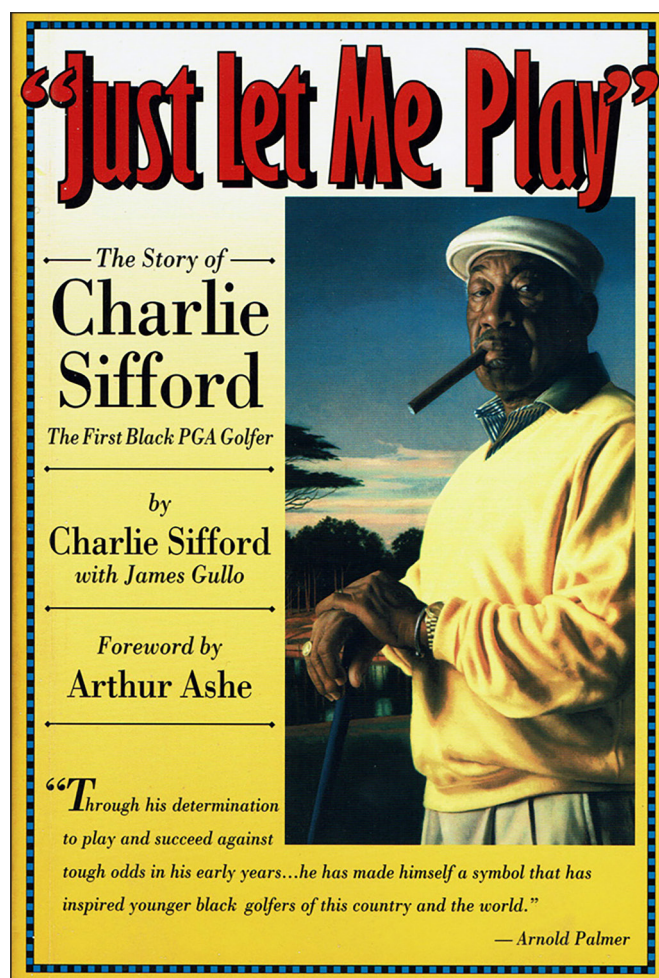


Fig. 4: Just Let Me Play, by Charlie Sifford, 1992
Image courtesy of John Stewart

student residence anywhere to be named after a golfer. Fittingly, Powell Hall for postgraduate students has a fine location, only ten minutes' walking distance from the Old Course. And of course, with its conveniently located halls of residence close to the Links, the University provides almost 4,000 beds daily for visitors attending The Open at St Andrews.²⁶

In conclusion

The University is an integral component of the town, community, and the golfing environment with an impact, past and present, that stretches far and wide. Also, it deepens, extends and perpetuates relationships with golf and golfers. Partly owing to the University's presence, there really is nowhere else like St Andrews.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to a broad range of staff at the University, particularly in Special Collections. Additionally, in terms of specific individuals, I received invaluable help from Robert Fleming, Niall Scott, Lauren Sykes and Gayle McIntyre.



Fig. 5: Powell Family at Clearview GC, c. 1960



Fig. 6: Renee Powell entering the Royal and Ancient clubhouse for the first time as a member, 2015
Image courtesy of John Stewart

Nigel Morecroft's book, St Andrews: Camelot of Golf (ISBN: 978-1-7391796-0-1) can be purchased from his website (<https://nigelmorecroft.com>), from some outlets in St Andrews or via selected on-line retailers

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