



The Curragh Golf Club 1858

*A Scots Home from Home
described by*

Colonel William H Gibson, Retd

WHEN I PUBLISHED my *Early Irish Golf* in 1988 I presented the evidence for a 'nascent' golf club at the Curragh military camp, in Co Kildare, in 1858. The Earl of Eglinton, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1858-59, was a frequent visitor to the course on the Curragh, where he played with Major Robert Harrington and Lieutenant Andrew Smith (Maxwell) of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Lanarkshire Militia and others, including the Musselburgh professional John Gourlay.¹ This regiment had been embodied in 1854 and Lieutenant Smith (who took the maternal name of Maxwell afterwards) must have had Edinburgh connections, as he was responsible for contacting the legendary ball-maker Gourlay. At the time of publication, I postulated:

In this Chapter the reader will not find a claim for the foundation of a club, but will see very clear indications of the existence of organised golf on the Curragh in the period 1858 and 1859. ... The question regarding the possible foundation of a club on the Curragh during the period 1858-1859 must remain unresolved until positive evidence is discovered.

At long last, the necessary evidence for the establishment of a golf club has come to light and the 'chain of evidence' was rediscovered through the use of modern technology, via digital versions of newspapers and their availability on the internet.

The arrival of an e-mail from the British Library announcing the availability of an online digital archive of over 50 newspapers was the beginning of a wonderful new phase of research into the news and sports reporting of the years from 1800 to 1900. A search for 'Curragh golf 1858' resulted in three 'hits' with a column of news from the Curragh Camp being carried in three newspapers – *The Belfast Newsletter* 1st July

GAETIES AT THE CURRAGH CAMP.—The Curragh Camp is now very gay. Balls are to take place once a month. Stewards—Major Connolly, Coldstream Guards; Captain Beresford, A.D.C.; Captain Onkes, Military Train; Captain Donald, 2nd Royal Lanark; Captain Lowry, R.C.L.I. Militia. There have been several pic-nics, and there are archery meetings once a week. There is also a golf club got up by the officers of the Lanarkshire Militia.

Fig 3 An internet hit – *The Curragh Golf Club 1858.*
The Belfast Newsletter 1st July 1858

1858, *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin) 1st July 1858 and the *Morning Chronicle* (London) 2nd July 1858. Each paper carried the same details headed 'Gaieties at the Curragh Camp', which stated that 'The Curragh Camp is now very gay. Balls are taking place once a month ...'. A list of the Stewards is given, including Captain Donald of the 2nd Royal Lanark Militia and it was mentioned that 'There have been several picnics and there are archery meetings once a week'. The final sentence provides the evidence for the creation of a Golf Club on the Curragh at this time: **'There is also a golf club got up by the officers of the Lanarkshire Militia.'**

This simple sentence conveys a significant piece of evidence regarding the golfing activities on the Curragh in 1858. The implication that there were a sufficiently sizeable number of golfers within the 2nd Battalion, Royal Lanarkshire Militia is evident; however, there were several other regiments at the Curragh Camp at this time. These included the 3rd Battalion, 60th Regiment (23 officers), Cork North Militia (ten officers), Dublin Co. Militia (eight officers), Longford Militia (four officers), Westmeath Militia (four officers), 2/10th Regiment (twelve Officers), 2/14th Regiment (twelve Officers), 2/16th Regiment (ten Officers), 2/18th Regiment (twelve Officers), 76th Regiment (ten officers), North Lincolnshire Militia (ten Officers), and 2nd Stafford Regiment (ten Officers).² Thus, there was a total of 115 Officers of other regiments based at the Camp, in addition to the administrative and logistics staff. Some of these officers must have been exposed to the game of golf there and induced to join the Curragh Golf Club. As mentioned above, the Earl of Eglinton was a regular visitor to the course and he was accompanied by his ADC, Major Walter Ferrier Hamilton of the Royal Ayrshire Rifles Militia, who was Captain of Prestwick Golf Club in 1855.³ In addition, the presence of John Gourlay, the eminent Musselburgh professional, must have provided a solid foundation for the new Curragh Golf Club.

Second Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia are billeted at Lanark 1855

The outbreak of the Crimean War in October 1853 caused great pressure on the British Army, with the mobilisation of a major new army to participate in the forthcoming campaign in the Crimea. The Curragh, Aldershot and Shorncliff Military

Camps were created in 1855 to house and train the thousands of new recruits that were required to augment and replace the regiments that had gone to the Crimea. Militia Regiments of Great Britain and Ireland were mobilised to act in defence of the homeland and this caused great 'billeting' pressure on the two islands.

On the 12th of March 1855, the Burgh Council of the Royal Borough of Lanark approved the sending of a letter to the Secretary of State for War for the relief of the inhabitants of Lanark from billeting of Militia. One month later, on the 9th of April, the following entry appears in the records of the Burgh Council:

Billeting letter – letter from Secretary of State for War intimating that he had requested the Muster General and Board of Ordnance to make arrangements as may render it unnecessary to billet the 2nd Lanark Militia upon the inhabitants of Lanark was read. ... A letter from Dumfries with a copy of a petition against the billeting system in Scotland was produced ...⁴

Many of the major towns in Scotland were bracing themselves for the arrival of militia regiments and, despite the re-assuring letter from the Secretary of State for War, the Lanark Borough Council must have been worried about the 'arrangements' for the accommodation of the 600+ Officers and other ranks of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Lanarkshire Militia. A somewhat different resolution presented itself when the Council received a letter from Lt Col. Buchanan, Commanding Officer of the

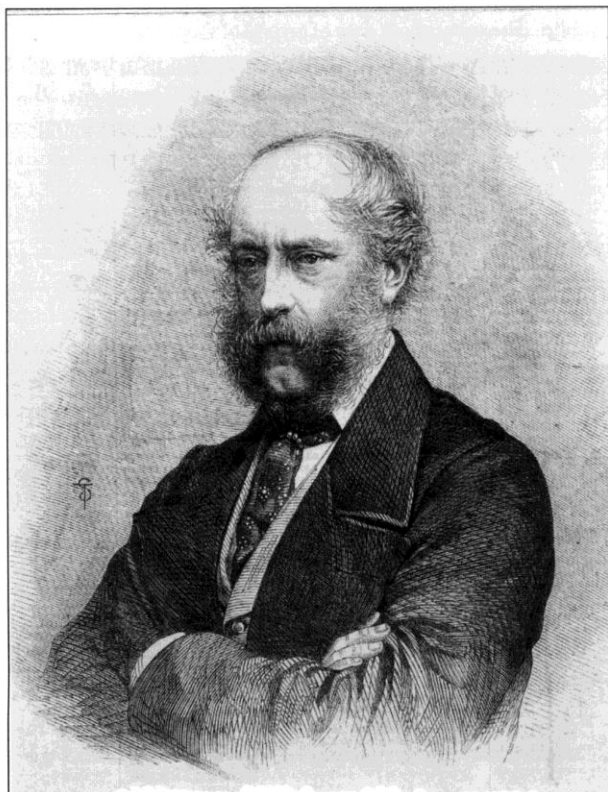


Fig 1. Archibald William Montgomerie, 13th Earl of Eglinton, Captain R&A 1853, founder Captain Prestwick GC 1851 and co-founder of The Open Championship in 1860

2nd Battalion, on the 7th of May 1855. Therein he enquired 'regarding accommodation of Militia and what rent would be asked by the Council for a piece of Lanark Moor to hut it. ...'⁵ The Council appointed a Committee to meet with the military authorities and there was a quick outcome; on the 14th of May the Committee reported:

Ground for huts for Militia – that they had agreed to give ground for the huts for accommodation of Militia, provided it was taken in a convenient situation – **without interfering with the other purposes of the Moor.**⁶

Lanark Golf Club (1851) – home for the 2nd Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia 1855–1857

The specific mention of 'other purposes of the Moor' is significant because Lanark Golf Club, founded in 1851, was sited on the Moor, and the Loch was used by the local Curling Club. As a result of the agreement reached with the military representatives, the militia camp was laid out at the eastern extremity of Lanark Moor. The present clubhouse of the Lanark Golf Club is located at the top (north) of the Loch and the golf course extends to the area shown as 'Camp, site of'. It will be seen that



Fig 2. John Gourlay, eminent Musselburgh golf ball maker

there is no record of the Club being granted permission to use the Moor for golf.

The hutted camp of the 2nd Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia would appear to have been occupied by the 9th of November 1855, when a letter from Major 'Harrington' (a Curragh golfer in 1858) was read at a meeting of the Burgh Council. Therein he requested 'permission to throw over the Horse Market some ashes or slag to absorb the water on it as after rain it is so saturated as to become useless for the drill of the Militia'.⁷

Records of the Lanark Golf Club

Unfortunately for the modern golf historian, the earliest minute books of the Lanark Golf Club prior to the 1880s are missing. Thus, the contemporary relationship of the golfers and the Royal Lanarkshire Militia must remain a mystery and it is unfortunate that there is no record of officers becoming members of the Club during their residence on Lanark Moor. The 150th anniversary history of the Lanark Golf Club (2001) carries the following entry regarding the presence of the military on Lanark Moor:

Lanark Golf Club has had a connection with the Army locally going back to the Club's earliest times. It began with the militia being encamped around the area beside the fourteenth hole which now forms the practice ground. The concrete bases for the more permanent buildings could be seen in the deep rough until quite recently. The old photographs in the clubhouse show the size of the fairly large encampment.⁹

It would appear that the Lanark Golf Club had been playing



Fig 7. Edward in uniform of a Grenadier Guards officer

on the Moor without any formal arrangements with the local Council from its foundation on the 4th of October 1851. The first Council record of the Golf Club is on the 28th of March 1856:

Application by golfers to erect house Provost Grey enquired if the Council would allow that Golf Club to build a neat little brick house on the east end of the engine house for the purpose of holding their Clubs, the house to become the property of the Burgh on the breaking up of the Club. The Council granted the request.¹⁰

The Lanarkshire Militia on the Curragh 1858 - 1859

The 2nd Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia remained encamped on Lanark Moor until October 1857, when it was reported in the *Scotsman* on the 3rd of October that it was now positively 'fixed' that the Lanarkshire Militia was to be embodied 'and that the compliment of calling out our country's local force was first paid to the 2nd Regiment. The day fixed for assembly is Wednesday 21st October'.

At this time the extent of the Indian Mutiny, which had begun in May 1857, was clear and there was a rapid redeployment of the British Army to India from all over the world. The movement of the Militia to Ireland was authorised at this time and the 2nd Battalion, Royal Lanarkshire Militia arrived to Ireland in early December, when they were reported to be at Kilkenny and 'the left wing' was ordered to the Curragh.¹¹ On the 24th of December 1857 the *Anglo Celt* newspaper reported that the 'two Companies ... who lately left Kilkenny for the Curragh Camp ... returned on Monday last and joined the headquarters in Dublin'. The subsequent date of arrival of the 2nd Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia to the Curragh is not known; however, it appears that they were well established at the Camp when they had 'got up' a golf club by the end of June 1858. The 2nd Battalion was on the Curragh in August 1859, when it was reported that 24 Officers and 625 Other Ranks were based there.¹²

The Earl plays golf on the Curragh in 1858-59

Thus, the founders of the Curragh Golf Club were still 'in situ' when the Earl of Eglinton had terminated his duties as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in June 1859. Two years later, he was a key figure in the founding of the first Open Championship at Prestwick Golf Club.¹³ During Eglinton's tenure in Ireland he was a very popular figure and, as reported by Lieutenant Andrew Smith Maxwell of the 2nd Battalion Royal Lanarkshire Militia, he was a regular visitor at the golf meetings on the Curragh. There were other members of the R&A resident in Ireland at this time: John Jameson (of whiskey fame) had been a member since the

THE PRINCE OF WALES.—On Saturday last the Prince of Wales visited Musselburgh, and, after witnessing a game at golf between the Earl of Eglinton and Sir James G. Baird, took the Earl's clubs, and went a round with Sir James Baird, playing with considerable tact. At the conclusion of the game, Provost Kemp of Musselburgh, having been introduced to his Royal Highness by Colonel Bruce, expressed the great pleasure he felt, in common with every member of the community, at the visit of his Royal Highness. The Prince kindly acknowledged the compliment.—*Courant*.

Fig 6. Aberdeen Journal 31st August 1859

25th of March 1840 and had a private course at his Portmarnock residence in 1858;¹⁴ William Ponsonby Barker, of Kilcooley Abbey, Tipperary, was a member of the R&A since the 25th of March 1846; George Houghton Powell of Kilmarnock, Wexford, was a member since the 9th of May 1838. Additionally, David Ritchie, who had laid out the first course near Donnelly's Hollow on the Curragh, in 1852, was living near Straffan Co. Kildare and he too may have been playing with Eglinton during 1858-59. They would have been acquainted during the Earl's first term as Lord Lieutenant in 1852, when he was a regular player on the 'Links near Donnelly's Hollow, Curragh'.¹⁵ Alexander Love, who had played a golf match with Ritchie at the Donnelly's Hollow 'links' in 1857, also lived nearby.

Edward Prince of Wales: Royal golfer at the Curragh

Prior to his arrival at the Curragh Camp as an officer of the Grenadier Guards, on 29th June 1861, the future King Edward VII had been introduced to the game of golf. It is almost certain that his tutor was General, Hon. Robert Bruce, who was admitted to membership of the R&A on 26th September 1834. He had been appointed as Governor to the Prince of Wales when the *Aberdeen Journal* carried a news item on the 31st of August 1859, which reported on the presence of the young Prince at the Musselburgh Golf course. Here it can be seen that the Earl of Eglinton and Sir James Gardiner Baird (R&A 1850) played an exhibition game, witnessed by the Prince. The Prince then played a round with Sir James Baird, who was a former Captain in the 10th Light Dragoons.

Bruce would be promoted to General on the 10th of December 1859 and eighteen months later he would travel to the Curragh with his young Prince. Unfortunately there is no record of Edward playing golf during his ten weeks at the Camp;

rather, his period there is remembered for his indiscretion with Nelly Clifden, a young actress who 'knew her way around the camp in the dark'. Two years later, in 1863, Edward became Captain of the Royal & Ancient Golf Club

Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to thank Peter Lewis, former Director of the British Golf Museum, for help in providing membership lists of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. Also, George Cuthill, Manager of Lanark GC for access to the Club's records. The staff of Lanark Library, particularly Mr Iain MacIver, were most helpful.

Notes

1. **Gibson, WH.** *Early Irish Golf.* Oak Leaf. 1988. pp 27-29
2. National Archives UK WO/17/1120 p 23
3. *Early Irish Golf,* p 28
4. Council Records, Royal Burgh Lanark 1849-1863 p 268
5. *Ibid* p 271
6. *Ibid* p 274
7. Council Records, Royal Burgh Lanark 1849-1863 p 301
8. Courtesy of Lanark Golf Club
9. **Shanks, TH.** *Lanark Golf Club Fifty Years On 1951 to 2001.* Private. 2001. p 42
10. The 'Engine House' was sited close to where the present clubhouse is located
11. The *Nation* newspaper, 10th of December 1857
12. National Archives UK: WO/17/1122 p 25
13. When young Tom Morris died in 1875, *The Field* newspaper of the 1st of January 1876 reported that the 'Belt' he had won outright, following his third victory in the Open, was 'the gift of the Earl of Eglinton'.
14. *Early Irish Golf,* p 27
15. *Ibid* pp 20-21



Fig 5 . Lanark – A Stymie by the Military. (Etching by George Aikman ARSA, from a watercolour by John Smart RSA. 1893)⁸