

## **BETWEEN THE WAR YEARS**

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### **Tommy Foggett**



It is with a certain amount of fear and trepidation that I contribute to the research into the history of the course. I can only speak for the period post First World War (1914-18) up to 1949 and in my formative years I had to rely on my father to pass on his knowledge of the course.

I was born in the village in the latter part of the First World War in “the old manse” which is situated opposite “The Dunstanburgh Castle Hotel”. The house was the birthplace of William Stead who was born in 1849 and who became a great evangelist (also editor of The Northern Echo, sub editor and editor of The Times).

On a few occasions he was placed in jail by the government of the day for opposing the importation of young girls from France for the purposes of prostitution. Sadly, he went down with The Titanic on its maiden voyage in 1912.

The original nine-hole course came into being at the turn of the century. It was owned by Sir Arthur Sutherland Bart and used to provide recreation for his invited guests and patrons of The Dunstanburgh Castle Hotel, which was owned by Sir Arthur. The licensee, Miss Nicholson, collected the golf course fees and acquainted the players of the local rules. One or two local people were employed to look after and maintain the course.

My father, John S Foggett, came to Embleton from Newcastle upon Tyne at the latter part of the First World War where he joined the firm of Mark Appleby Ltd as manager. They were quarry owners and needless to say the main employer in the village. My father introduced a building section in the firm. The quarry produced whinstone which was blasted from the face of the rock and hauled from the site by a small steam engine and trucks. The stone was knocked into sets and curbs for road making. In addition, there was a crushing plant, with a tarmacadam process for road re-surfacing. At this time came the introduction of Irish labour, who lodged in a two storey lodging house in the village and for which they paid 4 pennies per night for board and lodgings, sleeping on straw palliasses. Times were hard and difficult and true to the expression used at the time when Murphy said there are “bugs in the bed” and he wants his 4 pennies back.

Turning to the main issue of the golf course, father was a keen golfer, playing off a single figure handicap and hence he immediately became associated with the nine hole course. He struck up a relationship with Mr Duncan Campbell of the firm “Noel Villiers” agents for the land owner Sir Arthur Sutherland, who decided to engage the famous golf professional and golf architect, James Braid, to plan and design an 18-hole golf course.

During this period of time, a second hand First World War building of corrugated iron and timber was erected in conjunction with local labour to provide a clubhouse and maintain further improvements. It was decided to engage a full time greenkeeper, steward, stewardess (Mr & Mrs William Povah) who provided a certain amount of catering including scones and teas.

The work on the development of an 18-hole course began in earnest in conjunction with local labour in and about the early 1920's. The new 18-hole course was opened by Sir Arthur Sutherland long with many of his friends and associates. After the first ball was driven off, it was retrieved by a caddy who was rewarded with a gold sovereign. The course development was a progression over a period of time in the 20's to mid-30's, extending from 9 holes to 12 holes, three holes being added to the east, towards Newton by the Sea. A further three holes from Dunstan Steads south were added to make 15 holes and eventually a further three holes

were added towards Dunstanburgh Castle, making 18 holes. The course was also widened, taking in part of the fields of Dunstan Steads Farm, which involved the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes. This was done under a phased development.

Mr & Mrs Povah retired in the 20's and were followed by Mr & Mrs John Brown who had two sons and were employed on the course in the 30's. Machinery and equipment improved from horse drawn to mechanical, with a Fordson machine and trailer for a gang mower. Hand cutting of greens was still maintained at this time. Mr Brown was not only knowledgeable at his job as a greenkeeper but was a great asset to the development of the course to 18 holes, and introduced many amendments. He also did repairs to clubs in his spare time and was quite an accomplished golfer.

With the advent of the car in the late 20's, plus public transport and the easing of the Depression years, the course became very popular and swelled in membership. Bungalows were built on the dunes to enable people to take up resident for the summer months.

With the course being privately owned, the club as such was run on an ad hoc basis with a few competitions which proved to be very popular from a recreational point of view. Nevertheless, etiquette and rules of the game were much in evidence. Sir Arthur donated some silver dessert spoons and others to be played for on a monthly basis. In addition, Mr Pettinger and Mr Pitt donated silver cups to be played for annually.

By the 30's the course was flourishing and matches were played by a team of eight against neighbouring clubs, i.e. Alnwick, Warkworth, Alnmouth, Seahouses, Bamburgh, Wooler and Rothbury.

During this time my father was much involved in the game of golf and loved the course. He encouraged local residents to play on a subscription basis, which entailed leaving clubs etc. in a locker in the clubhouse. A limited number, including a few workmen, were classed as artisans and left their clubs in the neighbouring Low Mill Farm.

At a young age I showed a considerable interest in the game. Father cut down a hickory-shafted iron and with his tuition I started hitting a golf ball on the beach at Embleton. I spent hours practising, making a hole in the sand to enable me to perfect the line and direction of the ball. By the time I was ten I was quite proficient at the game and was given a junior ticket to play on the course. I was told my position as a junior and the etiquette of the game. As a teenager I developed into a scratch golfer and subsequently was selected for international youth honours twice, in the mid 30's at Royal Birkdale and Royal Burgess. After this I progressed to county golf but the highlight of my golfing years came in 1941 when I played in two exhibition matches at Royal Mid Surrey and Royal St. George's in the company of three-times "Open Champion" Henry Cotton, Dick Burton (Open Champion 1939) and Jimmy Adams (Ryder Cup).

The course was used by guests of the owner, namely Admiral Cameron of Fallodon, Colonel Scott of Newton Hall, the Bosanquet family of Rock, the Lord Runciman family and the Potters of Newton House.

The following names are those who played locally: Dixon Donkin, Tommy Donkin, Charles Varnham Snr. & Jnr., Norman Laidlaw, Jimmy Scott, N. Glendinning, Charles Wake, Jimmy Smith and Alex Crisp (artisan), who was an excellent player but packed the game in as quickly as he had started it. Charles Varnham Snr. named above was commonly known as Teggy. He was a small man in stature, who crouched over the ball with the left foot well forward of the right and used to sweep the ball off the tee or fairway with a hickory shafted iron to great effect. He was the first man, to my knowledge, who made a wooden golf tee to stand the ball on, as opposed to the original making of a tee from damp sand. The wooden

tee was made out of the bung of a barrel and scooped out at the top to hold the ball. In order not to lose the tee, he tied many woollen bobbins to it for easy identification.

Another colourful character was Dick Thompson known as Rabby Dick from Christon Bank area, who caught rabbits and hares by snaring and trapping for a living. He also caught moles along the golf course and dunes, so keeping the vermin down and many a time as a young man I accompanied him on his rounds.

During the years, when bungalows were built, the occupants were regular visitors to the course. Some names that I can recall are as follows: Pettinger (of the Northern Goldsmiths); Lamb (Chemist, Forest Hall); Lively (Reyrolles, Newcastle); Atkinson and Shaftoe (Dentists of Newcastle); Thompson (Newcastle City Treasurer); and Cutting (South Shields). Also visitors to the hotel and village were two prominent members: J.G. Elder of Beadnell and Tommy Mills of Shepherds Cottage, Beadnell, both in shipping. The few of the lady members who played at that time included Mrs Donkin, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Appleby and Mrs Skipper. The lady membership is much stronger today and contributes to the club in general.

There can be no doubt of the popularity of the course during the 20's and 30's, so much so that from a small number of residents in the village playing the course there has been a considerable increase in members and visitors alike. In my lifetime I have witnessed many big changes in the game. I was brought up with the hickory shafts, persimmon headed woods and hand forged irons. The names of the clubs were as follows: **Woods** – *Driver, Brassie, Spoon and Baffie*; **Irons** – *Mid-iron, Jigger, Cleek, Mashie, Spade or Deep Mashie, Mashie Niblick, Niblick and Putter*.

There were no tees as such but sand boxes on the tee filled with damp sand from which players took a small amount to stand the ball on. The grips on the clubs were invariably made of suede or leather. Dress was a suede or alpaca jacket with plus twos or fours. The bag was made of leather or suede and the cheaper version was of canvas with leather trim. Shoes were of ribbed rubber and spiked shoes became a later version.

The ball was of square mesh and later became a dimple. The first quality ball was known as a Silver King or Dunlop costing about one shilling and sixpence. The second quality balls were known as a Warwick Goblin tee mee costing about sixpence to ninepence. Not forgetting the introduction of the bramble ball, with convex dimples, which did not last long.

There was also the 'floater'. A player with consent of his partner could drop a 'floater' over the left shoulder if he felt that a first quality ball might end up in the water (this practice did not last long).

At the beginning of the Second World War, in 1939, no more golf equipment was produced. My father was involved with the War Department on coastal defences, namely the erection of concrete pill boxes along the dunes from Newton and Embleton Bay to Dunstanburgh Castle. The army erected barbed wire entanglements and many were posted to the area on coastal defences, including the local Defence Volunteers and Home Guard.

The course no doubt suffered damage with the traversing of vehicles and army defence guns, but not too badly. At the period in time, John Brown (Steward Greenkeeper) left and was replaced at the end of the war by a Mr & Mrs Callan and, along with local labour, it was not too long before the course was restored to its former glory in 1946 – 47. I had been enlisted into the RAF in 1939 and was wounded and discharged in 1946. Fortunately I was able to resume playing golf after rehabilitation.

At a meeting of subscribers, held in 1947 under the chairmanship of my father (J.S. Foggett), it was resolved to form a golf club to be known as the Dunstanburgh Castle Golf Club, hence

the birth of the club as such. I was elected as Honorary Secretary / Treasurer and it was resolved to ask Sir Arthur Sutherland, KBE, Bart, to be President and Mr Ivan Sutherland (son) to be Vice President.

The committee elected comprised Messrs. Campbell, D.M. Foggett, T.L. Bookless, C. Varnham, W. Callan.

The Pitt and Pettinger Cups were handed over to the club for keeping. These cups were to be played for as before the War. The Secretary was requested to obtain affiliation with the Northumberland Union of Golf Clubs and the English Golf Union. The Secretary in his first annual report in 1948 discovered that the course was opened in 1900 and the club as such formed in 1907, with Alderman Mark Appleby as Secretary. We did not form the club, therefore, but only revived it.

In April 1948 the Secretary reported the membership as 40 gentlemen and 10 ladies. The outlook for visitors was not very bright, but rumours abounded that the basic allowance of petrol rationing was likely to increase. If so, it was thought that things would improve as the course depended on its revenue from visitors.

Finally, it was decided that the Secretary and another member attend a meeting at Alnmouth Golf Club in 1949, thus commenced the North Northumberland Golf League. At that meeting I presented a Silver Rose Bowl to be played for annually by the league. Shortly after this, I sadly left the district because of employment and taking up matrimonial stakes.

For one reason or another I never played the course again, but by a strange coincidence I was contacted by the current captain, Gerry Camozzi, and kindly invited to play in the Past Captains Competition, followed by a dinner in the attractive refurbished clubhouse on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2000. I was certainly taken aback with surprise when I observed the course had been altered in the 1960's. Three beautiful, challenging short holes, the old 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> had been replaced by two par 4 holes now 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> running parallel to one another and a very short hole, now 13<sup>th</sup> at the Dunstanburgh Castle end of the course. I gather this was done to give the course extra length, but I would certainly take issue with this idea as there was plenty of scope for the length to be increased with the three original holes.

No golfer could wish to play in better surroundings with the beautiful sweep of Embleton Bay, unsurpassed views of rocky coves and bays, plus the majestic remains of Dunstanburgh Castle always in view. Not forgetting the wildlife, the sound of the skylark, lapwing (or more commonly known as the peewit), the curlew and the rare sound of the corncrake, especially in this day and age. Turning to the wild flowers, there are masses of cowslips, primroses, cuckoo flowers, wild geraniums and bluebells. In other words it is idyllic countryside, with the odd covey of partridge and pheasant crossing the fairways.