

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

In 1919 the golf course and the rest of the Dunstanburgh estate was purchased by Mr (later Sir) Arthur Munro Sutherland from the Eyres trustees.

Sir Arthur was a businessman who had been born and brought up in Newcastle upon Tyne. He attended the Royal Grammar School and left at the age of sixteen to pursue a career in shipping. In 1892 at the age of twenty-five he purchased his first ship and he went on to form the Sutherland Steamship Company which became a successful shipping line. He had other business ventures and in 1920 purchased the Newcastle Chronicle chain of newspapers.



*Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland
1867-1953*

Shortly after his purchase of the golf course he announced that it was his intention to remodel the course “to secure the provision of nine holes unsurpassed by anything in the county”. The plan was to extend the course to 18 holes after the nine hole course had been “properly developed and brought to a state bordering on perfection”.

VISIT OF JAMES BRAID

As part of Sir Arthur’s ambitious plans he asked James Braid to plan a new layout for the course in 1920. The previous year Braid had been involved in remodelling the Northumberland Golf Club at Gosforth Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, and it is possible that this had given Sir Arthur the idea of employing Braid at Embleton.



Braid had a long career as one of Britain’s most successful golfers and golf course architects. He came to prominence when he first won the Open Championship in 1901. He went on to win another four times by 1910, becoming one of the elite of golf professionals, joining Vardon and Taylor to form “The Great Triumvirate” which dominated golf for the next fifteen years. He became a professional at Romford Golf Club in 1896 and soon afterwards started designing golf courses. In all he designed about 160 courses in Britain and abroad including Carnoustie Medal Course and the King’s and Queen’s Courses at Gleneagles.

*The Triumvirate: Harry Vardon drives,
watched by John Henry Taylor and
James Braid (centre).*

He was able to work fast and efficiently because of his ability to interpret topographical maps combined with a photographic memory. Usually he took a single day to plan a course. He would walk around with stakes and a mallet. In his railway carriage on the way home he would use his photographic memory to draw up the plans of the course. He was always very

aware of the scenic value of his courses and used the terrain to its best advantage. As a result very little earth was moved to create his designs.

We know that Braid visited Embleton links on Tuesday, 23 March 1920. In accordance with his usual *modus operandi* he spent the whole day pegging out the new tees and greens and planning the fairways and bunkers.

The extract to the right from the Alnwick and County Gazette of 27 March, 1920 indicates that Braid was accompanied by Sir Arthur's eldest son, Munro Sutherland, and his agent Mr Noel Villiers. Also present was Colonel Fawcus of Dunstan Steads Farm who had been involved in the maintenance of the golf course in the early years prior to the purchase by Sir Arthur.

The work is to be under expert supervision and it was inaugurated on Tuesday when James Braid went over the course and planned the lay out for the new scheme. This he did with meticulous care, and his admiration for the possibilities of the wide stretch of land at his disposal amounted to enthusiasm. Accompanied by Mr Noel Villiers (Mr Sutherland's agent), Mr Munro Sutherland, Junr., Lieut.-Col. Fawcus, and Mr Burnett, he spent the whole day on the links, pegging out the new tees and greens, and planning the fairways and bunkers, artificial and natural.

With such a first-class scheme as Braid propounded little can be done this year, but it is Mr Sutherland's intention to make the best of the present nine holes course for this season, and to endeavour to have the remodelled short course in play next season. It will probably be three or four years before the full scheme can be effectively carried out, but when it is completed the Embleton links will stand high in comparison with any other seaside course south of the border.

Without the course has been planted to

At the time of Braid's visit Sir Arthur stated that he intended to remodel the nine hole course within a year and implement Braid's design for the 18 holes within three or four years. In the event it was to take almost two decades for the work to be completed. Sir Arthur also indicated that he would form a club with a strong local committee and said "a handsome and cosy clubhouse will be erected on the links, the plans for this including sleeping rooms for visitors". The club was not formed until almost three decades later, and the proposed new clubhouse was never built.

It is not clear why Sir Arthur's initial enthusiasm for development of the golf course subsequently waned. There was certainly no shortage of funds - a few months after Braid's visit Sir Arthur bought the Newcastle Chronicle publications for £800,000. It is possible that his increasing business commitments caused him to devote his energies elsewhere.



The Nissen hut installed in 1921 which provided the clubhouse until remodelled in 1994.

DEVELOPMENTS UP TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A clubhouse, which had seen service in the First World War as a Nissen hut, was erected in 1921. It has proved to be a sturdy structure and it remains today as the underpinnings of the present-day clubhouse.

Also in 1921 the first full-time greenkeeper was appointed. He was Mr William Povah - he and his wife lived in the new clubhouse. Mrs Povah later became noted for the splendid teas she provided golfers.

Mr Povah was the person initially responsible for remodelling the course to the design of James Braid. This remodelling took place in stages. A nine hole course was ready by 1922 and officially inaugurated by Sir Arthur and a group of friends. A member of Newcastle Quayside drove off the first ball and rewarded the caddy that retrieved it with a gold sovereign.

With the help of local labour - mainly fishermen working outside the fishing season - the course was gradually extended to twelve holes by about 1932 and fifteen by 1935. The golf course was maintained during this period by a horse-drawn six-foot wide cutter for the fairways and hand-pushed cutters for the greens and tees. This equipment was kept in the wooden shed at the end of the road from Dunstan Steads farm which is still standing at the present day.

Mr Povah retired about 1927 and Mr John Brown was employed as head greenkeeper. Mr Brown had two sons who assisted with maintenance of the course during the 1930s.

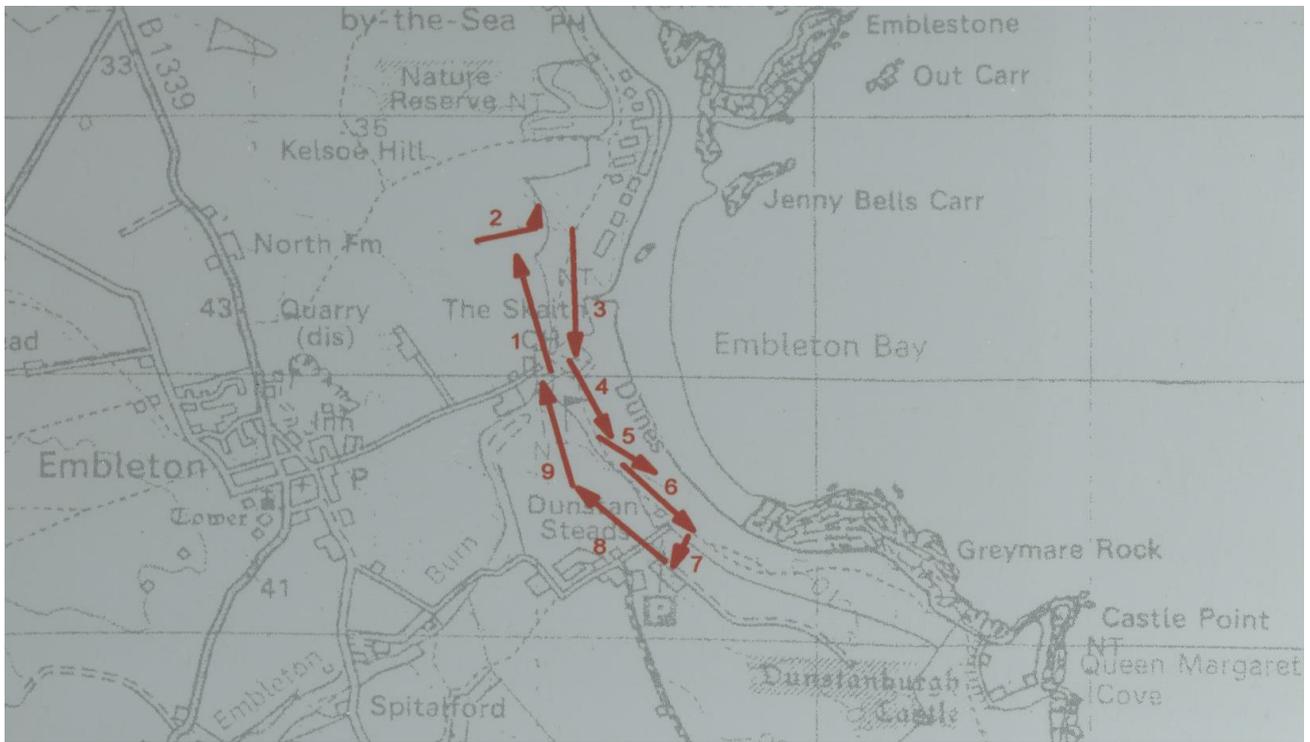
In the 1930s Mr Brown and his sons, together with a number of part-time helpers, worked steadily at extending the course while at the same time maintaining the existing course for the increasing numbers of golfers who visited Embleton. Finally in 1937 Braid's design came to fruition and the 18 hole course was completed.



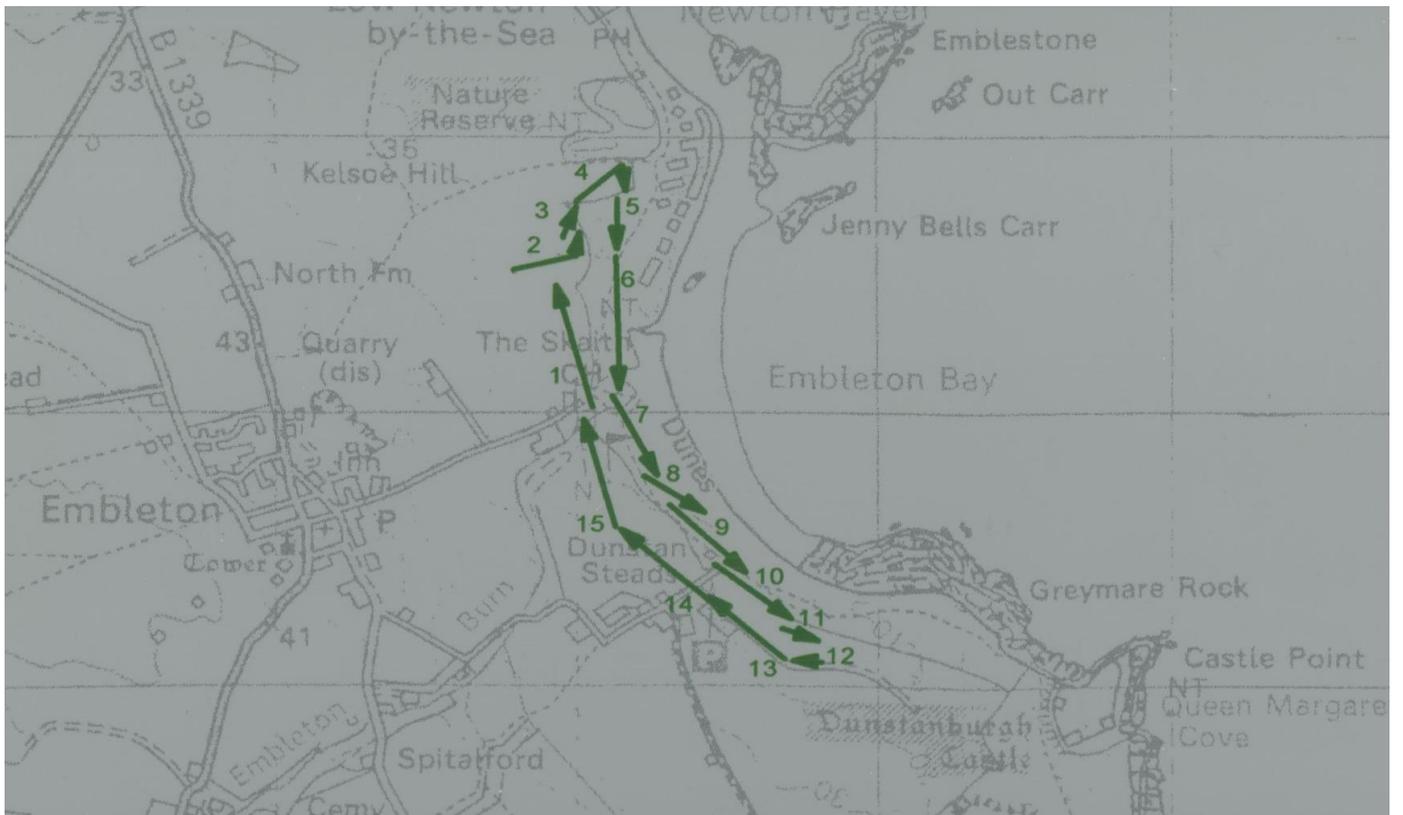
Bungalows next to the fifth fairway

In the 1930s Embleton became increasingly popular with visitors. Although there were few cars at that time visitors would come by train to Christon Bank and stay locally. An open-topped bus ran down the road to the clubhouse, charging a penny from the village. Embleton beach was crowded in the Summer and there were many wooden beach

huts. Also at this time wooden bungalows began to be constructed on the dune-land adjacent to the northern end of the golf course. Sir Arthur Munro Sutherland granted leases on the land permitting the construction of the bungalows and eventually forty were completed. Many of the bungalow owners were keen golfers and close links with the golf club continue to the present day.



Layout of the course 1922-1932



Layout of the course 1935-1936

LOCAL RULES.

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**REPLACE THE TURF.**

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Out of Bounds.—A ball is out of bounds when over the fence at the 1st, 2nd, 10th, 11th and 12th holes. Penalty: Stroke and distance.

A ball in the burn or under the bridges can be picked out and dropped behind under a penalty of one stroke.

A ball in the ditch on left of the 1st green may be lifted and dropped a club's length away (but not nearer the green) under a penalty of one stroke.

Players are requested not to go into the crops or damage the fences.

Players must not buy balls from boys on the Course.

Lost Ball.—Penalty: Stroke and distance.

Players when playing the 2nd hole must not approach the green until the players in front are on the 3rd tee.

Three and Four Ball Matches must allow Single Matches to go through.

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**Luncheons and Teas. Chocolates.  
Cigarettes. Aerated Waters.**

**Golf Balls, Golf Clubs and all  
Requisites.**

**JOHN BROWN,**  
Golf Groundsman,  
EMBLETON.

**Dunstanburgh Castle Golf Course.**

Name.....

Date.....193.....

| Hole.            | Yards. | Bogey. | Strokes allowed at | Score | Won x<br>Lost -<br>Halved 0 | Hole. | Yards. | Bogey. | Strokes allowed at | Score. | Won x<br>Lost -<br>Halved 0 |
|------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------------------|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1                | 325    | 4      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 10    | 240    | 4      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 2                | 260    | 4      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 11    | 350    | 4      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 3                | 420    | 5      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 12    | 410    | 5      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 4                | 240    | 4      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 13    | 325    | 4      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 5                | 153    | 3      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 14    | 260    | 4      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 6                | 310    | 4      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 15    | 420    | 5      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 7                | 265    | 4      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 16    | 240    | 4      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 8                | 192    | 3      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 17    | 153    | 3      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
| 9                | 125    | 3      | .....              | ..... | .....                       | 18    | 410    | 5      | .....              | .....  | .....                       |
|                  |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
|                  |        | 34     |                    |       |                             |       |        | 38     |                    |        |                             |
| ~~~~~            |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
| First Round ..   |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
| Gross Total ...  |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
| Less Handicap .. |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
| Nett Score ...   |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |
| ~~~~~            |        |        |                    |       |                             |       |        |        |                    |        |                             |

*Scorecard from about 1937.*

In the late 1930s an informal club was started by Charlie Varnham and a few local men from Embleton and the surrounding villages. Varnham had previously been a caddy on the course for some of Sir Arthur's friends - charging sixpence a round for his services. He approached Sir Arthur and was given permission to organize competitions with local clubs. This informal club had a one guinea annual subscription. However this subscription did not entitle the members to enter the clubhouse! The clubhouse was reserved for visitors buying day tickets and Sir Arthur's golfing parties. Mr Brown, the steward and head greenkeeper, would stand at the entrance to the clubhouse and hand out scorecards whenever competitions were played by club members.

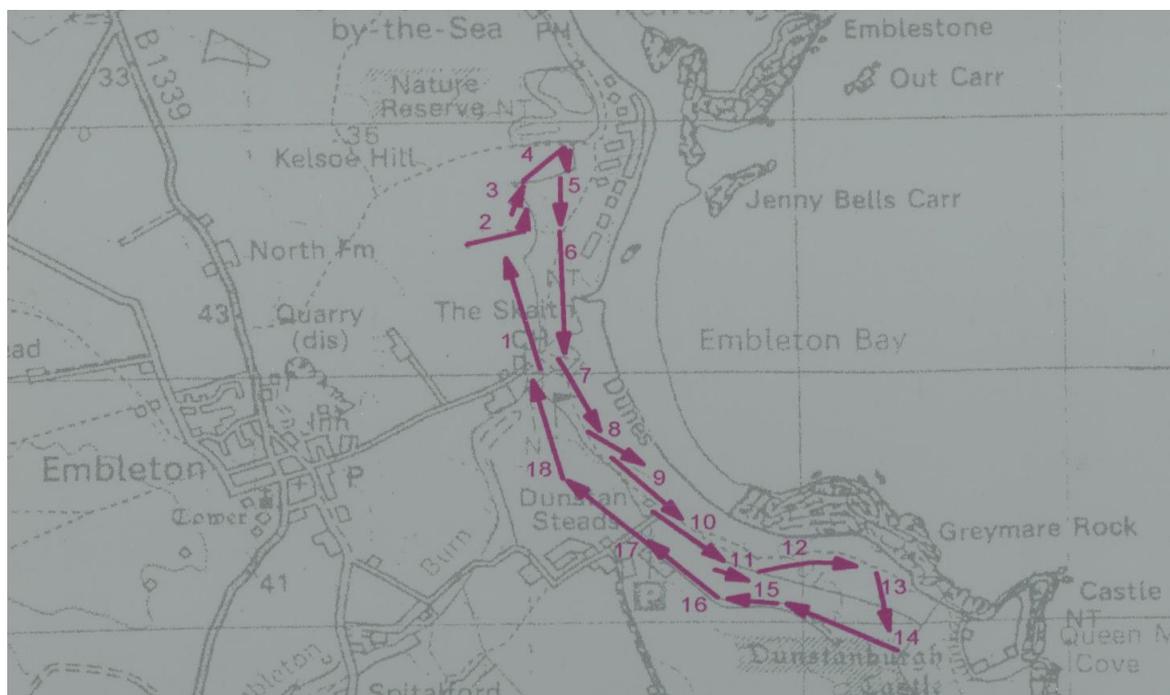
In 1938 the Army started to build coastal defences on the dunes at the edge of the golf course. By the outbreak of the Second World War golf had stopped being played, and tanks and other vehicles traversed the fairways. All maintenance of the golf course ceased and rabbits and moles started digging up the greens.

## **THE POST-WAR YEARS TO THE PRESENT DAY**

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In 1945 at the end of hostilities the Army returned control of the golf course to Sir Arthur. Over the course of the next few years the course was gradually rehabilitated, with barbed wire and other debris left by the Army being removed. For the first time a formal members golf club was founded in 1947 so that men playing at Dunstanburgh could participate in golf competitions.

In 1948 Mr Robert Thomson was appointed as Head Groundsman. He continued the improvements to the course and the number of players continued to increase. By the early 1950s he had three additional greens staff. Although there was a motor mower its weight was such that most greens were cut with hand mowers. There was a serious problem with damage caused by rabbits and large numbers were shot and sold to a butcher in Newcastle. For a few years revenues from the sale of rabbit carcasses represented a significant proportion of total income for the golf course! Indeed the monthly income from the sale of rabbits frequently exceeded income from green fees. For example, in October 1951 130 rabbits were sold for £16 5s 0d whilst green fee income was £14 1s 0d.



*Layout of the course 1937-1966*



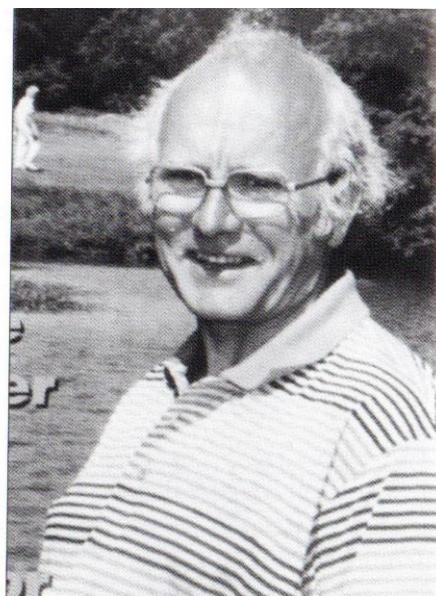
In 1951 there were 69 members in different categories ranging from 5 Gentlemen (paying £4 p.a.), 17 Country Gentlemen (£3), 17 Season Workmen in Village (£3), 8 Country Ladies (£2 10s), 6 Ladies (£3), 12 Country Juveniles (£1 5s), 1 Juvenile (£2), 2 Youth in Village (£1 10s), 1 Family (£10). Thus income from golf club memberships was only about £200 p.a. at this time. About the same annual income was generated through the sale of daily green fees at 4 shillings for weekdays and 5 shillings for weekends. In addition well over £100 p.a. was raised through the sale of rabbits (at up to 7s 9d per couple) and hares (4 s each).

In 1953 Sir Arthur died and in 1955 his son Sir Ivan purchased the course from Sir Arthur's executors. Soon afterwards he met with the members of Dunstanburgh Castle Golf Club and was elected President. He made it clear that he wanted to continue improving the course even though there were difficulties with the finances. In the next few years the clubhouse was extensively refurbished.

In 1961 Sir Ivan gifted the golf course and other land to the National Trust, though he retained a lease on the golf course. His wife, Lady Margaret Sutherland, took over the running of the course in 1964 and subsequently her son William Sutherland became lessee. He made a number of changes to the layout of the course as described in the next chapter.



*Sir Ivan Sutherland*



*Lady Margaret Sutherland, William Sutherland*

Soon after I became lessee in 1987 it became clear that significant investment was required, both to upgrade the clubhouse but, perhaps more importantly, to purchase new machinery to improve the maintenance of the golf course. Before this investment could be made I realised a new longer lease from the National Trust was required. The National Trust was receptive to my proposal and several years later the old lease was replaced with a new one with an 80 year term. As part of this lease there were conservation covenants which require the lessee to protect and preserve the outstanding flora and fauna on and around the golf course. My greenkeeping staff and I have found this to be a challenging but rewarding aspect of the

maintenance of the course. Last year I was pleased that the efforts of my current Head Greenkeeper, Simon Olver, were recognised when he won the 2007 Special Initiative prize in the British and International Greenkeepers Association Golf Environment Competition.

Shortly after taking over the running of the golf course I arranged regular visits from agronomists of the Sports Turf Research Institute in order to set in train a programme to improve the playing quality of the course. My then Head Greenkeeper, Ken Day, and his deputy Steve Grice started this programme which has resulted in the improvements to be seen today.

The original first world war Nissen hut clubhouse was completely refurbished and the new clubhouse was opened in 1994.



*Refurbishment of  
the Nissen hut  
clubhouse*



*The new clubhouse.*

In the year 2000 the golf club celebrated its centenary. I was honoured to receive a plate marking this event from the English Golf Union.



*Dr Peter Gilbert receiving the EGU Centenary plate from Dennis Pearson, President of the Northumberland Union of Golf Clubs.*



*TIMOTHY KIRKHOPE MP (left), who opened Dunstanburgh Castle Golf Club's refurbished clubhouse on Saturday, is pictured with Dr Peter Gilbert, the course leaseholder, ladies' captain Mrs Ann Camozzi and men's captain Steve White, NGC.*

## Refurbished clubhouse worthy of historic Dunstanburgh course

DUNSTANBURGH Castle golfers celebrated the formal opening of their newly re-furbished and extended clubhouse at the weekend - an occasion which added another chapter to its long history. Founded in 1900 and re-designed with 18 holes by the world famous course architect James Braid in 1922, this lovely links course, with its unequalled panorama of Embleton Bay and Dunstanburgh Castle's evocative ruins, is still the gem which continues to tantalise golfers as it has for nearly a century.

Employing skilled local craftsmen, the extensive alterations have provided all the facilities the modern golfer requires without destroying the fundamental simplicity vital to the scenic sympathy this area of outstanding natural beauty demands.

Members and visiting golfers are able to survey the course from the tastefully furnished bar and lounge, while the new changing rooms for men and women golfers are up to the most modern standards.

Dr Peter Gilbert, the course leaseholder, has overseen all the activity of the past year and says he is proud to have had the chance to provide a clubhouse worthy of the golf course and properly feels that the ghost of James Braid will certainly approve - as will all golfers (even if they don't get a par four at the wicked 18th).

The opening was performed by Dr Gilbert's friend, Mr Timothy Kirkhope MP, a senior whip for the Department of the

Environment.

Mr Kirkhope, a member of the Dunstanburgh club, congratulated all those concerned with the development and said he hoped people would come to appreciate what had been achieved.

He said it was important for golf clubs to blend into the environment, particularly when it involved such an historic and scenic setting as that at Dunstanburgh.

Dr Gilbert said that a Nissen hut erected in 1922 had served as the clubhouse until fairly recently and a section

had been preserved for posterity. He thanked everyone who had worked on the new clubhouse development, particularly local builder Mr Jimmy Newton who had been responsible for the attractive wood panelling.

Earlier, club captain Mr Steve White paid tribute to Dr Gilbert's vision and foresight which had brought about a "virtually unbelievable transformation."

Ladies' captain Mrs Ann Camozzi thanked those involved in providing the wonderful hospitality on the day.

*Newspaper report of the opening of the new clubhouse in July 1994.*