



— Founded 1780 —  
**ROYAL ABERDEEN  
GOLF CLUB**

## From the Archivist's Attic - Royal Aberdeen in Wartime

Under normal circumstances at this time of year the Masters Champion would have been crowned and we would have been looking forward to the U.S. Open at Winged Foot in June and the Open at Sandwich in July. Instead we are confined to practice swinging in the back garden (my lawn has been well divoted!) a bit of putting on the carpet, and using David Ross's excellent YouTube videos – working on our chipping drills.

However, with the lockdown still firmly in place at the time of writing, one thing many of us have is time. For the Archivist it has provided the opportunity to dig into the minutes, to investigate how the club has dealt with other seismic events in the country's history, and to provide a comparison with the situation we find ourselves in today. The Council minutes have been painstakingly digitised, providing a complete record all the way back to 1815. They therefore cover the whole range of historical events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They include the period of the Spanish Flu Pandemic between 1918 and 1920, and even the Boer War between 1899 and 1902 and whilst there is no reference to disruption to the club during these events, there is widespread reference to the major impact which both the Great War and World War Two had on life at Royal Aberdeen. Of course Ian Edward's wonderful book published in 2005 also provides a colourful and informative viewpoint on these chapters of the club's history, and reference to this material is included below.

### The Great War

The main impact of the Great War was on the individual members of the club. This was substantial, and the Aberdeen Journal printed a list of 90 members who had joined the Territorial Army or the Armed Forces. The club pro – Alick Marling signed up to join the Gordon Highlanders and sadly during the course of the war, the former Head Greenkeeper Leslie Wilson was among those killed in action. The plaque in the lobby of the clubhouse provides a reminder of the brave Members who gave their lives in the War, as illustrated opposite.



The knock on effect of the reduction in active membership as a result of those serving in the War was the impact on club funds, and at the half year Ordinary Meeting in April 1915 it was reported that there was a deficiency in the revenue account of £122. At that time there was no Furlough Scheme or rates relief to provide assistance, in fact the opposite was the case. A request was received from Sir Frederick Ponsonby of Buckingham Palace (shown opposite) for the club to contribute to the country's National Relief Fund, and it was agreed that a subscription of 40 guineas would be paid. This combination of factors placed the club in a challenging financial position, and to counter this, an attempt was made to cut down on all expenditure. However, in the minutes of the Council meeting of August 1915, it was noted that owing to ongoing commitments this had not been possible to any great extent. The only other option was to raise a levy on the membership, and it was agreed to set this at one guinea, which raised a sum of £213. A further step included increasing the number of debentures.



Whilst play on the course continued through the War, it was agreed in August 1915 that the competitions would be suspended, and that no matches would be played with other clubs.

Balgownie did offer a golfing haven to two groups who were without a course. The first were the members of Nigg Bay GC, who as a result of armed forces commandeering Balnagask, had nowhere to play. As a result 25 members who had a handicap of 7 or below were welcomed to Royal Aberdeen. The second group were any Navy officers who arrived into port at Aberdeen, and were allowed to play as Occasional Members without any subscription.

## **World War Two**

The club suffered the same level of financial challenges during the Second World War, however was more seriously impacted by the requisitioning of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes and also the clubhouse by the armed forces. These holes were required for the installation of a searchlight and gun batteries, and it is understood that these were formed within the gorse to the right of the 1<sup>st</sup> fairway. The minutes show that a minefield was also formed to the right of the 5<sup>th</sup> fairway, which may be worrying news to some of our wilder swingers! At the time the club objected to the formation of the minefield on the grounds that it could prove fatal to anyone walking in the area, however it went ahead regardless. A far cry from today's right to roam environment! The clubhouse was requisitioned for the billeting of 20 officers and the armed forces had effectively taken over by October 1942.

This effectively rendered the Members homeless in terms of accommodation, so it was arranged firstly to utilise the changing facilities at a nearby hotel in the Bridge of Don. However this fell through, and as one of the Members (Willie Crockett) had a vacant flat within walking distance of the course, this was taken up as a temporary refuge.

Prior to the requisitioning of the clubhouse a grand sale of all liquor took place. The Secretary was also instructed by the Council to purchase the entire stock of golf balls from the pro-shop, and to sell them on to the Members. I am sure David Ross would approve of such a move today!

As a result of the requisitioning of Silverburn Course, the Secretary of Aberdeen Ladies GC requested that their Members be permitted to play on the reconfigured Championship Course. In light of the circumstances this was unanimously agreed, with only minor limitations on tee times.

Play remained possible on the reconfigured course, however 4 days after the declaration of War on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, it had been agreed that all annual competitions, other than the Monthly Medals, Bogey Competition and the Veteran Trophy, would be suspended. Some external competitions continued, including the Maitland Shield. The minutes shown that Royal Aberdeen objected to the continuation of the competition during the War, however the majority of clubs wished to continue, and in May 1942 it was played at Balgownie (prior to the reconfiguration), with Murcar coming out on top. The following year Royal Aberdeen were the victors at Hazlehead, overcoming Caledonian GC 1 up, and photographs of both of these winning teams are included below.



Winning Murcar GC Maitland Shield Team – 1942, Venue Royal Aberdeen GC



Presentation of Maitland Shield to Royal Aberdeen – 1943, Venue Hazlehead GC

Comparisons with the past show that the club was hit fairly hard by both World Wars. The Great War, had a particular financial impact, to the extent that a levy was raised on all the members. Arguably the disruption caused by the Second World War was more severe, in that the clubhouse and the course were requisitioned. Today, although frustrating, we know that the Balgownie is there and ready for play. This was reinforced by the excellent fly though videos which were recently circulated, which provided a tantalising taste of the condition of the course. The choice of background music for the final 3 holes was particularly apt, and in the words of Vera Lynn “we’ll meet again” hopefully very soon!