

Legendary golf course designer's clubs gifted to hometown museum

BY GORDON
BANNERMAN

Clubs handcrafted by legendary US golf course architect Donald Ross have returned to the Highlands.

Two woods from the 19th century and three irons have been gifted to the Historylinks Museum's golf memorabilia collection in his home town of Dornoch by great-niece Jane McElligott.

"I am so pleased to share these clubs with the Historylinks Museum and with Dornoch, which was so close to Donald's heart all his life," said Ms McElligott, who lives in Vancouver, Canada.

"He would be so glad to know they are here now, as is the whole family."

The presentation took place in front of the Ross family home in St Gilbert Street, which is a magnet for American golfers making the pilgrimage to play Royal Dornoch, where a youthful Ross was greenkeeper and the club's first professional before embarking on a new life in the US.

He became synonymous with Pinehurst in North Carolina – known as "the cradle of American golf" – and designed more than 400 courses across the whole of North America.

Museum curator Lynne Mahoney welcomed the addition to the golf exhibit room, which honours the town's golfing heritage and key figures from the past 100-plus years.

"We are absolutely thrilled that Jane has given such an important collection of clubs owned by Donald Ross to Historylinks," she said.

"We know that local people and visitors will enjoy seeing these original pieces in our museum, shedding even more light on his amazing life story."

Royal Dornoch, where Ross spent his formative years and honed his skills, is ranked among the finest



ICON: Donald Ross and his handcrafted clubs, right, which were gifted to the museum by Jane McElligott, top centre.



links courses in world golf and it heavily influenced his course architecture.

General manager Neil Hampton, who is looking forward to the opening of a new £13.9 million clubhouse and the start of a new era for the club's 150th anniversary in 2027, said: "Royal Dornoch is delighted that we will have more items that belonged to Donald Ross back here in Dornoch."

"His talent for golf course design will attract many people wishing to see where his inspiration came from."

"Having the clubs he used to play the game and other artefacts on display in the museum will give a deeper understanding of his approach to golf course architecture."

Ross was born in Dornoch in 1872. His father was a stone cutter and Ross

went on to complete a five-year apprenticeship to become a joiner.

Like other young men in the town, he enjoyed golf and was recognised as a fine player at an early age.

Around 1886, the then Dornoch Golf Club needed a professional to make clubs and give lessons.

With his golfing prowess and training as a joiner, Ross was the ideal candidate.

He spent a year with Old Tom Morris in St Andrews learning the club-making craft and a further year at Carnoustie before heading back to Dornoch in 1893.

Around the turn of the century, he left Scotland.

Following a spell at Oakley Country Club near Boston, he was lured to North Carolina, where the Pinehurst No 2 course is regarded as his masterpiece.