

100 YEARS AGO (November 12, 1908)

ROYAL DORNOCH GOLF CLUB - Laying Foundation Stone of New Club House - On Saturday afternoon an interesting ceremony in the history of the Royal Golf Club was carried out, the occasion being the laying of the foundation-stone of the new Club-House. Every resident golfer was present, and many friends of the club. Mr Arthur J Ryle, captain of the club, addressing the company, said the members and friends of the club were invited there to witness certain documents and relics pertaining to the club and its history being deposited in the building, and the foundation-stone laid. The little building over the way from which they were parting had been the centre of the life of Golf Club for very many years.

All their matches, all their friendly meetings had centred in that little house, the nursery of the club. They must think of those by-gone names like those of Mr Macdonald, chief-constable, and Mr Bridgeford, both dead; Mr Machardy, now Chief-Constable of Inverness, a founder of the club; Mr Macintosh, Pitgrudy, an early medallist; Mr John Leslie, Mr Hacon, and Rev Dr Grant, energetic captains. Then they must think of those distinguished golfers who had been in the little building - Mr John L Low, the first authority on the game; Mr Gordon Simpson, Mr de Montmorency, Mr C E Dick, all members of the club. They had also to recall the names of the great professionals, Braid and Herd, Vardon, Taylor, Massy, and Tom Morris himself; and lastly, to come nearer to themselves, they had to think of their own players, who were constantly bringing glory to the club - Mr Sutherland, their secretary; Mr Thomas E Grant, and Mr Alex Morrison, who had all helped to win for the Club the Northern Counties Cup six times in succession, a feat probably unequalled in the annals of golf. (Applause.) The club had become a big tree with branches in all directions. Its membership of 360 contained many illustrious names, notably that of his Grace the Duke of Sutherland, its one and only president since its inception; Mr Andrew Carnegie of Skibo, vice-president; the Duke of Portland, the Duchess of Sutherland, and many other distinguished personages. But it was not merely the names which formed the numbers in the list in which they rejoiced.

They had the good fortune also to have members who took a very live interest in the club and in the town, and returned year by year. The names of Thomson, Tindal, Atkinson, Gladstone, Williams, Dr Sing, Dr Soutar, Dr Rowland, Mr Crole, and Mr Nimmo were household words in Dornoch. A few years back the club was honoured by his Majesty with the title "Royal," and they were proud that it had taken its place amongst the few Royal Clubs in Scotland. (Applause.) The club, as a body, was confident of one thing, and that was that in its prosperity, to which they were all devoted, and in the constant and systematic improvement of the courses, lay the true secret of the prosperity of the town. (Applause.)

Mr J Sutherland, who has entered upon the twenty-sixth year of his secretaryship of the club, then read the minutes of the first meeting, dated 20th October, 1877, constituting the club. Of the thirteen gentlemen present, all had passed away save three - Mr Alexander Machardy, now of Inverness, its first secretary and chief organiser; Baillie W S Fraser, Dornoch; and Mr Alexander Mackay, of Montreal. Mr Sutherland acknowledged the courtesy and soundness of advice, always willing rendered, of Mr H M Mackay, the town clerk.

Mr Ryle then called upon Bailie Fraser, as the only original member of the club now in Dornoch, to place in the cavity prepared for it, a vase containing a short history of the club, a list of its members, and several relics connected with its history.

Bailie Fraser performed the customary ceremony connected with the laying of the foundation-stone. He acknowledged the honour the club had done him in asking him to perform the ceremony, and took the opportunity of paying a warm tribute to the club management, from the indefatigable captain, the secretary, and the committee, down to the professional, Mr Currie, and the greenkeeper, Mr William Munro. He described how he had seen the town grow and prosper from the time the golf had been fairly established and taken seriously in hand by competent people. The number of prosperous shops spread along the streets, the many villas built everywhere along the high ground and links, the palatial hotels, all evidenced what golf had done for Dornoch, and he emphasised his conviction that the money which came from the Golf Club and the visitors percolated to practically every member of the community. (Applause.)

The new Club-House will cost £1400, exclusive of furnishing. Mr Horne, Golspie, is architect, and the contractors are - Messrs Donald Maclean, Dornoch, mason; Messrs Mackie & Mackenzie, Elgin, joiners; John Sutherland, Golspie, slater; R Macrae, Dornoch, plumber; John Munro, Tain, plasterer; and A Innes, Dornoch, painter. The house will be ready for occupation at the end of June.