



• DORNOCH •
HERITAGE • SOCIETY



Historylinks Cat. No. 2006_64_31

A history of Donald Ross

talk by

Tom Tew

19th October 2006

The history of Donald Ross is pretty straightforward until he leaves these shores, at which time there are areas and times where he is not particularly well publicised in his works and all the rest of it. In a broad sense he worked extremely hard and became a very wealthy man through his work in the United States.



What we see here is the house where Donald was born. The dormer windows in the roof were a later addition. . This was a typical 'doorknob house' of the period. There were basically two rooms either side of the front door and there would have been a scullery and a toilet at the back.

Oakley Cottage, Dornoch Historylinks Cat No. 2023_028_35

Remembering that the family, I think eight in number, that was quite a tight squeeze for everybody. The mother, Lillian, was, an absolute wonder just looking after the family under those conditions, particularly at times with quite a difficult husband, Murdo. He was a bricklayer by trade, or stonemason if you like, and through the early years of the firstborn, who was in fact Donald, he was away in the United States doing his masonry work. I think the idea was that he could earn more money and have regular work there but unfortunately it was expensive to live there and I'm not quite sure how the money got back. It must have done it sometime, otherwise the family just would not have survived. This is Ross's mother, Lillian, and the next picture is Murdo, the father.



Mother Lillian b 1845 m 1871, d 1924 Historylinks Cat No. 2006_064_02



Under that beard, I think he was quite an attractive man, but he had had a pretty tough life. Their first child, Jane, was born and did not survive any more than a few hours after birth. Within a year, Donald had been born on November 23rd, 1872. Subsequently, quite a large family followed, Alex, Aeneas and John, and then two sisters, Jean and Christina.

Murdo Ross Historylinks Cat No. 2006_064_05

During one of Murdo's trips returning from the US, he tried to convince Lillian that she should join him in America but at that time she was tending her mother, who was quite sick and needed nursing. Actually Lillian was initially a nurse.

Donald left school at the age of 14. This was really the start of his career. At the age of 14, he joined Peter Murray, who, I think at that time had a workshop behind the Old Manse, which as you go out of Dornoch on the bottom road is the last house on the left-hand side. I'm led to believe that the workshop was somewhere in that location. In fact, I think the house stayed in the hands of Peter Murray's family for many years. Incidentally, this was the same year that John Sutherland, who was the secretary at that time, invited Tom Morris to come to Dornoch and lay down a further nine holes. There had been no formal architect working on the course, and yet we know that much earlier than that, I think 1854, it was recorded that golf was being played on Dornoch Links. We're not quite sure just what that course was like, but it must have been something which started around about where the putting green is today and returned roughly in the same area. So somewhere out there and

back again, there was nine holes. Now this layout, as it was, has been referred to way back, and I'm assuming it would have been not a golf course as we would have recognised it today. It would have been some sort of stick or cane which was in a simple hole which would have been dug in the ground, roughly about the four-inch size. There would be no actual green as such just cropped ground. And you have to remember that up until quite late, which would have been 1820s, the ground would have been grazed by sheep, cattle and horses. So they would have kept it down and it would have consisted of this fine seaside turf that we all associate with the quality links courses.

This course, which was played by several people and recorded as such, had simply been laid out by whom we don't know. Bearing in mind that from the very early days, with the type of ball that would have been used, it would have been really quite a short course. But nonetheless, it would have had a root and it would have been laid down, and when Tom Morris came along, having been invited to lay down nine holes, I think he would have taken the original nine holes into account and laid down a further nine holes which, more or less, gave an 18-hole course. There would possibly have been some juggling, because the course would have gone down onto the lower level, as we know it, which would be the Fox Sea and that level, and consisted of crossing over or whatever at the 16th etc. There are no diagrams about it, so pure speculation. But in terms of somebody like Morris, a St Andrew's man, probably one of the best golf course architects of that time, he would have made quite a sensible layout which would have been out roughly nine and back roughly nine. The laying down of this course really brought the golf quality into Dornoch. We had people visiting at this time and because we had a course at that stage, we could actually charge people. The club that was constituted in 1877 we already know had an 18-hole golf course and a secretary.

The origins of the club I would imagine most of you are familiar with. We started out in 1877 being known as the Sutherland Golfing Society, and that consisted of nine holes at Golspie and nine holes at Dornoch. After two or three years, Golspie seemed to falter, and Dornoch decided in its wisdom to call itself the Royal Dornoch Golf Club. I have to say that the Golspie Golf Organisation eventually got themselves set up and, I think it was about 1886 something like that, they constituted their club.

We're talking about Ross here at that time, of course, and he's now got 18 holes. He's an apprenticed carpenter with Murray and he's got plenty of time off at evenings and weekends and I think he becomes a very accomplished golfer. At that time bear in mind he's playing with the gutter-percher ball with a good carry for a player with a good club, and I emphasise the good club, because they were handmade at that time. A good club was a special item which you would hang on to. If it broke you would have mended it. They were specialised clubs handmade and of course at the time we did not have a professional here who made such clubs. So they would have been brought in from outside, from St Andrews or somewhere like that in a shipment, and you would have had to have paid quite dearly for them. At that time Ross was probably just knocking a round with two or three clubs at the most. One being a putter, one perhaps some sort of baffie (or 'baffie' - equivalent to a higher-lofted wood (such as a 7-wood) and a mid-iron. Those were the basics which these guys came to learn their game and to play it, quite different from how we see ourselves today. If you were ever to take out a club with a ball which we produce now, you would find it really very difficult to use these clubs.

So Ross at this stage is building up his talents on the golf course, and he at that time also is very much under the influence of John Sutherland. I can't stress enough that this man was an icon in the club, and throughout Dornoch's early years, he controlled virtually everything that went on. He was, I would think, a very strict man, and he ran the club very efficiently. He was also Secretary of the local council and I think very officious, and I'm sure that he was well in control of all the youngsters that would be screaming around, hitting balls from here and there.

Ross, having been at Murray's for four years, decides that he is going to turn professional, which is an amazing thing at that time. I mean here he is at the end of the world, but he must be playing so well that he's got confidence and, we must not forget, his personality is an extremely determined one. He's at work at 14, supporting the family. His father is away for long periods, he's the eldest in the family and he strikes up a very strong relationship with his mother, they are very close. Yet there he is out there and, I believe, through John Sutherland he has somebody who he can match himself against, which is quite interesting. He has a yardstick in Sutherland who is playing very good golf at this time. I have no proof of this but my feeling is that Sutherland has said to him, *'do you realise that we will need a professional at Dornoch at some time, and there's no reason why not that it couldn't be yourself. But before that, you have to find out what's going on in the rest of the golfing world. You need to know how to make clubs, you need to know how to make golf balls, effectively, and you need to be a bit more worldly, and I suggest to you that you go and work in St Andrews with Tom Morris' shop'*.

Now at that time, in St Andrews, there would probably have been something like three or four of these shops. I would describe them as sweat houses, really. This picture will give you some idea of the great long sheds, nothing but vices and rows of people who would be hand-making these clubs as fast as they possibly could. I'm pretty certain that you would have been judged on what your turnout was, and if you didn't come up to scratch, you were off, because there were lots of people at that time willing to take up these jobs. And in St Andrews alone, we know of Tom Morris' shop. There was the largest one, which would have been Forgan's, and then there was the Octolone establishment.



Robert Forgan's Workshop Historylinks Cat No. 2006_307

In St Andrews we know there were three and there were similar groups of shops of these manufacturing facilities for clubs in places like Carnoustie and perhaps even Glasgow.

So off Ross goes down to Tom Morris' shop. About this time, I would think that young Ross would have been 18 to 20, something like that. And very smart he was too. Although he was quite small in stature, he was about 5 foot 8, so he wasn't a particularly large man, but he was a big man in other ways. I tried to research his stay in St Andrews where I have a number of contacts but there was no record of him being at St Andrews at all. That is the club of St

Andrews. It was made clear to me, or they tried to make clear to me, that he went under the umbrella of Tom Morris, who not only had a commercial establishment in St Andrews but at the same time he was the green keeper at St Andrews. Had Ross gone to work with him as a green keeper, I'm certain that his existence would have been recorded. So I'm fairly certain that he went into one of these workshops and beavered away in there. There are slight gaps at this time but it would appear that he'd was there at least for a couple of years. He would have moved through that shop and gone on to finishing and straightening shafts and getting the feel, and all that sort of thing, because every one of the clubs was different; the density of the head was different, the wood grain goes from A to B, so the grain is wrong,. It needed somebody to actually feel the club and cast a lead insert into it to dress it. It is all very interesting. Even today I have a modest collection of these ancient clubs and every one of them is different. I had personal experiences of speaking to an old professional, long gone now, who said to me that in his pro shop they would have bundles of shafts that would come in, all the same, all the same length, all the same thickness, but with a different flex. You could never tell what the flex was going to be. So you pare it down, you make the grip, the handle, and you fit it into the head of the club, which would be an iron or maybe a wooden-headed club. And it was so interesting to see him pick them up and know if it felt right. From about 20 clubs he ends up with four and another person would come along and do exactly the same and would come up with a totally different set of four clubs. I think it's lovely. That is where the skill, the craft and the understanding of what you were making come into force and you gain a reputation.

So here we are. Ross is really learning his trade in this respect. He's going round and he's really getting the hang of things. And all the time it's confidence, confidence, confidence. And this really holds him in good stead.

Now, once again, John Sutherland comes into the picture here because Ross, having done this apprenticeship, we think he was away around about three and a half to four years. He did come back occasionally and regular occasions, Christmas and that type of thing. But in the working year, he was away doing his thing. And I simply cannot trace where he was. St Andrews and Carnoustie are the two that are mentioned, but I can find no record of them.

But let's assume that he was out and about and he was learning his trade. So he comes back and he is instated as the professional at Dornoch Golf Club. And after two years, I think about 18 months, the club make him a nice little shed. Well, it's not a shed, a hut really, quite small. I'm not quite sure whether some of the early members might have remembered it. But anyway, it was demolished eventually. And there he became effectively the pro at Dornoch. And at that particular stage, once again, Dornoch was progressing. They now had 18 holes and our mighty man Sutherland was there again. Now, Sutherland, once again, has become a remarkable figure. He has understood and taken onboard himself, as secretary, the importance and the knowledge of greenkeeping. He starts to learn about grasses, he knows what works here and knows what doesn't work here. And he starts to experiment with top dressings. Now, we're on a links course here and normally it's just sand, sand, sand, sand. But he works on a mixture. I don't know what it was. I don't think anybody does. He keeps it a secret. It gradually works on the greens.

So Sutherland and Ross are becoming quite close, not only in the payment of wages but in terms of the maintenance of the course and what is happening to the course At this time it

is already laid out and we've got greens and tees. In some instances, the tees won't be elevated. It will just be a patch on the ground which they move on a regular basis. There are bunkers on the course and a number of these are just windblown holes or where sheep have been lying curled up in little places where they can keep out of the wind, etc. But once again I'm certain at that stage they are introducing proper bunkers to improve the course. And this is once again where Ross and Sutherland together are understanding and appreciating where you need to place your ball, how far it's going to go, what effect the wind's going to have, how does it roll, the whole science of laying out and understanding what is a fair course for somebody and gives a person satisfaction when they hit a good shot.

You could say you don't want bunkers and you've just got to play, just whack it off the tee and it's fine. If you hit the ball in the place that you're meant to hit it, there is a satisfaction and that is an essential ingredient in playing golf. I believe so anyway. So the course is coming together in my imagination of course, it has to happen like that, and people are coming here. They like it. The weather's nice. The scenery's beautiful. All these things which existed then are existing today and there we go. We trundle along like this.

In about 1895-96, I think it was around about this time, we have the gardener from Skibo and John Sutherland coming together on the subject of topsoil. Sutherland is proving that by dressing the greens with topsoil, he is getting better and more consistent growth and bearing in mind also in those days, he didn't have a lot of problems with divot marks. The ball never really went very high and it was mainly a game which was played along the ground. The greens were really coming together, making putting and the golf in general very, very entertaining. Eventually the gardener from Skibo gets such a reputation with all his other skills that he goes to St Andrews as the greenkeeper at St Andrews. I think that was about 1903 - 1905, something like that and all the while John Sutherland, has got tentacles all over the place. All these people he's beginning to know and I think he's an amazing character and I really can't leave him out of this story too much because he does influence it so much.

Now, as far as I'm concerned, at this time we get to one of the most interesting parts in this history of Donald Ross's career. R. W. Wilson, commonly known as Professor Wilson, and Mrs. Wilson came to Dornoch. They had travelled roughly from just northeast of New York, probably coming across into Liverpool or to Glasgow, and come up here on the train to the Mound Station. Just how they got from the mound is likely to have been using a buggy which went out to the Mound, particularly when they got prior warning, to pick people up and bring them the eight miles into Dornoch.

Professor and Mrs Wilson have been known as the key in offering Donald Ross the opportunity to go to America. The Professor gave him all sorts of reasons, mainly monetary, that he would find a wonderful job there and, apart from that, he could actually point him in the right direction and to the right club. Ultimately this led to Donald Ross making the decision that he would go to America.

What nobody has picked up which appears in the biggest book that's been written, **'Discovering Donald Ross' by Bradley Cline**, is that the Wilsons came to Dornoch as part of a foursome. At that time two-and-sixpence was the cost of a round and records show Mr. Wilson played five times which may have been with his wife, I'm not quite sure of that, and a Professor Wheeler had a pound's worth, which I reckon was four rounds. So it was worth me

taking the trouble to do investigate. At the time I said to one of our members who was in America, I need to know more about this chap Professor Wilson. I also have another good friend who's just as interested as I am, most of you will know him, and his name is Doug Mitchell. Now Doug is a very enquiring person and made a fantastic job of going through the 'Who's Who' records about this Professor Wilson and it turned out that he wasn't a professor at that time. He was nearly a Professor but he wasn't a Professor. The 'Who's Who' list shows he eventually became a Professor of Astronomy at Harvard University in 1903. When he came here in 1899 he was strictly speaking an assistant professor but that was good enough for us I suppose.

So here we have this 'Professor' and he is a member of the Oakley Golf Club on the east coast of America. Donald Ross is persuaded to go across under his own steam and his own finance. We've all heard the story, he gets to New York, docks, gets on a train and eventually gets out near to where the Professor lives. He then walks four miles and knocks on the door and he's greeted, I think, with some amazement. It was never thought it would actually happen.

Once again in my opinion it says a lot about the man. He's taken off, he's got a job really he never thought he'd ever get, he's earning, roughly we worked out, about a hundred pounds a year and that's a lot of money in those days. Normal wage was around about 30 to 40 pounds a year including perks from the shop and through his teaching. It's perhaps a generous guess but nonetheless it's a reasonable salary he was getting there.

So Ross is there, he's seen Professor Wilson he's knocked on his door, he's taken him in and the following morning he's taken him out to the golf course. Now he gets to this golf course and it's covered in snow but it's a large hill, slightly oval which is in fact a glacial phenomenon and there is an existing golf course on it which is a disgrace. It was laid out about 1895 and Ross looks at this and I suppose he really had no choice other than to say right, I can do something better and he starts there and then and lays out this course. This takes quite a lot of moving of the existing course and he's very anxious that, in these early days, he's going to make some sort of reasonable job about this. In the end it turned out to be quite successful and he got quite a few accolades from this. Bear in mind in the period around the turn of the century, golf was established in America but it was really still a sleeping beastie and the only people that played golf were the wealthy people. The working scallywag was just not there other than occasionally to clean shoes. This was largely due to the fees that they were charging. The way it worked was that a group of ten or twelve guys would get together and say we want to a golf course here. Land was not a problem in those times and they would buy up a lot of land and then put the whole thing together. They needed money to do this and they probably got to lay down something in the region of something like twenty-thousand dollars which was at that time a huge amount of money.

They didn't have to come up with the cash right there and then. They would maybe come up with five to eight thousand pounds and then get a loan from the bank. They would want their golf or country club to get into its stride as soon as possible so that their membership could be increased and the money could be returned and loan paid off. So this is exactly what happened at Oakley and what happens then is that golf courses fairly are widely spread, This was in the early days and people were travelling quite long distances to play their golf. They would take their Sunday off and it would be perhaps two or three hours on the train to the club and play their golf, and with a meal that would be the whole day. They were hard

working people at that time as well, unless you were one of the very lucky ones and extremely wealthy.

So Ross is off up and running and he's laid down his first golf course. Now at that stage people from far and wide were coming and playing it and saying, *'Oh this looks good to me'* and then thinking about building their own golf course in their own area. And it was pretty straightforward the way was done before, the borrowing the money and all the rest of it. And so at this stage Ross is fairly well set up and he got one or two contacts from his efforts on the Oakley Golf Club.

I'm way behind here, you're going to have to bear with me for a second. I forgot to mention that the first golf course which he saw I told you was perched on a hill and the surrounding ground. Most of the holes which had originally been laid out were laid out round the base of the hill, which is an obvious way to do it because there was no earth moving. But of course when it rained the whole course got flooded. It was a pretty obvious thing and even in reasonable weather if they had a few downpours the greens were unplayable. So he set about that and his basic plan was drawn up and said to be opening on October the 1st, 1900. Ross's crew at that time numbered 50 labourers. Another interesting point to me, here's the man, pretty small time, now directing a group of 50 people. There's no health and safety at that time but nonetheless he's got to be all over the place. He's got to be telling them exactly what to do. He has to have a picture in his mind of what the end result's going to be.

Bearing in mind the actual training he's had, nowadays we send people to school for this for years, but here he is in a position controlling these sort of numbers and at that time, bear in mind, when they would be working with horses. If you've got very wet ground, although there were tractors at that time, the way to work it would have been with horses and they used a lot of dynamite to blow up all the large stones. There were the usual delays but the course opened in spring in 1901, about nine months late. It measured 5,900 yards and he makes the comment that the course was somewhat restricted. He means by that such was the ground that there had to be sacrifices because of the gradients and a lot of the fairways were quite close together. He had to slot them in in smaller spaces and so forth.

I like this picture. It's Ross about that time. This is about 1900. What I just want you to observe is that I think he's quite a handsome man really and he's nicely attired, a double-handed grip



Historylinks Cat No. 2006_064_24

and more obvious here which at that time, you know, Vardin hadn't been out that long and told us all about the overlapping grip but, I mean, a good shoulder turn, not quite shifted his weight there but really an excellent posture I would think. So that's Donald and you see the other thing about them, the open stance. You see they always draw back that left foot. It might not mean anything to us but there we are.

So Ross now, having laid this course out and got the whole thing going in 1901, He now slots himself because he is the golf professional into the new pro shop and becomes the pro. His brother Alex has taken roughly the same path as Donald. Alex is just below Donald and they

are obviously corresponding and with Donald having set himself up in the pro shop, he thinks there's sufficient in it for two people. So he writes to Alex and Alex goes out and so there's another Ross man out in the US. He joins Donald Ross in his pro shop at that stage and between them they teach lessons, make golf clubs and heads and golf balls. When I say make golf balls, that's what they did in those days because they were the gutter percher. This came in big slabs, looked like a large slab of toffee and you melted it down in a pot which had a water surround so it didn't burn until it got to some liquid form. Then you put it in the mould and, if you go around the shop, you can see exactly how they were made.

I'll divert slightly onto that because I think this ball is quite interesting inasmuch that when they actually made it, if you look at some of these early pictures of these golf sweatshops as I called them, in a number of them around the top of the workbenches you will see racks. And all these golf balls would be placed along these racks and matured. When the ball was cast in a mould it was this solid lump of gutter percher and obviously the mould imprinted all the lines and the dots or whatever pattern you wanted on the exterior of the ball. Over the years they discovered that if you left this ball too long and it became solid, when you hit it with a golf club it would explode. So the way to make this ball play at its best was that after moulding it was put up on the rack. Then after a certain time you took it down and what happens is the exterior of this ball dries out with a hard outer skin on it. The rest of the gutter percher, which hasn't dried out properly, has really still got some flex in it and I put it to you that's exactly what your ball is to this day. What actually happened was when you put them in the rack there was a date on it as to when they could be sold. And so this whole thing kept moving round and round the room as they made these balls; it wasn't just a question of moulding there were some skills as well.

Alex, who had joined Donald was eventually poached and he moved on to the nearby golf club which was called Braybone a county club which was in Newton. Now at this time it would appear there was a number of Scots moving out, not obviously all from Dornoch but from everywhere in Scotland. Since the early 1890s Scotland had been providing the Americas with professional golfers and one or two of them had been very successful indeed. There was an image that if you want a good man who works hard and knows his business go to Scotland and which was then the heart of golf. More than at any other time, this is where people played this silly game of golf and they had a massive history of playing and a pool of people that knew what they were doing. I have got a note here that Fred Lowe and Eugene Wogan were a couple Ross took on. From time-to-time people had been recommended to him and he was very comfortable about taking these Scottish people on.

At this time of course Ross was established and was playing a lot more golf himself and as we know he was a very competent golfer. In 1905 he actually won the Massachusetts Open which was really quite an event with a good field of probably 30 or 40. Not huge numbers at that time but that was something worth winning. But in the long run it was Alex who really became the golfer of the two and he seemed to sustain his form for much longer. He wasn't working anywhere near as hard as Donald and he certainly shone. In 1907 he won the U.S. Open, which had only been going about three or four years at that time, so he had really put himself on the map. Donald at that time had been entering the U.S. Open on a regular basis but 1907 was Alex's year.

DORNOCH TO THE U.S.A.

In the early 20th Century a number of Scottish golfers emigrated to the United States of America to become professionals at the many clubs that were appearing there. Among these were several from Dornoch:

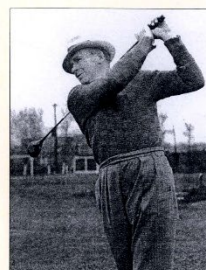


DONALD ROSS

Born in St Gilbert Street, Dornoch in 1874, Donald Ross emigrated to the United States in 1899. His first job was professional at Oakley Club, Boston. He was later appointed manager at Pinehurst Country Club, North Carolina. He became a legendary architect of many great courses including Pinehurst No.2, Braeburn, Oakland Hills, Interlachen, Inverness (Toledo, Ohio) and Seminole. In total he was architect for approximately 500 courses.

BOB MACDONALD

Born at Evelix, Dornoch. Emigrated to the United States in 1910. Bob was professional at a number of Chicago clubs including Evanston and Edgewater and was the first winner of the Texas Open in 1922. He was a founder member of the U.S.P.G.A. and later became it's president. He coached legendary U.S. golfers Gene Sarazen, Horton Smith and Babe Zaharias. His book, "Golf", published in 1927, was a classic of it's time.

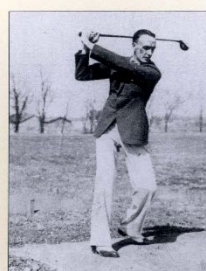


ALEX ROSS

Born in St Gilbert Street, Dornoch, brother to Donald. Alex emigrated to the United States of America in 1900. He played out of Brae-Burn Country Club, West Newton, Massachusetts, having previously played out of Pinehurst and then Wilmington, Del. He won the U.S. Open in 1907 at Philadelphia and had 4 more top 10 finishes in that Open. He also won the North-South Open 5 times and the Massachusetts Open 6 times (in succession).

BILL MACDONALD

Born at Evelix, Dornoch, brother to Bob and Jack. Emigrated to the United States in 1912. He became professional at Door County, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin then later at Springfield, Illinois and Illini Country Club, Illinois. Bill managed city tournaments for many years.



Actually I can't fault Alex's swing, that not that I'd want to. It might very well be just that the left hand's a little bit slack at the end of the swing there but I think good pose and rather elegant. Not quite sure where his shoulder was at the back of the swing it might have knocked his pipe out of his mouth. But he was very capable and that picture was actually taken when he was winning that U.S. Open title and that really put him on the map. I might add that at that time they were now using the Haskell ball the Haskell ball was the development of the golf ball and was the first ball that was actually wound and that came onto the U.K. scene in 1901 I think it was. When Alex Heard won the Open here he used that ball and from then on the whole thing took off.

In 1904 Ross returned to Scotland. I forgot to tell you that just before he left he met Wee Janet in Dornoch. She was a nurse and a child minder and she had come, with her with the parents of the two children she was looking after, to Dornoch for a holiday and Alex bumped into her. They paired up very quickly it must have continued at a distance because they became sweethearts and continued to write to each other for something like seven years. Because Ross went away without any written agreement they betrothed themselves and in 1904 Ross returned to Dornoch to marry Janet. She was in trouble at this stage and the wedding was an extremely disappointing affair. Her mother was seriously ill and the marriage was conducted at her bedside without any guests at all. It was a shame. Ross returned to America with his wife and they set up home in Waverley in Massachusetts. He was now nicely set up at Oakley and he was able to afford a winter holiday November to April. Now this is an interesting thing. In the States if you were below a certain latitude you would get snow and it would be quite a harsh winter but if you were the other side of that line you would have a very nice climate. And this is what happened at Pinehurst. It became a very popular winter resort and this is where the people that could afford it would go for their winters. They didn't go for two weeks holiday they went for two, three and four months.

Pinehurst is in North Carolina and is in existence to this day. But at that particular time. the very, very early days, Ross' reputation had gone before him and the first time they went to Pinehurst he is introduced to Mr. Tufts who runs the whole thing, lock, stock and barrel. He bought a huge tract of land for very little money. At that time it was just nothing but sand. Gradually Ross brought this whole thing together and, as we know to this day, produced one of the most unbelievable resorts that any golfer could ever wish for. In fact it now has its own town or village, whatever you call it, the houses are all the same because they were all built by the same man. and we all know about Pinehurst No. 2 and Pinehurst No. 1 and 3, 4, 5 and whatever. These are all where Ross was at his best and where he really made his reputation. Once again, he did his good work were the wealthy people came from all over for their winter stay, seeing the results of this man's talents and of course take it and his reputation away again.

The umbrella he has just expands and expands and expands and it gets to a stage where really he is totally overworked and employs people who he's met over these years to do his best work. He relies on them very heavily. And I think that something like a third of the golf courses which he designed, he never went to the course, had never been to the course, and the course was there and built by his various associates and contractors. People who he knew did good work and he was very disciplined with them all. He got regular reports but it was almost impossible for him to get round and see everybody in his lifetime, it was incredible.

I do have an interesting slide here. Actually I don't think this is on that screen. Here is the United States. Ross is located roughly here, Boston area and all these black dots that you can see, all over here, all around here, right through down to wherever. The massive range and area that he covers, is virtually half the States. All down this eastern coast and right into Canada as well. He was prolific.

So, rumour has it that and it's written down in several places, he is cited as being involved in 600 courses. Certain people have corrected me on this namely, Cline who has written an excellent book has worked out that Donald Ross was effectively involved with about 399 courses. He seems so precise I'm entitled to believe him. However, Ross is really flying at this stage. After he was introduced to Mr Tufts at Pinehurst, he was asked to do some work on what was then their Course Number 1. Subsequently over the years that Ross went to Pinehurst during the winter months he was laying the Pinehurst courses to something like Number 4 and Number 5. Pinehurst Number 2 is what today is reckoned is the classic and, I looked it up the other day, I think about 13 of the 18 holes that are there to this day are original holes laid down by Ross. Something close to 100 years ago. I think that is quite exceptional when you think about the development of the ball and development of the golf clubs. Obviously some of the tees have been pushed back and there's always work to be done on the course, in terms of trees creeping in and all the rest of it, but basically those holes are as he left them which I think is remarkable, At that time he was propositioned to become 'Director of Golf Operations' each winter. Basically there's not much going on through the summer it's just too hot and the ground's too hard, it is sandy and it's difficult to work at that time because you can't get anything to grow, it's just so dry. What we call a green is in these circumstances a 'brown' because it's effectively a clay surface is put down and spread with sand. These types of courses are still laid down to this day in the Far East in areas like that in wilder parts because grass simply cannot grow. There is no root depth.

In about the 1930s Ross set about changing all this and the greens were then some of the finest in the whole of the States. Once you had played your shot or once you had put it out, a gentleman comes along with a straight piece of carpet. He stands at the side of the green and as the people come off having putted, his job is to drag the piece of carpet on a string whilst walking across the green. So when you left the green you just dropped something in his hand. Thus he then leaves the green for the next person in a perfect state. These greens were at Pinehurst up until the mid-thirties and what happened then is really what's happening now following the development of grasses and topsoils, which is what we spoke about in the early days of Sutherland. Topsoils were put on and types of grasses which would weather extremely dry conditions and very shallow roots.

This chap Tufts who owned the Pinehurst complex made his money through soda fountains and if you've been in the States you will know about these soda machines. Well he actually designed and installed them becoming an unbelievably wealthy man and this whole complex is where he successfully plunged much of his money. He became a personal friend of Ross and so here again is an example of how Ross has just simply elevated himself by his skills and by his ability. He was able to get the right people to do what he wants without ordering them about but making them want to work for him. That comes across on several occasions. Around about 1920 he had a whole crew of people, these were draughtsmen, architects and mechanics, all of whom he could trust and there was really no need for him to go to these sites every time. He would send an architect along to a potential site, which would be a piece of ground where one of these groups of gentlemen had said they wanted to put a country club, and they would make a topographical outlay of the ground giving undulations and the measurements. With this Ross with amazing skills could actually lay out a course. Then the mechanics would go in with the necessary machinery and surveyors would form the greens and bunkers laid out, all based on a straightforward diagram that Ross had overlaid on the topographical plan.

Moving on to the family, Janet and Donald had their first child Lillian in 1909 and in the summer of 1910 the Ross family returned to Dornoch to show off the infant.

Historylinks Cat No. 2026_064_06

At that stage Ross is getting quite some coverage with the Boston newspapers recording the trip. They stay for two months at Dornoch for one month and the second month they stay at Moniave. Donald has plenty of time for golf and enters the 1909 Open at St Andrews. In spite of some serious opposition he tied in eighth place in the British Open which was held that year at St Andrews which I thought was commendable the winner being James Braid.



It is at this time that Ross decides to leave Oakley and joins another club the Essex County Club which is about 30 miles away and this again is described as a summer retreat for wealthy Bostonians. The facilities at this club include a race track, ice skating in the winter on open ponds, a golf course, tennis courts, shooting, archery and indoor curling. Not bad for a golf course! Once again it is an indication of the wealth of the groups of people that form themselves into clubs.

Amongst the members there is a chap called George F Willett who has taken lessons from Ross at Oakley. He becomes quite an important character. He is the president of one of the Bostonian banks so he's in the know. When Donald Ross's granddaughter Elizabeth Shapiro was here a couple of years ago I went around with her for a couple of days and one of the questions I wanted to ask her was what happened to Donald Ross in the Wall Street crash. She didn't say very much but she said I think he was tipped off and that was all she said. It's interesting because he didn't go down the pan. Donald carried on much as usual and, putting two and three together perhaps he was helped by this personal friend?

The Essex Country Club decided to rebuild a course on a new site. Ross was taken by Willett to oversee the location and he took on the project, supported by a meticulous civil engineer named Charles Fritz. This is interesting and I am going through this because it's going to give you a feel for what happens. An accurate topographical map was produced and Ross was able to overlay his course design. The result after seven years is the classic of this day. So it seems an oversimplification but he's got this extremely accurate layout and it's on a sheet or whatever it is which has got yardages both ways so you can pinpoint everything. It also indicates the humps and bumps and he's able to study this and work out: a. where he's going to put the clubhouse; b. where he's going to start out; c. after nine holes and back at the clubhouse; d. where to start out on the tenth and come back to the clubhouse.

He works all this out taking into account where the trees are, where there's water, if there's a pond is there a stream, is there road access... There's a hell of an amount of considerations. All these things have to be fitted in and he's able to do it without going near the place. But he has this group of people that back him up and he's able to get away with this for dozens, well something close on 20, 30 courses that he designs. Bear in mind this is not pin money here, you are paying a man an awful lot of money to do this but such is his reputation and the knowledge that he's done it before and his team is in touch with him all the time, he's being kept informed of what's going on how the progress is going, where they've got problems. Where necessary he will have a look at it passes it on a solution. He is the nub of the whole thing.

Telephone contact must be maintained all the time and he has got two or three sometimes on at the same time. Remarkable but it provides a wonderful feel for the lie of the land and what he sees here and there. You can imagine he'll see the green in that position and he'll see this hump there. He loved the humps and bumps because that is where he was brought up. It is not a question of a necessarily long hole but giving the golfer the opportunity to take a line and a degree of risk he wants to take. And if he takes a big risk and he makes the shot. his next shot gives him a full view of the green or it puts him this side of the bunker. You know that this wonderful sophistication, which can be built into courses, is lovely to see and he was a master of that.

Ross gained further fame when he was mentioned in the UK evening news on December 12th with reference to the work he was doing on this golf club. During the project he left the Essex club in 1913 but made several returns before its completion in 1917. This course of 6,300 yards is largely intact to this day and it has a spacious layout. He worked with a generous piece of land in the first place which permitted good access which is one of the essential requirements. It is no good plonking your course without good access to a main

road coming close by because you've got to get visitors to your clubhouse and the course around it.

Ross has come a long way since arriving in the USA, head professional at Oakley then Essex and with a winter affiliation at Pinehurst. I forgot to mention that he changed his golf clubs a couple of times. He retained an affiliation to Pinehurst in the winter, where he continued to work with an ongoing programme. Yet he was doing all the other courses through the spring and summer times and became a very wealthy man.

The affiliation with Pinehurst started back in 1900 when Ross was invited by J.W. Tufts and he took on the winter position. The following year 1902 Ross took Alex with him. The local Pinehurst Outlook paper reports the Lynx will be in charge. Donald and Alex Ross considered Pinehurst being in premier place. Number 2 course was opened in 1907 and proved a great attraction to visitors, bringing crowds into the area and putting more and more money in Mr Tuft's pocket. This course being Ross's direct responsibility elevated his designer status. In 1903 a men's association was formed and in 1904 it took the name of the Tin Whistle Club, just a bunch of guys that got down to Pinehurst and like men do they formed a group.

In 1919 tragedy struck when Janet Donald's wife was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery which was said to be successful. Her health soon began to slide and they decided to return back to Scotland for the summer. The crossing took 10 days. They visited both families in Dornoch and Moniave. While in Dornoch Ross suggested that there should be change in the first and second holes on the Dornoch course. Many of you will know about that second hole which was quite a long hole at that time. The first green was roughly opposite the plateau at the side of the wall on the left-hand side so the hole was really quite short but by lengthening it and taking the green out to where it is now, shortened the second hole and those were the changes that he suggested at that time. The changes were actually taken up in 1921.

The family return journey was a sad affair with Janet accepting she would not be back. She died on February the 12th 1922 aged 55; Lillian their daughter was just 12 at that time.

During the summer of 1922 Donald took off on his own and went across to the west coast and whilst he was away Lillian moved into Pinecrest, which was on the Pinehurst estate, and was cared for by a family called the McNabs who were very close friends. Ross spent the summer of 1923 in Rome, in New York working on a new layout, and on a new site of the Terghiga Country Club. Mr and Mrs Hassleton who were members there also visited Pinehurst in the winter and got to know Mr and Mrs Ross and Lillian. They became friends after a couple of visits. Travelling with the Hassletons was the company secretary a Susan Comstock Aldridge. Young Lillian became genuinely fond and friendly with Susan and she was invited to Lillian's birthday parties. Following the death of Janet, Donald and Susan became close and frequently corresponded. She was an excellent golfer and the first woman champion in 1921 of the club. Donald was obviously smitten and they were engaged in 1933. Sadly Susan died quite quickly again with cancer with Ross at her bedside.

Ross's trip back to Scotland in 1921 would prove fateful in more ways than one as Ross's mother Lillian died in March 1924 and his father 15 months later. Both are buried in the Dornoch East churchyard.

Donald finally remarried again in 1924 to a wealthy widow, Miss Florence Sturgy Blackington whom Ross had met in 1922 at Pinehurst.



Donald, Lillian and Florence 1929 Historylinks Cat No. 2023_028_09

At the wedding ceremony there were no guests as Donald was really quite poorly with a serious throat ulcers. He used to smoke an awful lot of cigars. An American habit. The New York Times reported Donald J. Ross, golf architect wed on a sick bed. They resided at Pinehurst, by the third green on Pinehurst number 2, which is still there and called Donald Cottage. Despite his workload and prolonged trips away, Donald was a doting father; young Lillian greatly missed her mother and never quite warmed to her father's second wife. With Donald frequently away it was decided to send Lillian to a prep school in Troy, New York. Lillian's account was she hated every minute of it. Over the Christmas period, dad and daughter talked it through and young Lillian finished her schooling there.

Following the depression of the 1929 Wall Street crash there were serious cutbacks all round. Ross accepted a cut in salary of a thousand dollars but he agreed everybody should share the burden.

In June 1932. Ross's daughter Lillian sailed on the Britannia back to Liverpool and Scotland, accompanied by her Uncle Aeneas younger brother of Donald. He decided to stay and does not return having suffered badly in the Wall Street Crash. He became a very, very sad figure and died in 1957 in Dornoch, I believe more or less penniless. Lillian returned to America after spending time with both the families in Dornoch and Moniave.



Donald, Aeneas and Alex Ross Historylinks Cat No. 2006_064_04

It was in 1932 that Donald Ross resigned as a director and officer in management with Richard Tufts. Tufts accepted his resignation, although he requested that Ross stayed on with Pinehurst Incorporated in an advisory capacity and he serves as a President of the Pinehurst Country Club. His salary remained at \$2,400, which at that time must have been a colossal sum, plus concessions from the golf shop.

Donald Ross died of a heart attack on April 26th 1948, aged 75. He was buried next to his first wife, Janet, in Newton Centre Cemetery. Ross' second wife, Florence Blackington, lived until 1955 and was buried beside her first husband.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the best I can do on Donald Ross.