

# Musselburgh Old Course Golf Club

## THE CRADLE



## OF GOLF

### Newsletter - Issue 11

### Winter 2025

#### Summer Competitions

During each Summer we run three major knockout competitions, Summer Singles, Summer Pairs and the League Cup. All three use previous medals and competitions to give us the entrants, i.e. the 16 to play off. Although they tend not to run smoothly as holidays, work commitments and our busy calendar of competitions get in the way of arranging ties, we have our winners. The pairs winners seen here with our Captain are



Mark Allison and Gary Locke. They defeated the Brown brothers in a tight match, the format being 4 ball better ball. The League Cup winner was Gordon Henderson, who ran out winner over Mathew Craigie. This competition is slightly different as it is knockout but based on the 18 hole net score not hole by hole match play. The final to complete was the Summer Singles, and saw Bob Beverage take on Stevie Peters, with Bob being the victor.



#### Couple of presentations



Both our Bar Manager and our resident Chef were presented with a small thank you for all their hard work. For John it was a bottle of his favourite tipple, and he has decided to step back from the kitchen, thanks again John. Cheryl is a newcomer to the MOCGC family, welcome.



## A Special competition



The Committee and Competition Secretary thought it was a good idea to have a trophy and competition / championship for our older members. A Veteran Championship was put in place, over 70 years old. The competition took place on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October over 9 holes.

A great turnout of 10 members played in bright but very windy and cool conditions.

The organiser was asked if he chose such a poor day in an attempt to cull some of our older members. The winning score with a net 32 was Mike McGovern, seen here with our Chairman Brian Weddell, a great score in those conditions, but a 33 and two 34s shows how tight a competition we had.

MOCGC			
Name	Score	H/Cap	Net
			Rank
S. STEWART	43	8	35
D. CAMPBELL	42	9	33 <span style="color:red">2</span>
A. McGREGOR			N/R
I. STEWART	46	6	40
B. SKILLING	40	6	34
J. MCLELLAND	42	8	34
R. LITTLE	58	13	45
B. GORDON	45	8	37
G. GEDDES	51	9	42
M. MCGOVERN	41	9	32 <span style="color:red">1</span>

## Smoking Shelter

At the same time as winning the inaugural Veterans Trophy, Mike was also working on the construction of a new smoking shelter, at the back of the trolley shed in our back garden. A number of other volunteers, mostly from the Committee, prepared and are in the process of finishing the structure. With Paul Marshall making the structure watertight. The Committee would request that all members and visitors use this facility and not to smoke outside the front door next to our neighbours.

## INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

International Membership for 2025 costs £250 and the proceeds from International Memberships enable us to maintain and upgrade our historic clubhouse. If anyone is interested in supporting the club by becoming an International Member or by buying one as a gift for someone else, please follow the following link ...

<https://musselburgholdcourse.com/international-members-form>

A number of the improvements that the Club has made this year are due to these members, thank you to all of our International members, hope to see you soon in the club.

## The Thursday Friends - Dementia Friendly East Lothian

For a year or so the Club has been used by a group supporting dementia in Musselburgh. Once again, the wee club with a big heart helping people within our community. The wonderful people that host the Thursday Friends are always grateful for the use of our facility and asked to include their thanks below.

### **On behalf of Thursday Friends and all at DFEL, thank you.**

The Thursday Friends meet every week in the Clubhouse, thanks to the MOCGC Members. The Friends have written a poem to express their gratitude for your kindness and welcome in offering us such a special place to meet.

#### **A Place Amongst Friends**

“As soon as we walk through the door,  
Theres a feeling of ease  
A warmth that tells us  
Were amongst friends.



The room is beautifully decorated, old and full of history,  
Wraps us in its charm,  
It's a pleasant place to sit and chat,  
To share a laugh, a cuppa and enjoy the view.

You can feel the community spirit in the air,  
In every conversation and every smile.  
There's comfort in simply being together,  
And joy in the moments we share.

Thank you for giving us this space,  
Where friendship and laughter  
Make each visit something  
To truly look forward to,  
And where strangers become friends”.

The Thursday Friends is one of the 4 groups supported by the Dementia Friendly East Lothian ([www.dfel.org.uk](http://www.dfel.org.uk)) through the Musselburgh Meeting Centre. If you'd like to find out more about our work, get involved or volunteer, please contact April at - [april@dfel.org.uk](mailto:april@dfel.org.uk)

## R MacWhinnie Trophy

One of the Charity Days that are run within the club is a match between MOCGC and “The Ship Inn” for the R MacWhinnie Trophy. In the match MOCGC came second so you see their Captain Vince Fitzpatrick holding the trophy. Mark MacWhinnie, who with his family worked tirelessly to host the day, with our Captain on the day James (Bonnie) Bonthron. Once again, the big winners were the charity, the Musselburgh branch of



A huge number of raffle prizes together with donations from the golfers raised an incredible £1440 for Musselburgh cycling without age charity. Well done to all those who played and paid and donated for the raffle. Mark and his family and friends put in a lot of effort but was well rewarded on the day.



## Early Christmas celebrations



On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December the club celebrated Christmas, by having our annual Christmas Dinner. Our resident chef, John McFeely together with a few of his helpers served up a 3-course traditional festive feast. A great time was had by all, and the picture shows the festive scene before the absolute mayhem commenced. A decision was made not to show any pictures after the meal to avoid embarrassment. Thanks to John and his staff, and to

Cheryl our bar manager who changed her shifts to accommodate the night.

## Kids Christmas party



Once again, the club hosted a Christmas Party for the children and grandchildren of our members. Not only did Santa make an appearance but he managed to kidnap a passing elf who delighted the children. It really was just by coincidence that the elf was near by and agreed to pop in to see the kids. We can not say what our bar manager Cheryl asked Santa for Christmas especially as it was a kid's party.



### *MEMBERS of Musselburgh Probus Club enjoyed their Christmas lunch on Monday.*

*The festive feast took place at Musselburgh Old Course Golf Club's clubhouse on Balcarres Road.*

*Alister Hadden, president of Musselburgh Probus Club, thanked everyone for attending the event and wished them all the compliments of the season. He relayed the club's appreciation to the chef and his staff for an "excellent lunch".*

*Ivor Highley, club treasurer, read a Christmas poem to fellow members and speaker secretary David Monaghan revealed the syllabus of speakers who will be welcomed at club meetings for the first half of 2026.*



The Club hosted the above event, as posted in the East Lothian Courier. The chef was our own John, but it will be his last as you may see earlier, he is retiring. Once again, our club supporting the local community.



### Hearts v Hibs

The annual golf match which pits the Heart of Midlothian supporters against the Hibernian supporters took place in December. A fun format saw the first 9 holes being pairs better ball and the second 9 holes singles. The happy Captain, Callum Livingstone with the trophy as Hearts beat Hibs 14 to 12. A close score made it a good day, even the losing Captain Ryan Henderson was smiling.



## Mrs Forman's

For a number of our newer members, Mrs Forman's is just the name for the 4<sup>th</sup> hole, playing up to that white gable end. However, for many others including worldwide golfers it is so much more. Mrs Forman's hostelry had served golfers at Musselburgh for



almost 200 years and known as the oldest golfing pub in the world. George Forman's father built and ran the pub from about 1822 for several decades, it was known as Blucher Hall. In 1826, George Forman married Marion Bowman, from West Barnes, who became Mrs Forman, after whom the pub would later be named.

At some point, George took over the pub from his father and ran it until he died in 1843, aged only 41. George and Marion had nine children aged between 1 and 16, whom

Marion then had to work to look after.

Mrs. Forman would not serve anyone who was drunk. She had a unique way of dealing with her male customers and would frequently refuse their money, saying:- 'Tak yer money hame tae yer wife, she has mair need o' it than me.' In all the years she ran the pub, the police never had any cause to complain and there were never any problems with the renewal of her spirit licence. She served Lords and commoners alike, though VIPs dined in the kitchen and others had to make do with the garden if she was full.

Mrs Forman's was the site of a major golfing incident in 1870, when Old Tom Morris from St Andrews and Willie Park Snr were playing a close



match for high stakes. Willie was from Musselburgh and the local crowd were interfering with Old Tom's play. The umpire halted the match until the following day during the refreshment break in Mrs Forman's, which Willie Park refused to accept. Willie finished the match and the day after, when Old Tom walked the course and was declared the winner, Willie 'arrested' the stakes. After arbitration the match was declared void.



Mrs. Forman ran the pub until her death in 1888, aged 84, when her spinster daughters Ann and Bethia, with John Forman, took over. The Inn remained in the Forman family into the next century. Golfers were served drinks through one of windows. It is believed to be the only place in the world where you could order and have a drink on the green during a match. One of the most famous drinkers was Bobbie Jones who visited in 1930 to sketch the Sea Hole which he wanted to reproduce in the States. George Colville tells the story in his book on the five Musselburgh Open champions of how he drank a pint with Bobbie at the window of the pub while discussing putting techniques.

## **Eighteen.....An Odd Number? By Gordon Thomson**

Eighteen holes has always struck me as an odd number of holes for a round of golf! It would seem that a round consists of eighteen holes more by chance than design. When the R&A were looking to “define” what constitutes a round during 1858, the Old Course at St Andrews had 18 holes at that time and this was adopted as the standard. At one point a round at St Andrews consisted of twenty two holes so we may have had four more holes to enjoy, or is that endure, had they “defined” the round earlier than they did. Eighteen holes was thought to be a sufficient number of holes which should enable the player’s skill to be put to the test, with an array of different shots being called for whilst being manageable within four hours! Fast forward nearly two hundred years and we find the most accomplished players on the planet are struggling to knock it round in less than six hours but that is a debate for another day!

Whilst 18 holes constitutes a round, it is highly improbable that Musselburgh Links will ever change from its current nine hole lay out. Records suggest that the links has been the subject of perhaps more changes, both planned and unplanned, than most courses but it has never “officially” been more than nine holes.

During the nineteen century changes were often made to the course layout by complete strangers who had neither the authority or approval to do so, much to the annoyance of the golf clubs and societies associated with the course. A meeting was convened in 1832 by these clubs and societies which led to the introduction of a local bylaw to allow criminal proceedings to be raised against any person altering the course. Interestingly enough it was agreed at the meeting the course should increase the number of holes from seven to eight.

During 1843 the number of holes was increased to ten by John Gourlay, a local golf ball maker, but he was informed that he had no authority to do such a thing and by doing so was causing an infringement. The additional holes were then removed from play as quickly as they had appeared! In 1870 the links was extended to nine holes when the Sea Hole was added. This was the last hole added and no actual additions have been made since then. The Musselburgh Town Council took over the running of the course in 1892, and in 1895 the council submitted plans to have the course extended to 14 holes. The Musselburgh Golf Club (who would later move to Prestongrange and become Royal Musselburgh GC) “entirely disapproved” of this proposal and submitted a letter to the council which led to the plans for the additional holes to be scrapped. Fourteen holes does seem a strange number to propose unless it was perhaps with a view to extending the course to eighteen at a later date?

On May 21<sup>st</sup> 1909 council minutes state that the scheme to extend Musselburgh Old Course to one of 18 holes instead of the present nine had been discussed at great length and the local golfers in most cases would give the scheme their support if it was found to be workable. The extract states that the scheme had been so favourably received that the council wished to put it to the test and arranged to go over the course with

representatives of the various clubs and societies. If it was considered workable, plans would be drawn up to extend the course. Unfortunately, no further correspondence can be found regarding the outcome of the site visit but either some party objected or the council failed to deliver!

In the mid 1980's the Racing Authority submitted plans to the council to construct a National Hunt course adjacent to the flat track that was already in existence. To enable the new track to be constructed, the third green and the ninth greens required to be relocated. To say the golfers were less than pleased was an understatement. A series of public meetings took place, but it was obvious from the outset on which side the local councillors' bread was buttered. One councillor stated that he was completely taken aback at the sheer volume of golfers objecting to the proposal as the only thing he saw on the course when he drove past was seagulls. But, as a compromise of sorts the council advised the golfers that it was their intention to investigate the possibility of utilising the land reclaimed by the ash lagoons and extend the links to an eighteen hole course. The golfers knew they were fighting a losing battle from the outset but agreed to the new racecourse on the understanding that the council would explore the potential extension to the golf course. Alas, as soon as the racecourse plans were approved the golf course proposal got pushed further and further back until such time as it was forgotten about.

Interestingly enough, during the early 2000's representatives from the club were invited to meet with council officials to once again explore the possibilities of utilising the land reclaimed by the lagoons with a view to extending the course to eighteen holes. The council officials at this time differed from those that had been in office when it was previously aired during the 1980's. After some highly promising discussions, we presented the council with a list of course architects that we had contacted with a view to carrying out on site surveys. The council were quite taken aback by the costs involved in getting this up and running and stated that there had been a misunderstanding and when they had previously mentioned getting professionals in to design the new layout they had meant contacting the local professionals at nearby courses with a view to them taking the course design on as a project, without any significant expenditure being incurred. They, the council, duly contacted all the professionals in East Lothian but as no professional was willing to take the project on, the proposal was taken no further.

It would appear that the best chance of getting an additional nine holes was during the discussions of 1909 and given that the reclaimed land has since been transformed into a highly acclaimed ornithologists paradise this door is now closed. Whilst an additional nine holes would have had obvious benefits in allowing more rounds and speeding up play it may have been to the detriment of the course's rich heritage.