

John "Jack" Simpson

(29 December 1859 – 9 July 1895)



John, known as Jack, Simpson was born on 29th December 1859 in Earlsferry, the fourth son to Alexander Simpson and Mary Simpson (née Stewart). His was from a notable golfing family, which included an elder brother, Bob Simpson, Archie, David, etc. His cousin was the golfer James Braid. As a boy, Simpson was the favourite caddy of Sir Alexander Grant, principal of the University of Edinburgh, and a regular at Elie GHC where Simpson grew up.

He was one of six golfing brothers. He was a powerful but erratic player. He won the 1884 Open Championship at Prestwick with a score of 160 for 36 holes, despite taking a nine* at his second hole. He did not have any other high finishes at the Open and concentrated mainly on club making.

**That is what is said in Wikipedia but the actual score card below seems different.*



GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP.—We learn by telegram from **Prestwick** on Friday that the annual competition for the championship was played over the **Prestwick** Links. The weather was very boisterous, a strong gale from the north-west blowing right across the green made the scoring difficult. There was a large field, no less than fourteen couples starting. John Simpson, of Earlsferry, played a brilliant game, and won the cup in 160 strokes, 78 to the first round and 82 to the second, and was declared the champion for the following year. The next best scores were W. Fernie and D. Rolland, 184 strokes; W. Campbell and J. Park, jun., 169 strokes; D. Sayers and J. Kirkcaldy, 170 strokes; Mat Allan, 171 strokes; Tom Dunn, 173; Tom Morris and J. O. F. Morris, 174.

On summing up the cards it was found that Mr J. Simpson, of Earlsferry, had carried off the honours with a fine score of 160. His game was faultless, the driving and approach to the holes being something to be remembered. His score is made up thus—

First round	447525453653445543—78
Second round	446445355543745455—82

D. Rolland, another Earlsferry player, tied with W. Fernie, for second. The following are the details of the scores of—

1. J. Simpson (champion), £8.....	160
2. D. Rolland, } £8.....	164
W. Fernie, }	
4. W. Campbell, £1.....	169
5. W. Park, jun., £1.....	169
6. B. Sayers, £1.....	170
7. T. Dunn, } £1.....	171
G. Fernie, }	
J. Kirkcaldy.....	172
W. Dunn.....	173
M. Allan.....	173
T. Morris.....	174
J. O. F. Morris.....	174
J. Anderson.....	175
W. Doleman.....	178
W. Gogove.....	178
M. J. Hunter.....	179
G. Strath.....	183

1884 Open championship

He managed to capitalise on this to some extent as a result of some widely publicised matches.

THE FIELD, THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN'S NEWSPAPER. This week saw a series of very interesting matches played over the links. all of which drew after them a goodly following of spectators. On Monday, Mr Edward Blackwell had a single of two rounds with Jack Simpson (professional), Carnoustie. Mr Blackwell is a strong young player, who drives a loose ball. Recently he has been taking the links with remarkably low scores, ranging from 92 to 88 strokes, and it was thought that he would give a good account of himself with his professional rival, who was reckoned as one of the best professional players. The

match was two rounds. In the first turn both players were unsteady. their driving being wild and their putting below average. Mr Blackwell stood one up at the end last, but Simpson brought the match square at the burn, and the last was halved, the first round ended even. Scores Mr Blackwell 92, Simpson in the second round the play showed much improvement. Both went out in 43, Simpson, however, standing one hole up.

Coming home, the professional added another to his lead, but Mr Blackwell afterwards pulled both from him, and at the burn all was level. Mr Blackwell, however, secured the last hole, and with it the game by one. The scores in the second round were Mr Blackwell 87, Simpson 83. The weather was fine, and the green in good order. On Tuesday the same players went into a foursome, the sides were: My Alex. F. Macfie, winner of the Liverpool Golf Championship, and Mr Edward Blackwell against Jamie Morris. St. Andrews and Jack Simpson, Carnoustie. The day being favourable, a large following accompanied the match. Playing the first hole, Morris found himself stymied, and failed to hole, and the amateurs scored their first honour; but their professional opponents won it back at the third hole. On the fourth green Morris was again unfortunate in being stymied, and Macfie and Blackwell won.

They also lost the fifth hole, Morris coming to grief in a bunker, and stood two up. The sixth was halved. Playing the seventh hole, Macfie and Blackwell were very unfortunate, and lost by 6 to 4 strokes. Simpson, on the eighth green, footled [*sic*] his putt, and the amateurs again got two up. They also won the ninth hole, and at the turn three ahead. Playing the first hole in, Morris was again stymied but managed to hole, and belied his partner won in 4 strokes. The second, third, fourth, and seventh holes were halved. Macfie secured the fifth hole for his odds with fine long putt but threw away the eighth by feeding [*sic*] on the green. The last hole fell to the professionals by a good putt by Jamie, and the round ended—Macfie and Blackwell one up. The scores were 93 each. Playing the second round Macfie and Blackwell were somewhat unfortunate and lost the first three holes. The next two were halved.

Out of the remaining four holes one fell to each, and two were divided, the players turning homeward—professionals two ahead. Their amateur opponents, however, carried the first and third holes, and squared matters. The professionals at the fourth green were very deficient in their putting and their opponents again got one up. Two halves followed. Macfie, at the corner of the dyke, got down with a long putt, and he and his partner stood dormie—two up and two to play. They, however, made bad work of it playing the next hole, and the professionals won it. The last hole was halved, the play resulting in favour of Macfie and Mr Blackwell by one hole. The scores in the second round were Mr Macfie and Mr Blackwell 93, Morris and Simpson 92. Mr Macfie and Jamie Morris played well and steadily for their respective sides, but neither Mr Blackwell nor Jack Simpson ever attained their game. Simpson was repeatedly away to the side of the green in his driving, and all the four players made sad work of the short game, and repeatedly failed to hole easy putts.

On Wednesday, a return on the amateur-professional foursome, Mr Alex. Macfie and Mr E. Blackwell versus Jack Simpson (prof.), Carnoustie, Jack Morris (prof.), St. Andrews, was engaged in. The amateurs won the first hole, but after this their professional opponents ran away with four holes out of the next five played, and halved the next three, the game at the turn being three up for Simpson and Morris. They put other three holes to their credit in the first four holes coming in but made bad work of it towards the end of the round, and lost the last four holes to the amateurs, the round, however, being in favour of the professionals by two holes. Scores, Simpson and Morris 91. Macfie and Blackwell 93. Playing the second round, the amateurs lost two holes going out, and the professional antagonists got four up, and Simpson and his partner easily secured the match in the home, coming by five and four to play. They also got the bye by one. and was thus six ahead on the thirty-six holes. Scores, Simpson and Morris 91, Macfie and Blackwell 96. The professionals were in much better form than on Tuesday but were somewhat unlucky with their play in the earlier round. Mr Blackwell drove well, but Mr Macfie was not on his game, and during the second round to some extent went out of it. [1886]

ELIE —JACK SIMPSON —Mr H. S. C. Everard, writing on "Eminent Golfers" tells the following story of Jack Simpson:

Some eight or nine years or so have elapsed since Mr. Douglas Rolland came into general notice, although, as a matter of course, his merits were well known in the village of Elie, or Earlsferry, his native place. It so happened that about that time Jack Simpson, also native of Elie, and a subsequent winner of the open championship, was at the height of his game, and Rolland and he were in the habit of playing together continually. Nothing much, however, was known of either of them away from their own green, and the first notice strangers had was the intimation that there two would be glad to play any two amateurs of the Royal and Ancient at St Andrews.

Accordingly, a foursome was got, and Messrs Leslie Balfour-Melville and Horace Hutchinson were the selected champions of the latter Club. The play exhibited by its challengers was a revelation. Jack Simpson was to the full as fine a player as Rolland himself, even if he was not, as the latter inclined to think, a trifle better, and the driving shown by there too simply pulverised their opponents, who never had a chance from start to finish. It happened to be blowing a heavy gale of wind, which exactly suited the play of the strangers, and, as so instance of their great power, an episode may be given which occurred at the very first hole.

The gale was of such strength that Mr Balfour-Melville and his partner could not cross the burn at the third shot, although they had three very good drives, and it fell to Jack Simpson to play the like. He called for his cleek whereupon a spectator, himself a first-rate player, and excellent judge of the game, remarked—"I should have thought a man who can drive like that would have risked the burn." With but a three-quarter shot with his cleek, he laid the ball within a few feet at the hole. This particular round was finished in 89, which, considering the day, was extraordinarily fine performance, but it should be added that their putting was scandalously bad. Neither the one nor the other appeared to have the most rudimentary ideas of how to hole a ball out, and time after time, after reaching the green by magnificent driving and approaching, an extra stroke was almost sure to be required, unless the ball was absolutely dead. But, as the late Mr James Mansfield remarked in the course of the play, "With driving of that description you can afford a deal of slackness in the short game."

Douglas [Rolland], while still an amateur, came very near winning the open championship in 1884. His friend Jack Simpson, however, proved too good for him; but he was in front of everybody else, excepting W. Fernie, with whom he tied at 164 over Prestwick on a very windy day. [1891]

1892

Andrews men by two up and one to play. A single for a prize presented by some friends was also played for by Jack Simpson and Jack Duncan, when Simpson played one of the most brilliant games ever seen on the links, doing the eleven holes in the very low score of 41, and beating Duncan, who did the round in 48, by seven holes. As a finish up to the day's proceedings, the two St Andrews professionals played a round against Simpson and Jack Duncan, which resulted in favour of the local men by one hole. Great interest is being shown in the match (Simpson against Kirkaldy) which comes off on 22nd and 27th inst.

He died of typhoid in 1895

	Single	Edinburgh			Chas. B. Bell		
	John Simpson	1892	11	20	Alexander Simpson	1892	
	John Simpson	July		18	Edinburgh	1892	
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East of Fife Record

DEATH OF A NOTED GOLFER.—The death of **Jack Simpson** the other day in Edinburgh, from fever, will be regretted, not only by those of his native links at Earlsferry, but by golfers all over the country. Every golfer knows of the occasion when, after a May meeting at St Andrews, two raw boys appeared on the links and challenged the winners of the gold and silver medals in a foursome. How, after some haggling, the challenge was accepted, and the *twa laddies* came in victorious. How, the next day, the two best professionals of the day tried conclusions with **Jack Simpson** and Douglas Rolland, who again were conquerors. From those days till now, **Jack** has been in full front of every tournament, and one year carried off the blue ribbon and was champion. Latterly **Jack**, in company with his brother Alex., started as clubmakers in Edinburgh, and the necessities of business have prevented him getting that practice which makes perfection. From this cause **Jack's** name of late had not been so prominent as formerly, and he had been content to allow his brother Archie to take his place.

north again so soon.

The death of Jack Simpson adds yet another name to that long list of fine professional players who have been cut down in the prime of their life and vigour. Jack Simpson's game has not been, for some time, all that it used to be; and lately his fame has been rather eclipsed by that of his brother Archie, who has recently issued a challenge to play, with Andrew Kirkaldy as his partner, a foursome for £100 a side against any other two players on the links of Carnoustie, Prestwick, and St. Andrews. Very possibly ill-health has had much to do with the falling-off in his game. Of his style, Mr. Everard has put on record that he considered it the finest driving style he has ever seen, with the possible exception of that of Mr. Edward Blackwell. The name of Simpson has been so long and honourably connected with the golf at Carnoustie that all gollers have learned to look upon the brothers as inseparably associated with that fine course, although Archie has held temporary engagements so far south as Bembridge, in the Isle of Wight, and is now—or was until very lately—engaged so far north as Aberdeen. And yet the first that we seem to have heard of the Simpson family coming prominently forward in the golfing world was on the occasion of a challenge being sent over to St. Andrews from Elie, saying that a pair of Elie men would like to match themselves against any two members of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. This was about a dozen years ago. They did not propose a money match; the proposition was made out of true sporting instinct. The pair that accepted the challenge were the present amateur champion, Mr. Leslie Baliour-Melville, and Mr. Horace Hutchinson. The pair that came over from Elie were Jack Simpson and Douglas Rolland. Neither was much known to fame, and when the St. Andrews pair were two up at the eighth hole they were thought to have done little more than should be expected of them. When they were one down at the end of the first round the St. Andrews folk began to wonder; and when they were finally beaten by a comfortable margin on the thirty-six hole match the critics began to think that these Elie men could play golf. They even began to distrust their own criticism, for the Elie men drove in a manner with which they were not at all familiar, for Mr. Edward Blackwell was still a schoolboy. The driving of Rolland is historical now, and Jack Simpson won the open championship following that St. Andrews match in the score of 160 for the two rounds at Prestwick. Rolland, if we mistake not, was second in that championship. So perhaps it is Elie, after all, rather than Carnoustie, that we must look on as poor Jack Simpson's golfing nursery. Belonging to a family famous in the annals of golf, he is the only one that has attained championship honours. It now behoves Archie to take up his brother's mantle, and again, as well he may, win a championship for the family.

1895

The address at which he and his brother setup a golf club making business was 128 Morningside Road in Edinburgh and whilst his brother Alexander spent some time at Mortonhall Golf Club as the professional there, which was just a mile or so away, in addition to using the Morningside Road premises Jack seemed to have continued the business.

When he died, he was stated as living at 128a Morningside Road and there is a possibility that there was, attached to the shop, living accommodation because his brother lived in Morningside Drive, 200 yards away. It is difficult to imagine why a former Open golf champion whose game, for whatever reason, seemed to deteriorate very quickly and who passed the Simpson mantle as it were to his bother Archie and his second eldest brother Robert (Bob) who was an eminent citizen of Carnoustie, died in relative obscurity. His brothers all otherwise made a great success of their golfing prowess.

On the other hand, had he survived beyond his 36 years he may have brooked greater success, but it seems unlikely. There may be another story here. Jack is shown in the most recent census before his death 1891 as living with his parents in Earlsferry, probably in Grangeview, although the census of that

time was based more upon reported living than actual physical inspection. We hazard a guess therefore that Jack was something of a loner. He never married and it is of some significance that when the Open championship the year after his success at Prestwick was at Hoylake indisposition prevented him from taking part. Thus by 1885 or so he was probably not in the best of health. His death from Typhoid (enteric fever) may have been part of an epidemic in Edinburgh about this time which was a waterborne infection caused apparently by insanitary conditions in dairies producing milk.

Researched and compiled by Graham Johnston