

George Forrester

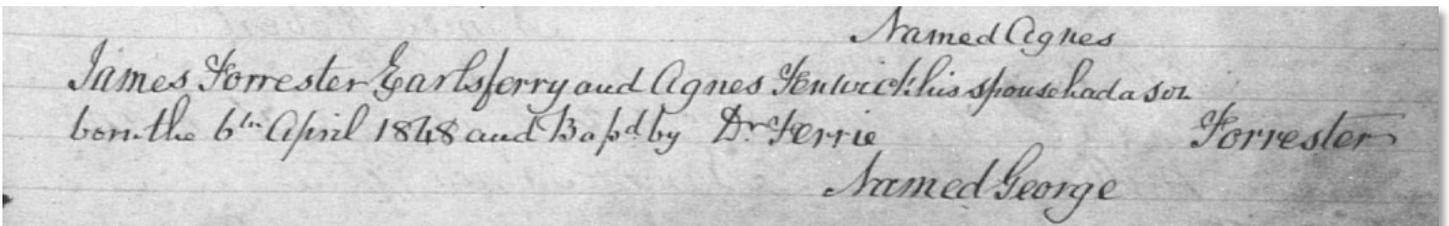


George Forrester 1848 -1930

Without a doubt George Forrester was one of the earliest and the most innovative and influential of the golf club manufacturers certainly in Fife and probably in the world. There were earlier and contemporary manufacturers, Morris and Forgan in St. Andrews and some in North Berwick and Musselburgh but Forrester was a clever and skilled businessman who not only had the technical expertise to produce golf clubs he also had an acute business knowledge which stood him in good stead.

However, unusually, he did not start out as a joiner or carpenter, as many of the others did, but he was initially apprenticed as a mason to David Given (whose son and nephew also excelled (q.v.) as golfers). At that time, late 19th Century, the mason's trade was prosperous with the building of many houses along the beach front of Elie and Earlsferry from stone sourced on the golf course or beach and financed by visitors from the cities via the railway network. To chart his progress, we need to go back in time.

He was born 6th April 1848



His father James and mother Agnes lived in Earlsferry in the Main Street. He is described as being a manufacturer's agent, but in a later census it is amplified by word 'linen'. We can assume therefore that he would be responsible for selling the various items of linen weaving undertaken by the residents of Earlsferry.

There were 12 'weavers' shops' in Earlsferry at this time where there were a number of looms and in addition people would have looms in their homes and as a cottage industry produce linen which was then sent 'over the hill' to Kirkcaldy where it was used in the floor manufacturing industry. In addition to this job, he is also described as a grocer and latterly an innkeeper and having a grocer's shop which presumably was manned by his wife.

In Earlsferry High Street at this time (1865) there were nine grocer's shops and the Forrester's shop appears to have been number 47 High Street. This would place it somewhere between the Town Hall (no 30) and Cadgers Wynd. Subsequent valuation rolls after James snr death (1876) shows his wife Agnes as proprietor of house and garden which was tenanted by Mrs. Methven a grocer. Methven's grocer shop was in Earlsferry High Street, and it looks very much as though this may have been the Forrester's grocer's shop. However, father Forrester and mother were reasonably prosperous. No doubt as a young man in Earlsferry he would be found mostly on the golfing tract/course where many of his contemporaries honed and perfected their golfing skills.

He was no mean golfer, again strengthened by his work as a mason. Apparently, he first began to make clubs for his own use entirely while still serving his apprenticeship. Shortly after finishing he went to the United States in pursuance of his trade as a mason/stonecutter where, we were advised by his family, he became involved in the rebuilding of Chicago after the fire of 1871 - the fire destroyed 17,500 buildings and 73 miles of street so there was a lot of rebuilding to be done and consequently work for masons. After the fire, laws were passed requiring new buildings be constructed with fireproof materials such as brick, stone, marble, and limestone. That is what we were advised by his great grandson who lives in Oxfordshire from family lore.

On looking at the records from USA, George was based in Baltimore, at least in the census of 1870 he is shown as living in Baltimore, with an occupation of Stone Cutter. Now it is possible that this census is wrong, and we have picked up the wrong Forrester, but his birth year coincides with the information on that census sheet. It may be that at that time he was in transit to Chicago. We think he travelled from Liverpool arriving in New York on 21st October 1869 and the census in which he is shown as being in Baltimore (coincidentally the ship on which he made the Atlantic crossing was called the City of Baltimore) was taken in the summer of 1870. Guesswork suggests that he did not move on to Chicago until later if at all.

We have so far not managed to find a reference to him in Chicago. However, he was back resident in Earlsferry in 1881 census along with his wife. He is designed there as a golf club maker so that suggests that between 1870 and 1881 he must have come back to Scotland set up business. There is evidence that he started in 1871 in the business of golf club making (see advertisement below). It is safe therefore, if that information is accurate, to assume that he spent very little time in USA and according to an article in "The Golfer" magazine he started his business as golf club maker in 1871. He was clearly no mean golfer and is noted as having won various golf competitions at Earlsferry in 1872. We think it safe to assume, therefore, that he did not spend much time in America not least of which because the great fire of Chicago was in October 1871.

The full report is thus:

FORRESTER, OF EARLSFERRY. (From "The Golfer" Portrait Gallery.) The name of this famous club-maker has extended far and wide—wherever, in short, sterling club and ball are held in due repute. Rather oddly, Mr. Forrester first began to make clubs for his own use entirely while still serving an apprenticeship as a mason to Mr. David Given of Elie some thirty years ago. His knowledge of the art has, in fact, been gained through pure experience and many an unsuccessful experiment. Then, in his ignorance of the proper material for his heads—a subject in which he is now an admittedly past master—he not unfrequently found them go in the first round. But he persevered, with the success to which we are all pleased to bear testimony.

On returning home, the old love of club-making once again seized him, when he began trade as a maker for the public in 1871. He at first found it up-hill work to push trade as the golfers of that day seemed to be of opinion that unless clubs were the handiwork of one or two makers of old standing, they would be worthless. Some indeed predicted that Mr. Forrester's first year in the trade would be his last—rather erroneously as we know. Even in the trade processes he was occasionally at fault. The mere matter of staining the heads was still a jealously guarded trade secret: and the same may be said of what else.

Not many years ago the golfing world was struck with indignant amazement at the thought of turning clubs with a lathe. But Mr. Forrester was alive to the value of this and among the first in the country to have one at work. Now-adays a club-maker can purchase any quantity of heads from various turners shaped to perfection. This being so, it would, in his opinion, be quite unnecessary for these

who have not already done so to go to the expense of purchasing a lathe, as heads already turned can be bought so very cheaply. Few, in fact, of our present makers get their wood turned; as they find a great saving in manual labour, and a perfectly shaped club is at the same time secured.

When the boom in golf began so suddenly it was difficult to secure efficient workmen; hence the use of machinery was almost compulsory. In Mr. Forrester's opinion, clubs made after a proper pattern and finished on the new principle—not known to many makers—are in every respect as good and well finished as the most expert workmen can turn out, and perhaps even more as the rapidity with which they are smoothed up gives them a far superior and ship-shape look. Beech is the most popular for heads, but Mr. Forrester's own favourite is lunderwood, which stands up admirably, even in wet weathers. It is a rare wood and cannot be sold in large quantities but stands in the front rank for durability. It is a little more expensive at first, but, as so often is the case, in the end cheaper. Other woods, of course, are used—even oak and cherry—but many require to be faced with leather. Lunderwood* requires nothing of that kind, as the spring is splendid, and drives as far as any beech head.*

Mr. Forrester knows persimmon wood very well. It is of a dark colour, but rather inclined to "fease" or break away in the face in wet weather. The clubmaking trade has, in Mr. Forrester's opinion, seen its best days. Prices have been cut down to the last degree; and most of the clubmakers of the present day are making up stock rapidly. But where and when all the clubs are to be disposed of is the next thing to be solved. As clubs are now being made everywhere the supply seemingly exceeds the demand.

For shafts Mr. Forrester's favourite wood is hickory but the prime stuff is difficult to procure. Plenty of a kind can no doubt, be cheap heads now put on the market are in the most cases made of stuff which makers of established repute would sooner put in the fire than send out. The golfers will soon find out for themselves and may have already done so. "Look," says Mr. Forrester, "through the list of our crack gentlemen golfers and see if a single one of them uses the Cheap Jack Clubs. No. Thousands of clubs which are really refused are turned for show not use. The material is bad and they are usually improperly set. It is absurd to say they are good enough for learners. No one could possibly learn with such faulty and rubbishy implements."

This seems pretty strong language but it is undoubtedly the general feeling of most makers of repute. Of Mr. Forrester's various patents it is impossible to speak in other terms than those of highest eulogy. His centre balance is most ingenious in theory and has stood the test of an immensity of play in all parts of the kingdom. His patent putter too is having an increasingly rapid sale. The principle is very ingenious on the ball being directly in the line of the shaft. It would be absurd to say that it is graceful as the old shape, but it is a highly finished, thoroughly workman like tool and has been found effective in practice. And the golfer who is not familiar with his balls must, it is feared have given up the game before the invention of guttie." [From East of Fife Record 1897.]

** "Lunderwood" does not seem to be a recognised wood but the fact that it is repeated in the text suggests that it is not a misprint. We wonder if it might be linden wood ?*

We think we can assume therefore that Forrester started business as a golf club maker in 1871 and we have evidence from other golfers that he shortly thereafter started to take on apprentices so we can assume that his business took off. Valuation roll searches suggest that he originally tenanted premises owned by James Waddell who was the town clerk of Earlsferry on Links Road, and it seems fairly safe to assume that he acquired the property because by 1886 he is shown as owning house and premises on Links Road and the golf club house (Georgeville—see later). We know that he had a smallish workshop behind what is now Georgeville and latterly it was called Cosy Cottage.

By this time not only was his business flourishing, so far as we can see he was also officially the green keeper of the Earlsferry Golf Course. In the mid 19th Century, there were two or three recognised golf clubs in Earlsferry; Earlsferry Abbey Golf Club, which seems to have started in 1832, and Earlsferry Golf Club, which became Earlsferry and Elie Golf Club. There was an earlier club in the late 1700s but other than an advertisement for its annual meeting we cannot trace it.

By 1875 the current Golf House Club and Thistle Golf Clubs were established and co-existed with the Earlsferry and Elie Golf Club (note the order). The Golf House Club had its own clubhouse, but the Thistle still used Georgeville. For whilst the current Melon Park (holes 1, 2, 3 and 18 on the current course) were acquired on lease by the Golf House Club, the main focus of golf at that time (1875–1912) was still the Earlsferry golf course and the clubhouse at Links Road. The clubhouse doubled as a workshop and showroom for Forrester's wares. The property itself was constructed in such a way that there was a small caretaker's flat for the steward of the club, which still exists.

George's business flourished, not least with the assistance of such luminaries as James Braid. Although Braid was a joiner to trade, he did not have much expertise in making golf clubs initially and it looks likely that he relied on George Forrester. Bernard Darwin, Braid's biographer, tells the tale of how Jamie Braid as he was known became the champion golfer. Braid was tall man for his era and one of his difficulties was finding a golf club which was long enough for him to be able swing naturally. He found himself often outdriven by his contemporaries. Apparently one day a similarly tall golfer, Mr. Berwick, visited Forrester's shop complaining that he could not seem to hit the ball well enough with his longer club. Forrester, ever ready for business, offered to buy the club from him for 6d. Very shortly thereafter Jamie visited George's shop and tried out the driver with remarkable results in that he then started outdriving even the most prestigious opponent. Forrester sold it to him for one shilling and sixpence.

During this time, he also acted as the green keeper for the golf course and although not officially recognized as such probably the first professional of Elie Golf House Club although James Sunter (q.v.) became the first officially recognized professional in 1921.

In the meantime, George had three children with his wife. James, who was born in 1879 and who later became a professional golfer (q.v.), a daughter Mary born 1881, and a daughter Agnes born 1882. Ronnie Sinclair of the Elie Golf House Club has done extensive research into Forrester golf club making and *inter alia* he notes:

"One of the oldest and most treasured items in the Elie Golf House Club collection is a Forrester play club circa 1875. His early patents include the smooth face cleek (registered design 153408) in 1890, the ball back cleek in 1892, and the first real socket head wood advertised as the "unbreakable drilled neck driver" in 1896 (registered design no. 269117). This development revolutionised golf club design at that time. Forrester had also constructed specialised labour-saving machines for making golf clubs and golf balls. He had created brass moulds that he used to make gutty (gutta percha) golf balls and invented and constructed a machine to wind rubber elastic ribbon into balls around which he moulded a cover. The other machines Forrester built had a significant impact on club making. Traditionally, golf club shafts had been attached to the wooden head by means of a long tapered and glued scarf joint. This long joint was then reinforced by wrapping it with pitched string. Forrester recognised that there was room to improve this method and he developed a way of attaching the shaft to the wooden head by means of a tapered hole in the head. He constructed machines similar to pencil sharpeners to form the taper on the end of shafts, as well as bespoke machines to taper-drill the heads."

By the time he died in 1930, Forrester was reckoned to have had more registered design applications than any other club maker. He actually misled the public slightly by claiming that they were patented.

Forrester was not just a club maker, as he served on Earlsferry town council and became Provost of the Burgh in 1899.

His business acumen extended to granting authority to others to stock his golf clubs and there are many advertisements recommending his clubs here are just a few:

N. MEECH.

When on ELIE LINKS look up
GEORGE FORRESTER,
 for Best Golf Clubs in Scotland.
 ESTABLISHED 40 YEARS.
 The Elie and Earlsferry Golf Course is un-
 surpassed. Its putting greens are the
 joy of every player.

JAMES FORRESTER,
GOLF PROFESSIONAL
 With 20 years experience,
 Can be engaged to teach dally
 at Elie and Earlsferry Links.

RACQUETS, 5s, 7s 6d, 10s 6d, 12s 6d, 15s, 18s 6d, and 21s.

GOLF.

SOLE AGENT FOR GEORGE FORRESTER & SON'S (ELIE CELEBRATED CLUBS. LANGO
 VARIETY OF BALLS (GUARANTEED WELL-SEASONED), INCLUDING COOROS, SILVERTOWN,
 EUREKA, &c. &c.

RUNNING OUTFITS AND SHOES.

VARIED SELECTION. AT ALL PRICES, IN KNICKERS AND SEDGMENTS. SHOES, SPECIALLY MADE
 MEASURE, 10s 6d PER PAIR. BEST CORDOVAN, STEEL SPIKES, 5s 6d and 7s 6d PER PAIR.

CYCLE COSTUMES AND SHOES.

RACING SUITS IN ANY COMBINATION. HAND KNITTED, &c.

SOLE AGENT FOR GEO. FOR-
 ROSTER of ELIE'S CELE-
 BRATED GOLF CLUBS. All the
 Latest Patents in Stock.

PRACTICE BALLS .. 2s 6d, 4s 6d doz.
 MATCH BALLS..... 8s ..
 SILVERTON BALLS..... 10s ..
 MILFORD BALLS..... 10s ..
 EUREKA..... 10s ..

And all Best Makes.

FOOTBALL,

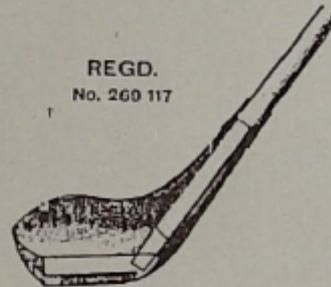
G. FORRESTER & SON

GOLF CLUB AND BALL MAKERS
EARLSFERRY, ELIE, FIFE

ESTABLISHED 1871

THE NEW PATENT FIBRE CLUB HEAD

This Club, which is the Patent of Messrs G. FORRESTER & SON, Elie, can be obtained in either Driver or Bulger Shapes. The Head is made of Fibre, the Shaft being inserted through to the Heel of the Club. From the durability of the material, and the method in which they are made, they will give satisfaction in any climate, and are guaranteed to stand for years in daily use. Another of G. F. & S's Patents is a Drilled Unbreakable Neck Club. The Shafts here are inserted as the Fibre Clubs. The Necks, being Thoroughly Drilled, are guaranteed to be Unbreakable. These can be had made in Beech, Lunderwood, or Persimmon.



REGD.
 No. 260 117

FORRESTER'S PATENTS

THE NEW FIBRE CLUB HEAD

Bulgers and Drivers, - - - - - 7/6
 Brassies, - - - - - 8/6

Wood Faced, 6d extra

DRILLED UNBREAKABLE NECK CLUBS

Bulgers and Drivers (Beech Heads), - - - 5/6
 Brassy Clubs Do., - - - 6/-

Specials in Lunderwood and Persimmon,
 6d extra.

IMPORTANT TO GOLFERS.

A. WEIR begs to intimate to Golfers that he has been appointed Sole Agent in Selkirk for FORRESTER'S CELEBRATED CLUBS, which he can supply on the best terms. For Finish, Strength, and Quality, these Clubs are unexcelled.

Heads and Handles kept in Stock for Repairing purposes. New Driver Heads put on for 2s 4d; Brassy Heads for 3s 3d. New Handles for Drivers 2s; for Cleeks, Irons, and Niblicks, 1s 9d.

Second-hand Clubs bought and exchanged.

Golf BALLS, Six for 4s, or 9d each, and upwards.

His enterprise was not restricted to golf clubs. In these days golf balls were also manufactured by the golf professionals - from the feathery through the gutty and eventually to the rubber wound ball which survives today. Forrester invented a machine for a rubber wound golf ball to compete with the Haskell the first such golf ball. Here is a report from the newspaper in 1907:

THE EARLSFERRY AND ELIE RUBBER CORE GOLF BALLS. In the days of the gutta golf ball, Messrs George Forrester & Son, the well-known clubmakers, of Earlsferry, manufactured balls which had many patrons among votaries of the game. With the advent of the rubber core ball the trade in the Earlsferry gutta, like other guttas, practically collapsed. The rubber core ball, with its hundreds of yards of tape rubber, is a much more difficult ball make than the gutta, or even the old feather-stuffed ball, and special machinery is required. As golfer after golfer stalked into Messrs Forrester's shop, and tabled a florin for a rubber quick flier, Messrs Forrester & Son came to the conclusion that they could not allow their ball trade to fall into the hands of outside makers, and they forthwith commenced to make experiments. Their first task was to construct a machine for winding the tape rubber. The difficulty was got over by the invention of an ingenious machine, which is driven by a gas engine, and this problem solved, Messrs Forrester applied their minds to the work of getting the gutta cover to consolidate properly with the rubber. This difficulty has been mastered, and the firm now claim that their rubber core "Traveller" and "Dreadnought" balls will retain their shape and merits of flight although they may be very much cut with the irons. The writer of this notice has tried both under most adverse weather circumstances—the recent frosts—and the gutta covering is so admirably consolidate with the rubber core that the balls retained their shape after several rounds. Messrs Forrester's cheaper balls are the "Pioneer" and the "Star of Burns." The senior partner of the Forrester firm an enthusiastic golfer and is one of our oldest club and ball makers. Among those who were trained at his bench may be mentioned:— Robert Simpson Carnoustie; Charles Ralph Smith, West Middlesex Golf Club, Southall; A. H. Scott, Earlsferry; William Mackie, David Given, Bogside, Glasgow; William Sime and Isaac Mackie, who are now in America. Mr Forrester likes to hear of the success of his old apprentices, and when they come from distant places to spend a holiday at Earlsferry, they always make it a point to while away an occasional hour with their old master. Messrs Forrester's "centre-balance" club is as well-known as their "Kasi" putter. The senior partner is as proud of his machine for the manufacture of rubber core balls as he is of the "Traveller" and the "Dreadnought" and does not hesitate to tell his patrons that his consolidating system of covering the rubber with gutta produces a ball which will fly for 25 rounds with a golfer.

He also featured in a criminal case in Cupar Sheriff Court where a number of Earlsferry youths 1909.....

James Fair, John Mather, Wm. Mather, and Thomas Small admitted having stolen five dozen golf balls from the shop of George Forrester, Earlsferry. The Sheriff remarked that they seemed pretty bad boys. The Fiscal said it seemed there had been clique boys at Elie, who had been carrying on for some time a system stealing from Mr Forrester's shop golf balls and selling them as found balls. The Sheriff—How do they get, the balls from the shop. The Fiscal —They are golf caddies, and they were recognised as privileged boys by Forrester. He had no suspicion that these boys were stealing his property. GOLFERS, BEWARE. Proceeding, the Fiscal said he blamed the golfers who bought the balls from the boys at 4d, 6d, and 9d. They must have known they were encouraging the boys to steal. He had said over and over again that if he gets a clear case of a person buying these balls, he

would bring a charge reset against him. The Sheriff—The boys cannot give you the names the persons to whom they sold balls? The Fiscal—No. They do know, they conveniently forget. As showing the extent to which that matter had gone, might mention that Mr Forrester during the season had had removed from his premises golf balls of the value of £36. It had been gigantic affair. The Sheriff—Mr Forrester, must have been very lax in looking after his golf balls. The Fiscal said one box was carried a time, and the balls divided amongst the boys in the clique. The parents of boys said they had punished them. The Sheriff remarked that they needed a good deal more looking after and he put the boys on probation for six months. He took that opportunity of saying that he quite agreed with everything the Procurator-Fiscal had said in regard to the persons who purchased these balls. His Lordship also made reference the apparent lax management of Mr Forrester's shop. 1907. [East of Fife Record.]

His inventions and sophistication continued these two articles in 1896

AN IMPROVED Putter—THE AMBIDEXTER CLEEK. —The busy and ingenious clubmaker at Elie, Mr George Forrester, patentee of many useful clubs already in the hands of golfers, has just brought out an improved putter. In appearance it is very much like that which Taylor uses, only the blade is deeper, and its bend in the neck is slightly different. The twist at the hose of the club is made in such a way as to throw it well forward, leaving the entire surface of the blade clear to view. We have given the putter a trial and can state from experience of it that admirable control in pace and direction of the ball is obtained, that it is beautifully balanced, and generally an excellent piece of workmanship—Mr Forrester has also brought out a new double-faced cleek to suit either a left-handed or a right-handed player. The sole is broad, and the space between the two blades is hollow. The balance of the club is in no way destroyed. We have often recommended the carrying by right-hand players of a left hand in important matches, in case of a difficult shot close against a paling or a wall; but in this powerful driving cleek of Mr Forrester in the bag, the carrying of an extra club is thereby obviated.[Golf 1896]

NEW Putter—The ingenuity of Mr George Forrester has evolved a new idea in the formation of an iron for putting. It is so constructed that unless with a sketch before you it is difficult to explain. However, it has a neck bent or crooked backwards, and a flange on the upper edge which, projecting over the line of the bottom edge by about three-eighths of an inch, makes it, when in the hands of a player, present apparently a solid front to the ball. Missers of short putts who have often good reason to suspect that the angles of their old favourite have played them false will find this a trusty weapon ; the ball gets a straight blow and is thus more under the mastery of the player. The putters are only newly out, and as yet have not had a severe test on the green, but several gentlemen have had a trial of it and found it very satisfactory. Samples, either with a straight or bent neck, can be obtained. They are made at Anderson's cleek factory, Anstruther, a guarantee of their finish and quality. The previous patents brought out by Mr Forrester have been welcomed on every green, and there are few golfers who do not carry some examples of his ingenuity in their kit—the Concentrated, Counterbalanced, Bulger, and Bulldog; and now that the Acme has been added to the list, many will be anxious to add it, to make the outfit complete. [1896]

Further evidence suggests Forrester's inventiveness created a controversy, in 1927, about the original of the mashie golf club. Forrester claimed in a letter to Golf Illustrated that he invented the "mashie" in 1884.

In a letter to the *Westminster Gazette* in February 1911, the author—who had visited Elie some 12 years previous—reported:

ORIGIN OF THE "MASHIE."

To the EDITOR of THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE.
SIR,—In your interesting article last night on the "Niblick," you ask the origin of the mashie. When I was in Elie twelve years ago I was told by one of the club-makers there that one wet season, when the grass was very long, they brought out a new club to "mash" the long grass, and called it by its well-known name.—Yours, &c.,
February 25. D. M.

The dispute or mystery seems to have been started in 1911 with an article in *Westminster Gazette* of February 1911 by Horace Hutchison about the "niblick" in the course of which he posed a question as to the origins of the "mashie". The following week a letter was published in these terms:

The next evidence of this question appears later in 1927 with a series of articles in "The Scotsman" newspaper. This seems to have been provoked by a letter in *Golf Magazine* from Forrester in which he claimed that it was his invention.

Who invented the Mashie - Considerable interest attaches to the claim definitely put forward by Mr George Forrester, Elie, now retired from business, but for many years one of the best-known clubmakers in the country, that he is the inventor of the mashie, because the origin of this club has always been a matter of doubt and discussion. Did Jack Morris, the famous Hoylake professional, not in the early 'eighties so amend an iron as to produce a club which has been regarded in some quarters as the authentic progenitor of the whole race of mashies and mashie-niblicks of to-day?

*Associated with Morris in the matter if one is not mistaken, was Mr A. F. Macfie, who after an interval of many years had his name added a few seasons ago to our roll of Amateur Champions as the first of them all, in virtue of his having won the pioneer tournament that gave the great event its birth. That was when the mashie was new. As one remembers the mashie story; a consignment of iron heads from Scotland had just been delivered at the professional's shop at Hoylake, and Jack Morris and Mr Macfie exchanged ideas as to altering them from the curved face of the period to a flat face with more loft. Each of them acting independently had the thing done according to his fancy, and each of them produced a club similar in purpose and in finish, and that was thought to be how the first mashie come about. A question of dates may arise here. That Hoylake invention, one thinks, belongs to about 1882, certainly early in that decade, and if the year mentioned is correct, it is a little in advance of the claim of Mr Forrester, who states in a letter to *Golf Illustrated*, "The mashie was invented by me in 1884. The reason I thought of such a style or iron was owing to the long grass which was not allowed to be cut*; therefore, we required an iron with more loft and shorter blade than was available at that time so as to mash it out.*

It is probably in fact about that period the same idea may have occurred to different minds in different places . Possibly there are other claimants. Mr Forrester's use of the verb "to mash" may leave less dubiety about the origin of the club's name. There is something onomatopoeic in it just as there is in cleek and baffy.

** There was at that time an ongoing dispute the background being as follows. The proprietor of Grange Estate part of which bordered the Earlsferry golfing tract, Sir Robert Malcolm, in the 1810s took exception to the playing of golf on what he considered was part of his estate farm and in order to prevent the good citizens of Earlsferry from playing golf, he instructed more land to be ploughed up than before. Eventually in 1815, Malcolm raised an action in the local sheriff court seeking an interdict to prevent the playing of golf on his land. The Magistrates of Earlsferry as representing the citizens of Earlsferry raised a counter action claiming a right of servitude to play golf over this tract and this action rumbled on for the next 50 years or so until it was eventually resolved in the 1890s at great personal expense and angst to the people of Earlsferry, and at considerable financial benefit to the lawyers. What however is most notable was that in 1878, another action was raised against the management of the golf club and George Forrester, club maker and green keeper to the club declaring that golfers had no right to cut or carry away grass from any part of the golfing course of Earlsferry."*

The Bygone Weapons - It is possibly one of the last-named clubs to which an Edinburgh club member specially refers in a communication on the mashie question which we have received. "It may interest you to know," he writes, "that I have in my possession a rough hand-forged iron club of that nature of a very much earlier date. It may be an early form of niblick. It belonged to my father, who, so far as I know, did not play golf after the early 'sixties. I do not know by whom the club was made, but as such clubs were in use many years before the 'eighties, it seems to me that the only claim that can be made by or on behalf of Mr Forrester, Mr Macfie, or Jack Morris is that one or other of them produced a club more nearly like the mashie or niblick of to-day.

The iron club was, of course, by no means new at the beginning of the 'eighties. It was no doubt upon the niblicks of the day that [two gentlemen] made their experiments, but even in the later years of that decade one does not find in writings where they might be expected any references to the mashie. The Chambers instance has been referred to. Mr Horace Hutchinson, writing of the 'seventies, has definitely said that there was no such club as a mashie. It looks, therefore, as if the period which evolved the club was the early days of the 'eighties, and that the products of Mr Macfie and Jack Morris were certainly among the pioneers, and, so far as one can discover data on the point, they appear to have been the first of the kind to which the word mashie was applied.

We have been told, however, that at St Andrews in the later 'eighties men had grown so fond of cleeks and irons in all shapes and sizes that the baffy had become despised. The play-club and the different spoons of which the baffy was the one used a short distance from the hole, when it was necessary to get the ball quickly in the air to carry a hazard, were indispensables in their day, and it is recorded of Sir Robert Hay, who was a baffy specialist, that he continued to use that club after it had been superseded in common use by approaching with irons. [1927]

FIRST MASHIE EVER MADE. From North Berwick we have received an interesting claim in connection with the discussion of the origin of the mashie which has been proceeding in this column in the past two weeks. We have a letter from a golfer who says that he owns the original mashie. "It is a clumsy, heavy, lofted mashie" he writes "face not concave. It was given to me by my old friend the late Mr J. R. Gairdner, the well-known golfer of North Berwick. I have a collection of old golf clubs, and Gairdner gave me this mashie (which I have now), saying, 'That is the first mashie ever made.' It was made, he said, under the directions of Mr Chambers, of North Berwick. The club head has Gray on the back, and the shaft has R. C. stamped on it, "It would throw some valuable light on the mashie question,

which has evidently created widespread attention, if the time at which the late Mr Gairdner's club was made could be even approximately ascertained.

The name on the hack of the clubhead suggests John Gray (though the initial does not seem to be decipherable), a Scottish clubmaker who was well known half a century ago, and whose products are rarities that are hard to secure in these days. As for the initials on the shaft, do they represent Robert Chambers? It looks as if they did from the association of "Mr Chambers of North Berwick" in which case the absence of any mention of the mashie in his article on the game, which was revised and republished in 1887, and which was alluded to here last week, is the more puzzling. This latest letter suggests a possible rival for precedence to the mashies produced by Sir Mackie and Jack Morris, the Hoylake professional, about the beginning of the 'eighties.

By then Forrester had retired and his business and machinery sold. You might wonder why his son James Forrester, himself an excellent professional player, did not succeed to his father's business. There is from the family a rumour that father and son did not get on together, but none has been able to pinpoint the area of controversy.

IMPORTANT SALE of GOLF CLUB MAKER'S PLANT belonging to Mr GEORGE FORRESTER, Earlsferry, Elie, who has retired from Business, comprising Crossley Gas Engine (3 H.P.). Buffeting Emery Sandpapering Cutting lor Lead and Horns, and Polishing Machines Turning Lathe for reducing Club Shafts Double-Acting Copying Lathe complete: Iron Spiral Stair. Band Saw, Water Engine (Double Cylinder), Shafting. Vices Anvil, a Large Quantity Golf Clubs. Shafts, and Club Heads. Irons. Brass Plates, etc, etc. Roup Commence 11 a.m. CLARK & DUNCAN, Auctioneers. Elie. 22nd February 1926.

His wife predeceased him and he himself died in 1930.

DEATH EARLS FERRY EX-PROVOST MR GEORGE FORRESTER'S INTEREST IN GOLF. At the age of 85, Mr George Forrester died yesterday morning his residence, Georgeville, Earlsferry. He was a former Provost of the burgh and a well-known clubmaker. A native of Earlsferry, was apprentice mason there, and as a young man went to America, returning later. He began business as a clubmaker, and in these days it was clubmaking by hand. His business became large and flourishing, and many of the younger generation of clubmakers were apprentices at his bench. Mr Forrester was one of the few surviving members of the old Elie and Earlsferry Golf Club, which was formed in 1858, and became defunct a number of years ago, and was the first greenkeeper to Elie Golf House Club. For three years was Provost and during his term of office many improvements were carried out in the royal and ancient, burgh. Mrs Forrester and he celebrated their golden wedding seven years ago. Not long afterwards Mrs Forrester died, and Mr Forrester retired from business. His last illness was brief, hardly lasting two weeks. Death was due to heart failure. is survived a son and two daughters. 1930

His estate was reported to be £4844 which is equivalent to £347,000 today so, relatively speaking, he was very successful. At his death he had a number of properties.

Georgeville which was his main residence, **Ravenscraig** next door to the Golf Tavern, **Cosy Cottage** which was originally his workshop, **Ogilvie Villa** and **Ogilvie Cottage** on the Earlsferry sea front, **Glenyra** which is on the same plot of land as Georgeville but at the south side being the northside of Earlsferry High Street. His youngest daughter Agnes seems to have taken over ownership of most of these properties on her father's death.

A famous picture of golfers in front of George Forrester's showroom and workshop, which also served as the clubhouse for the Earlsferry and Elie Golf Club until the demise of that club round about 1912. The photograph is dated 1905.



Researched and compiled by Graham Johnston
