



James Nelson

1871 - 1951

James Nelson was born on 29th July 1871 to Thomas Nelson, a Surfaceman, and Helen McGregor or Nelson, who had been married in January 1860. It is significant that he was born a little later than Jamie Braid (1870), but they were obviously contemporaries in Earlsferry.

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|-----------------|---|---|------------------------------------|
| James Nelson | 1871 July Twenty ninth U.B. O.M. | M. Thomas Nelson Surfaceman Robert Nelson M.S. W. Gregor | Thomas Nelson Father Present |
| 86 | Earlsferry Kilcomprehare | 1860 January Elie | |

The family lived in Links House in Links Road which is substantially different now but significantly it is fronted by Cleek Cottage which was A.H. Scott's workshop at one time. However, it should be noted that there are now two Links House in Links road - this one is the one nearer the Golf Tavern. This property seemed to have belonged to A.H. Scott (q.v.) at one time. Scott also had an iron shed two doors along which contained most of his manufacturing equipment. His father died in 1920.

Confirmation granted at Glasgow, 8 January, to Agnes Mitchell or Jordan, 2 Green Street aforesaid, and Daniel Mitchell, 50 Sandgate Ayr, Executors dative *qua* next of kin. Value of Estate, £703. 11s. 10d.

NELSON, Thomas, late of High Street, Earlsferry, died 17 August 1920, at Earlsferry, testate. Confirmation granted at Cupar, 30 December, to Agnes Blake Nelson or Smith, wife of Thomas Smith, Joiner, Earlsferry, Isabella Nelson or Greig, wife of David Barclay Greig, residing in Elie, Nellie Nelson or Peat, Edenwood, Cupar, and James Nelson, residing in Peebles, his children, Executors nominated in Will or Deed, dated 5 January 1899, and recorded in Court Books of Commissariat of Fife, 22 December 1920. Value of Estate, £244. 13s.

James seems likely to have been apprentice to George Forrester since we have a note of him as a golf club maker although along with many others in his profession seem to have started as a mason. Again, we surmise that he played a lot of golf in Earlsferry and was indeed almost an exact contemporary of Jamie Braid which may be significance later.

In 1891 he was living in Edinburgh again as mason but by 1901 he was back with his parents in Earlsferry at Links House. For some reason he must have given up mason's work and we suspect he did a training of sorts either with Forrester or even Scott – his parents lived behind Scott's workshop so it was perhaps the latter albeit that forester's workshop was two doors further east. In any event, in 1903 he was appointed to Peebles Golf Club as professional/greenkeeper so we must assume that part of his training would have been in

keeping the course in good condition. He would certainly have obtained that training whilst working for Forrester because Forrester at that time was also the green keeper for the Earlsferry golf course.

We are most grateful to Peebles Golf club who have given us details from their Centenary Book of his exploits:

In November 1903 J. Nelson was engaged as professional and greenkeeper in place of R. Brewster who had left the club in October 1902. Allan Smith had again looked after the course during the playing season of 1903. James Nelson was to figure prominently in the affairs of the club for some years to come and he must have been a competent golfer. There seems to be no doubt that he was a popular figure and a great attribute to the club. We should probably regard him as the Peebles club's first true professional rather than greenkeeper cum professional. Nevertheless, he was responsible for maintaining and improving the course under the direction of the club committee.

By that time, he had married Janet Graham in Grangemouth in 1901 and they lived together in Peebles. Initially it seems in the golf clubhouse, which tended to be the norm at the time, the job often coming with accommodation. But later they lived at Bridgehouse Terrace in Peebles.



Where he and Janet had a daughter in 1912 - Helen McGregor Nelson.

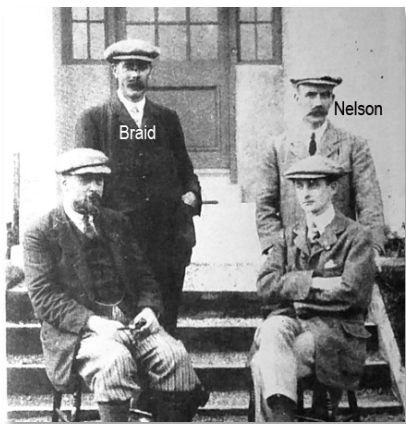
His career as greenkeeper professional at Peebles seems to have been a success judging from the extracts from Peebles Centenary book:



The highlight, as it were, of his time at Peebles was a match arranged in August 1910. Jamie Braid had recently won the Open Championship at St Andrews and was obviously a prime catch for Peebles, but it may have been his friendship of long standing with Nelson and his expertise that was being employed in doing some remodeling of the course. The occasion merited much publicity in the newspapers of the time. The Scotsman reported:

GOLF THE OPEN CHAMPION AT PEEBLES. • THREE ROUNDS AT KIRKLAND. Thanks to the enterprise of the Executive of the Peebles Golf Club, golfers in the Borders and the many visitors who at the present time are seeking that pleasure for which Peebles has long been famous, were afforded an opportunity yesterday of seeing James Braid, the open golf champion, play three rounds of the new course at Kirkland. About two years have elapsed since this course was laid out in a delightful situation over-looking the town and the wooded

hills and dales beyond]. In the interval the course has come on splendidly, A firm body of turf gives an excellent fairway from the first tee right round to the last hole, and so carefully has Nelson nursed the greens that to-day it might be said their quality is unsurpassed by that of any in the Borders of Scotland. Braid..... in his first round with Nelson in the forenoon of yesterday, his approximate score was 70, and in the evening in the four-ball foursome, he again had a total of 70. Braid played in the forenoon a match with James Nelson, the local professional, whom he defeated by five up and three to play; in the afternoon, with Sir Henry Ballantyne as his partner, the champion had a halved match with Mr Lyon, the secretary, and Nelson; and in a four-ball foursome, played in the evening. Braid and Mr Ruckbie were defeated by Mr T. Ballantvne and Nelson by two holes. The pleasure of the forenoon game was somewhat marred by heavy showers or rain but otherwise the conditions for good golf were by no means unfavourable. Each game was witnessed by a large and interested gathering, especially the one played in tha evening after work at the mills had ceased for the day.. BRAID v. NELSON. Braid started on his three matches by playing a single with James

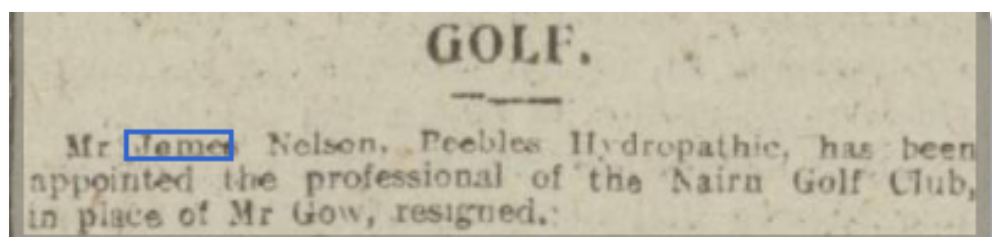


Nelson, the local professional, who, like Braid, is an old Elie and Earlsferry-player.he had a total of 70 against 76 recorded by Nelson. At the conclusion of play [in the evening] Sir Henry Ballantyne called for three cheers for Braid for the magnificent exhibition of golf which had had given. The champion responded by assuring the club that it had given him great pleasure to play over that course, which, he said, must be a great asset to the town of Peebles. The course was a splendid one, and when a few bunkers were added, it would be difficult to beat by any other course in the Borders.

Nelson reduced the professional record to 66 in June 1911 and by 1912 had further reduced the record to 65.

He played in the Scottish Professional championship at Cruden Bay in 1913, where he finished 11th and was rewarded with the prize of £1. Peebles Golf Club, under the patronage of Sir Henry Ballantyne of the tweed and knitwear fame offered, a prize of £2 for the best round in a match between Edward Ray, Open champion, and George Duncan (later an Open champion) to play an exhibition match at Peebles. It was quite an event, and both went round in 65 so each received £2 but James Nelson seems to have been a bit "pit oot" so he then went out and broke the course record in August of that year lowering it to 62. He must have been well ensconced at Peebles because he had the effrontery to seek an increase in his salary in 1915 to 30 shillings per week. His request was granted. But he must have been tempted away the following year. [1916]

However not long after that in 1917 he left and he shows up again living in Nairn, designed as a golf professional and living at 15 Albert Street in 1917. He had been appointed professional at Nairn.





15 Albert Street, Nairn (rented).

His daughter died tragically in January 1922.

NELSON.—Suddenly, at Dunbar Villa, Albert Street, Nairn, on the 26th inst., Helen McGregor Nelson, beloved daughter of Mr and Mrs James Nelson, Nairn, aged 9 years. Sadly missed.

James continued in his position as professional/greenkeeper and was responsible for extending and remodeling the course in 1924:

NAIRN GOLF CLUB.
OPENING OF NEWTON LINKS.

The nine-hole course constructed on what was known as "the Loop," was opened for play on Saturday last.

Mr Robert Park, the Captain of the Nairn Golf Club, in declaring the course open for play, stated how deeply the club and community were indebted to Viscount Finlay for the generous terms on which his lordship had granted the use of "the Loop" for the new course, and for his continued interest in and warm support of the club.

On the motion of the captain, a very hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Lord Finlay.

The wonderful forward state of the putting greens was the subject of favourable comment, and reflected the highest praise on the greenukeeper and his staff. The course was planned and laid out by Mr James Nelson, the club professional, acting in conjunction with Viscount Finlay. The first teeing ground is in close proximity to the Club House, and the general line of play is southwards along the gardens on the west side of Seabank Road, then along the service road leading to Altonburn. The fourth and fifth holes are played in an easterly and southern direction, the sixth and seventh towards the Sutors of Cromarty, the eighth is the old "Well" hole, and the ninth a short hole, returning to the Club House. The links are completely sheltered by the Acharaidh and Newton woods, and for beauty and variety of scenery will be hard to match.

He left Nairn in April 1927.

Peter McEwan of Barassie was appointed professional in succession to James Nelson. The committee urge upon members the duty of supporting and encouraging the Club Professional.

He was back living in Earlsferry after leaving Nairn in 1930 in Links House where there was also a workshop. His wife died in 1947 and her death certificate shows that she died in Salisbury Cottage in Elie. We originally thought that James Nelson may have owned Salisbury Cottage as well but the valuation roll for 1940 shows the proprietor as James **B** Nelson. However, if you consult the Voters' Roll you find that James Nelson (our one) was registered as voting from Elie but giving an address in Nairn, which was his known abode.

Pure speculation but we wonder whether after the tragic death of their daughter, Janet, they came back to live in Elie at Salisbury Cottage and that both she and James (our one) lived there and on her death in 1947 he sold Salisbury Cottage and moved to Links House where he was found dead in his house in March 1951 aged 79. That would certainly account for two James Nelsons but not the B.



Researched and compiled by Graham Johnston
