

Edinburgh surgery and the history of golf

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ABSTRACT Individuals associated with Edinburgh surgery have been involved with the history and development of the game of golf since the fifteenth century. King James IV of Scotland (1473–1513), who ratified the surgeons' Seal of Cause in 1506, played the game, ensuring its first Royal patronage, and he also became the first named golfer to play at a named location. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Kincaid the Younger (1661–1726) gave the first detailed description of what he regarded as the ideal stance, address and swing. John Rattray (1707–1771) signed the first rules of golf in 1744 and became almost certainly the first person whose life was saved by his golfing connections. In the nineteenth century, Laidlaw Purves (1842–1917) helped establish the Ladies' Golfing Union and devised the modern rules of handicapping.

KEYWORDS Edinburgh, history of golf, John Rattray, King James IV, Laidlaw Purvis, surgeons, Thomas Kincaid

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (LRCPE), Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (LRCSEd), Writer to the Signet (WS), Ladies' Golfing Union (LGU)

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INTRODUCTION

Games played with a stick and a ball were a common part of mediaeval life throughout Europe, but many authorities now accept that the modern game of golf began in the east of Scotland.^{1–4} References to the game of golf are made in the acts of the Scottish Parliament from as early as 1457. Over the past 500 years, golfers associated with Edinburgh surgery have played a remarkable and important role in the development of the game.

JAMES IV OF SCOTLAND

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two variants of the game of golf appear to have developed in parallel. A short game was played in churchyards by ordinary people, and a longer game played at seaside links by the nobility and the monarchy. King James IV of Scotland was the first monarch recorded as having played the game.^{1, 5} King James was a polymath, Scotland's Renaissance king, whose many interests included medicine, surgery and science.^{6, 7} He had strong associations with the Edinburgh surgeons and indeed practiced the surgical art himself. In 1506, he gave Royal ratification to the Seal of Cause, a charter which had been presented to the Incorporation of Surgeons and Barbers of Edinburgh by the Town Council of Edinburgh the previous year.⁸

FEBRUAR.

Item, the first day of Februar, to Alexander Wardlaw, be the Kingis command, . . . xvij s.
Item, the secound day of Februar, to Gareoch pursewant to pas in England with the Kingis writing, xxxvj s.
Item, [the thrid day of Februar], to the gysaris of Edinburgh that daunsit in the Abbay, v Franch crounis; summa . . . iij li. x s.
Item, to the King to play at the golf with the Erle of Bothuile, iij Franch crounis; summa . . . xlij s.
Item, be the Kingis command, to Johne Barbour with the Beschop of Sanctandrois, x Franch crounis; summa . . . vij li.
Item, to the priestis of Dunblane that singis for Margret Drummond, thair quartar fee of Candilmes, v li.

FIGURE 1 Extract from James IV's accounts for February 1503.

Yet he was more than a Royal patron of surgery as there are references in the royal accounts to payments made for dressings for a leg, which the king's treatment had apparently healed, and to dental extractions.^{9, 10} He also appears to have had time to devote to the game of golf. The accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland show that on 21 September 1502, the King paid fourteen shillings 'for clubs from the bower at Saint Johnston' (Perth). On 3 February 1503, there is an entry, shown in figure 1, 'to the King to play at the golf with the Erle of Bothuile' [Bothwell], which has been interpreted as a

wager being placed on the game.⁵ From other papers it is known that he spent that day at Perth. In 1506, there are entries showing payment made on the king's behalf for 'golf ballis' and 'golf clubbes'. The 1503 entry makes James IV, then 30 years old, the first recorded named player (with the Earl of Bothwell) of the game of golf in a form recognisable as the precursor of the modern game.

THOMAS KINCAID THE YOUNGER (1661–1726)

The first written description for the preferred stance, address and swing to be adopted in the game of golf is accredited to an Edinburgh surgeon's son, Thomas Kincaid the Younger. His father, also Thomas Kincaid (1619–1691), was a freeman of the Incorporation of Surgeons of Edinburgh and became its deacon, or president, in 1652. In his 45 years as a surgeon-apothecary in Edinburgh he had amassed a large library, the contents of which offer an insight into the reading material of Edinburgh surgeons in the late seventeenth century.¹² His son seemed destined to follow in his father's surgical footsteps, studying medical textbooks and learning Dutch, almost certainly with a view to taking a medical degree in Leiden. Kincaid the Younger offers us a fascinating insight into his life as he kept a detailed diary for the period January 1687 to December 1688. The original diary is now held in the National Library of Scotland (adv.MS.32.7.7), and an edited version was published in 1954.¹³

The diary records the surgical and medical textbooks Kincaid read, including works by Thomas Willis, Thomas Sydenham and Nicholas Culpeper. He had an active and inquiring mind. There is a diary entry almost every day which begins 'today I thought upon', followed by his thoughts on a remarkable variety of subjects, some wholly practical, such as the best way to make a blacksmith's vice, the best way to build a meeting house or the best posture for throwing a stone. Other topics on which he pondered were more academic, and these included theology, philosophy, principles of chemistry, the breeding of horses for speed and different ways in which parliamentary votes might be cast so as to influence the outcome. He gives descriptions of techniques for playing billiards and for shooting arrows, but one favourite theme to which he repeatedly returns in the diary entries for January and February of 1687 is golf. On 20 January 1687, after reading *Chirurgia* until lunchtime, he described the stance, the address and swing which he reckoned would produce the best result, writing:

'stand as you do at fencing with the small sword, bending your legs a little and holding the muscles of your legs and back and arms exceedingly bent or fixed or stiff... the ball must be straight before your breast a little towards the left foot. Your left foot must stand but a little before the right or rather it must be even with it and at a convenient distance from it... ye must lean most to the right foot but all

the turning about of your body must be only upon your legs holding them as stiff as you can.'

He goes on to consider important elements of the swing: 'You must neither raise your body straighter in bringing back the club, nor incline it further in bringing down the club.' In 13 such paragraphs, he goes on to give a series of similar detailed analyses. Golf was much in his thoughts as the following day he wrote of the importance of 'hitting the ball exactly' and not attempting to hit it too hard because, he goes on:

'the only reason why men readily miss the ball when they strick [*sic*] with more strength than ordinaire is because increasing their strenth [*sic*] in the stroke makes them alter the ordinaire position of their body and ordinaire way of bringing about the club.'

On 24 January, he rose at four in the morning to write about some detailed modifications, including:

'the ball must lie upon a line that is perpendicular to that line that passeth between the one foot and the other.'

In addition to his descriptions of the technique, Kincaid described what he regarded as the ideal golf ball ('it must be of thick and hard leather not with pores or grains or that will let a pin usually pass through it the specially at the soft end'). Activities he described include golf on Leith Links, archery, visiting the physic garden, visiting Holyrood Abbey to see 'the pictures' (portraits of the Scottish Kings) or the Surgeons Yard. At home he would discuss medicine with his father, write to his brother James in Holland or visit his married sisters. On 6 November 1688, he made the simply entry 'the Prince of Orange landed this day'.

Thomas Kincaid does not seem to have qualified as a surgeon and there is no record in the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh of his having passed the entry examination. In 1709 he donated his late father's very large library to the Incorporation and the next year he was admitted to the Incorporation. The admission note in the College's Fellows list states that he was admitted 'In regard of good deeds done by him ... without payment of any upsett (entrance) money.' He may well have been the first to be admitted in this way.

His other main sporting activity was archery and in 1711, as a member of the Edinburgh (later the Royal) Company of Archers, he won the City of Edinburgh silver arrow, which had been presented to the Company two years earlier.

While aspects of Kincaid's recommended technique would not find favour with modern students of the game, some of his advice, remarkably, remains pertinent over three centuries later.

JOHN RATTRAY (1707–1771)

John Rattray, the younger son of Thomas Rattray of that Ilk and Craighall-Rattray (1684–1743), the Episcopal Bishop of Brechin and Dunkeld, began his surgical training with an apprenticeship to John Semple, an Edinburgh surgeon. As it was a common practice at that time, he applied to sit the entrance examination to become a freeman of the Incorporation of Surgeons. Four examiners (*sic*) were duly appointed, and he sat four lessons or examinations in 1740. The minutes of the Incorporation of Surgeons dated 15 August 1740, shown in figure 2, states 'this being John Rattray's third Lesson After Examination the Corporation appointed him for his last Lesson, the operation of Brochotomia, The composition of linamentum arcai, and unguentum Basilicon.'¹⁴ Brochotomia is likely to have been the operation of laryngotomy, while the composition of the *unguentum Basilicon* (Royal Ointment) and *linamentum arcai* are to be found, conveniently both on page 134, in the 1735 edition of the *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia*.¹⁵

Rattray was successful in this examination and was admitted a freeman. The relevant entry on 14 November 1740 in the minutes of the Incorporation is shown in figure 3. It was the practice for those who passed the examination to have entry to the Incorporation decided by a subsequent vote among the freemen. If successful in this, they were then to provide a formal banquet for the freeman of the Incorporation and pay an entrance fee, which in the case of John Rattray amounted to twenty-one pounds, thirteen shillings and four pence sterling. The practice of 'taking of the seat' as a formal public token of membership is one that persists in the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh into the twenty-first century.

Rattray was also a keen sportsman and, like Thomas Kincaid, was a member of the Royal Company of Archers. In 1735 he too won the Edinburgh silver arrow, competing against some of the best archers in Scotland.¹⁶ His skill as an archer was matched by his golfing prowess. The Edinburgh golfers had approached the Edinburgh Town Council for a silver club to be played for in an annual competition over Leith Links, in much the same way as the Council provided the silver arrow for archery competitions. The Town Council approved this request on 7 March 1744 and the 'Articles and Laws in playing at golf', recorded in the minute book of the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, are likely to have been drawn up for this competition.⁴

On 2 April 1744 Rattray won the first competition held at Leith Links by the the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (previously the Company of Gentlemen Golfers), winning the silver club and earning the title 'Captain of the Golf'. It is Rattray's signature that appears below the 13 original rules of golf in the minute book of the Honourable Company (see figure 4). It is not clear

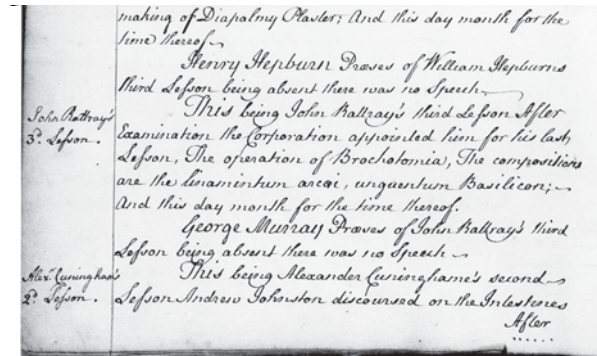


FIGURE 2 Minutes of 1740 showing the topic for John Rattray's fourth lesson.

whether he signed this in his capacity as captain of the golf or as the author of the rules. As was customary for entries in the minutes, he has written 'Cptn' after his signature, which some commentators have interpreted as indicating that he simply signed the minute as captain, the rules having been a joint effort of the golfers, who included some of the best legal brains in the land. Johnson and Johnston⁴ refuse to speculate on authorship, while Strachan regards Rattray as the most likely author.¹⁷ The rules signed by Rattray lay undisturbed in the minute book for some 200 years until discovered there by Clapcott in 1937.¹⁸ The St Andrews golfers, adopted them with minor modifications in 1754 and they still form the basis of many of the modern laws of the game.

Rattray and some of his golfing companions had been featured in the mock heroic poem 'The Goff' by Thomas Mathison (1720–1760) published in 1743,¹⁹ as in the following extract:

'North from Edina eight furlongs and more
Lies that fam'd field, on Forth's sounding shore,
Here Caledonian chiefs for health resort,
Confirm their sinews by the manly sport....

Rattray for skill, and Crosse for strength renowned,
Stuart and Leslie beat the sandy ground....

Yea here great Forbes, patron of the just,
The dread of villains and the good man's trust
When spent with toils in serving human kind,
His body recreates and unbends his mind.'

Leith Links is the 'fam'd field', while the 'great Forbes' referred to is Duncan Forbes of Culloden (1685–1747), Lord President of the Court of Session, Scotland's most senior judge and one of Rattray's regular golfing companions. Their friendship was to save the life of John Rattray.

Rattray had been born into a family which was staunchly Jacobite, and his father had become Episcopal *Primus* of Scotland. Prince Charles Edward Stuart, after arriving in

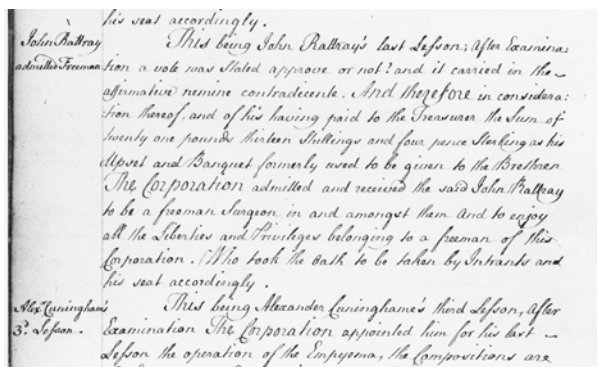


FIGURE 3 Minutes of 1740 confirming John Rattray's admission as a Freeman of the Incorporation.

Scotland, had written on 2 September 1745 to the Rattray family inviting them to join his standard. The three organisations of which Rattray was a member, the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, The Royal Company of Archers and the Incorporation of Surgeons, were in the main sympathetic to the Stuart cause. Rattray joined the Jacobite army after the battle of Prestonpans where he tended the wounded. He travelled as surgeon with the army as it advanced into England and then retreated from Derby, eventually becoming surgeon-general and personal surgeon to Prince Charles. After the battle of Culloden, Rattray surrendered to the Hanoverians and was imprisoned in Inverness.

Robert Forbes, Bishop of Ross and Caithness, describes in his detailed contemporary account of the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, *The Lyon in Mourning*,²⁰ how Rattray was taunted by a Hanoverian officer:

We know well what you are sir, the Pretender's surgeon. If anyone hangs, you shall.

Lord Forbes, the Lord President, made a personal plea of intercession on behalf of Rattray to the Duke of Cumberland, which was successful. 'At last ... the President got a present of Mr Rattray to do with him what he pleased.'²⁰ Rattray was freed to return to Edinburgh but was re-arrested there a few days later by order of Cumberland and held prisoner in London until January 1747, when he was finally released, having signed an oath of obedience to the king. He returned to Edinburgh to surgical practice and to golf, winning the silver club for a third time in 1751. He died in 1771.

WILLIAM LAIDLAW PURVES (1842–1917)

William Laidlaw Purves was born in 5 Hill Place, Edinburgh, on 16 April 1842, the son of William Brown Purves, who had qualified as a licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1835, and subsequently practised as a doctor in Edinburgh. Today, 5 Hill Place is the site of the administrative offices of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. After education

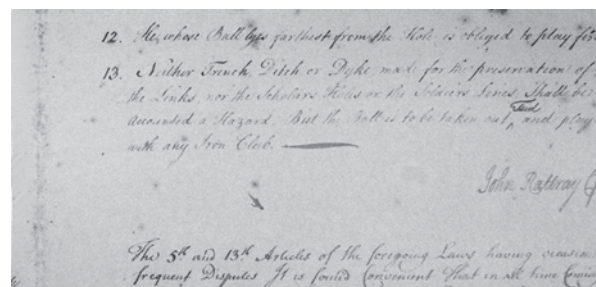


FIGURE 4 An extract from the first rules of golf showing John Rattray's signature.

at the High School of Edinburgh, he was apprenticed to William Forbes Skene WS but was not attracted to a career in law and matriculated at the University of Edinburgh Medical School. In 1864, he qualified LRCSEd, LRCPE and graduated MD from Edinburgh University later that year with a thesis entitled *On bronchocele; a beneficial physiological action*.²¹ After a period of practice in Australia he returned to Europe, taking a particular interest in aural surgery, with further studies in Berlin, Paris, Vienna and Utrecht.²² In 1874, he was appointed lecturer and aural surgeon to Guy's Hospital, London and began a private practice in aural and ophthalmic surgery.

Before leaving Edinburgh, he had been a member of the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers and of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews. In London he joined the London Scottish and Wimbledon Golf Club, moving with the Wimbledon (later Royal Wimbledon) when it split away. Purves wished to find a site for a new links course in the style of those with which he was familiar in the east of Scotland. While searching the Kent coast for a suitable links with a fellow golfer Henry Lamb, he climbed the tower of St Clement's Church, Sandwich, and chose the site for what became the Royal St Georges Golf Club. It is thought that he chose the name to match St Andrews in Scotland, and was largely responsible for the design of the course. (It was modified in 1925 by another doctor, Alister MacKenzie (1870–1934) MRCSEng, LRCP, MB BS (Cantab), the renowned golf course architect).²³ Purves became the first captain of the club and first winner of its silver club.

Purves made two other major contributions to the game – he championed the cause of women golfers and was the author of the handicapping system which became universally adopted.

The earliest thoughts on handicapping are attributed to Kincaid¹³ who wrote a paragraph about 'whither it is better in giving advantage in gameing to make the game equal ...'. In the nineteenth century, some clubs began to devise their own handicapping systems, and yet it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that an agreed system of handicapping was adopted. Clapcott concluded

that two people were responsible for the modern system, Mr Henry Lamb and Dr Laidlaw Purves, whom he described as 'the most active spirit of legislative propaganda in the golfing world'.²⁴ In a pamphlet entitled *The handicapping problem*, Laidlaw Purves set out the handicapping rules that had evolved at Royal Wimbledon and that, according to Clapcott, 'may be regarded as the basis upon which the British Golf Union's Joint Advisory Council have built up their system of uniform handicapping (average of the best three scores over two years of medal scores).'²⁴

Purves had been supportive of the formation of the Royal Wimbledon Ladies Club, and when one of its members, the formidable Issette Pearson (1861–1941), organised a meeting that led to the formation of the LGU in 1893, the support of Purves in its formation was crucial.³ He went on to become Vice President of the LGU. He remained associated with the Royal Wimbledon Club, becoming Captain in 1897–1898, and was a strong supporter of the Wimbledon Ladies Club.

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Purves maintained his links with Edinburgh, sending his four sons to school at Fettes College. Two of these, Alec and Donald, played rugby for Scotland, Alec on ten occasions between 1906–08 and Donald on five occasions in 1912–13. William Laidlaw Purves died at Wimbledon in 1917.

Edinburgh surgery has, by reason of these four men associated with it over four centuries, had a remarkable influence on the game of golf.

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