

Tiree Golf History

Tiree's first golfers

The Times August 3rd, 1886

The first recorded golfers on Tiree were the marines who came to 'pacify' the crofters of the island who were agitating for land rights in August 1886

The number of marines put ashore from the Ajax and Assistance was 250. The officer in charge of the force was Colonel MacKay Heriot, and under him were Captains Eagles, Wylde and Lang; Lieutenants Clavell, Anderson, Curtoys, Connolly and Pulter; and Dr Todd, RN. These officers must have travelled into active service with at least a handful of clubs and some balls, which tells us something about the life style of officers at that time and the popularity of the new game.

There is no record of where this new course was laid out, but we know that the marines were camping in Scarinish and that they preferred to play on the short, grazed, machair grass. This may rule out the reef, as it grazed only in winter, and the grass would have been long in August.

When the marines waded ashore in August the atmosphere was initially hostile. Local tradition has it that the force mounted a 24 hour guard on the well they commandeered in Scarinish in case it was poisoned. All of this makes it less likely that the officers would have felt comfortable playing golf on the machair in the west of the island, and that Vaul would have seemed 'safer' territory.

The marines left, but the idea of playing golf on Tiree stayed behind. In 1899 the Duke of Argyll, who was kindly disposed towards the new game, donated funds of £3 to the Tiree Golf Club. (**Information from the Inverary Castle Archives**)

Again, there is no indication where the Tiree Golf Club was, but by 1910 or 1911, the Vaul machair was transformed into a modern 18 hole links course. One of the holes was in Calum MacLean's croft in Kirkapol and the club was called the Kirkapol and Vaul Golf Club.

From The Book, Golf Causerie 1911

Tiree

The late Duke of Argyll placed it on record that he believed the island of Tiree had been destined for the perpetuation of the Royal and Ancient pastime. It was an island of golf courses. During the 35 or 40 years that may have elapsed since the Duke ventured that opinion golf has spread with rapidity far exceeding his dreams, so that the perpetuation of the game stands in no danger. At the same time there can be no question that some of these islands are certain soon to play an important part in the holiday golf of our country. Few golfers but have heard of Machrihanish in Kintyre, and of Machrie in Islay. The praises of their turf have been sung a thousand times. Kept almost perpetually green with the salt-laden breezes of the Atlantic, some enthusiasts would have them placed in a class by themselves. Not, however, for around Tiree is a margin of links quite equal in texture to that of either Machrihanish or Machrie, plus an advantage which neither of these links possesses ; there are no rabbits. There is not a bunny on the island of Tiree, which is about twelve miles in length and from two to five miles in breadth. Everywhere the beautiful stretches of clean, crisp turf are intersected with sand bunkers of a kind dear to the heart of the golfer. And such

sand!!, surely nowhere else is the sand so white – white almost to a fault when the finding of a bunkered ball is at stake. Golfers who cannot abstain from the game when hoar frost lies on the links are accustomed to play with balls painted red. On Tiree, where, by the way, frost and snow are practically unknown, the use of red balls all the year round would be an economy both of time and temper.

Natures Hazards

While all the links on the island are quite of first-class quality, that portion lying between the crofting townships of Kirkapoll and Vaul, at the East end, is perhaps the best adapted for golf on account of the excellence and variety of its hazards – all the handiwork of nature. Here, as elsewhere in many parts of the highlands, the links belong to the crofters, a privilege conferred upon them by the crofters act. Excusably jealous of their rights, crofters have not always met the proposal kindly to have golf established in their midst. But those of Kirkapoll and Vaul, by inaugurating a golf club of their own – the first and only one of its kind – have created a record, and have set an example with others in their position would do well to emulate. Links, from being the least valuable of all grazing lands (Possibly that is why the crofters fell heir to so many !), are bound to become more and more of an asset to the communities who own them when once golf takes root. In the formation of their club the Kirkapoll crofters had the assistance of an astute and generous Glasgow gentleman, who does not permit mention of his name. I have incidentally heard of sacks of flour, bundles of “ Bogey Roll” tobacco, and other articles of luxury and usefulness for the islanders being shipped from Glasgow at Christmas time, and of remarkable competitions that have been held for the determination of these seasonable gifts. Fully alive to the advantages they possess for providing the jaded city worker with a golfing retreat hardly to be equalled, the crofters, the schoolmasters, the parsons, and all the bigwigs of Tiree have put their hands to the plough with will and enthusiasm. They have seemingly determined on making their club a success, and their island an attraction to the holiday seeker.

Ideal Caddies

Of caddies there plenty, of the best type, and at the most moderate rate. In fact, once on the island, all the charges, including board and lodging, are on a scale which suits the man of moderate means, while there is no better or more worthy field for the wealthy to exercise their generosity. I am told there is no difficulty about supplies, the boat service from Glasgow being regular, while the island itself provides fish of all sorts and butchers meat in abundance. There is no Hotel or licensed premises on the island, but there are several boarding houses, in which visitors can be made most comfortable, and there are also furnished cottages, which can be rented for the season. On these and all other points, Mr M. MacLean, the indefatigable secretary to the Kirkapoll and Vaul club, Tiree, ought to be consulted. To get from London to Tiree occupies the same time as it does from London to the North of Scotland. The boat is timed to do the passage from Oban to Tiree in five hours, but on the average it takes six. Than Tiree, with its golf, its fishing, its boating, and its interesting people, nothing finer can be offered by way of a holiday resort to the schools and universities, next week the Kirkapoll and Vaul course will be described, and also a nine hole course in the neighbourhood known as Heanish. The fishing attractions of Tiree will also be touched upon.

In a letter received by me from the Glasgow gentleman referred to was the following “ There is no doubt of the place being thoroughly recommendable, whether to wealthy or poor. The

crofters, the farmers, the schoolmasters, etc., who as you know form the club, are as keen as mustard in keeping the course right, and I would like to emphasize the fact that the crofters and others have actually worked off the subscriptions on the course. This rather knocks on the head the still prevailing opinion that the crofter is a lazy, thriftless creature. I have found him anything but that.”

Speaking of the golfer generally, but of the London golfer in particular, the point at which he seems to have arrived is this ; no matter where he goes for his seaside golfing holiday, so long as he sticks to links of known quality and reputation, he is sure to find them crowded from about mid July to mid September. I believe I am stating a fact when I say that every private club within 250 miles of the metropolis possessing a really good golf course has not only a full membership, but a substantial waiting list as well. They nearly all admit visitors, but at such a tariff as the wealthy alone can afford to pay. Such clubs and courses so far as the merely well-to-do are concerned, are as if they did not exist, and of public or semi public courses England really possesses so few that they can hardly be taken into account. For these we must go to Scotland, the home of golf, and the “ land of links”. But even there the difficulty of getting good golf in comfort and at the time when one desires to engage in it is becoming more and more accentuated. Twenty five years ago the Kingdom of Fife and the adjacent shores of the Firth of Forth furnished the golfing world with playgrounds. When congestion began to make itself felt the game spread Northward, and the shores of the Moray Firth, remarkably rich in seaside links became invaded, and are now for holiday golf recognised as second to none. Yet, though the expansion of the game thus goes travelling on at a pace so rapid, there is no occasion to fret. The resources of old Scotland are far from exhausted. There still the Western Isles, the Scottish Hebrides. It is with one of these that I am now to deal.

Golf Causerie July 8th, 1911

Tiree 11.

Let the golf invasion proceed inland at what pace it may, the true game is and will always remain inseparably associated with the seashore, and those who have a wish to see and play on links of virgin purity, fresh from the hand of nature herself, can do no better than make Tiree their destination. Gently sweeping valleys and billowy risings, interspersed with miniature mountains : wide stretching plateaux intersected by sandy ravines ; here and there a benty ridge and here and there a murmuring stream ; and the turf kept perpetually green by the salt-laden breeze's from the surrounding Atlantic – a perfect paradise for the jaded city golfer.

Last week I outlined briefly the golfing attractions of this remarkable island, laying emphasis upon its uniqueness as a summer holiday resort for the schools and universities, and promised this week a description of the links of Kirkapol and Vaul, and also those at Heanish. First, however, a word as to the fishing fascinations of Tiree. No golfer who knows anything at all about fly-fishing should go there without a good salmon rod. The difficulties associated with inducing the king of fish to take the fly in salt water are proverbial, but from what I have been told by an authority on the subject, greater success attends the fresh water lure in Gott and Vaul Bays, both close by the links than in any other water of which I have heard.

The island is no more than a dozen miles in length, yet it contains one or two good fresh water lochs, the best being a few miles distant from the Kirkapol end. Here good trout fishing can be had, and hiring is procurable from Brown's Temperance Hotel. In this connection, when I stated in last week's notes that the island contained no hotel, the reference was intended to apply to “ Licensed” premises. If fly fishing is not appreciated, ample sport is

provided by the bays already named, where lithe, lobster, and saithe are numerous, and, generally, easily caught. The hire of a man and boat for a week costs only 1 pound.

Kirkapol and Vault

This splendid course of 18 holes was originally designed by Mr Charles McNeil, of Glasgow, for his own amusement. Being himself a scratch player, he conceived the notion of mapping out a real difficult 80-course for the "Class" man, while for the ordinary mortal, say a 15-handicap man, the idea was that he should not find it too strenuous work to hole occasionally in 90. In the subsequent alterations at the hands of such eminent golfers as the Rev. John Kerr, Dirleton, Mr Gordon Lockhart, Prestwick, (semi finalist in this years Amateur Championship), and David Kennell, the Prestwick Professional, whose advice Mr McNeil and the crofters invited, site was never lost of this excellent feature, and today, while the course demands sterling play from the expert, the " Ordinary Crock" finds it possible to compile a respectable score. To secure this end nine of the holes range in length from 380 to 450 yards, and nearly all are exceedingly difficult 4's, while most are easy enough 5's. The first hole, named " McNeil", 448 yards, is over fine driving ground though narrow, a fault perhaps a first hole should not have. Slice, and you are bunkered for a certainty in a long sandy ridge running parallel with the hole ; pull, and you are out of bounds. Next comes " Perfection " , 360 yards. Here no trouble is encountered till the second shot comes to be played. With a deep bunker in front and a bunker running along each side of the green, and the beach beyond, accuracy from 170 yards is essential.

Nature has manufactured few finer second shots. From this green the golfer looks down on Vault Bay, with its numerous prominent rocks, the haunt of the lobster – a beautiful sight. In the distance, far out at sea, are to be seen the following islands : Barra, South Uist, Rhum, Skye, Eigg, Muck, Mull, Iona, and Colonsay. Hole No 3 is of the dogleg type, the tee shot being over a succession of small promontories and sandy bays, and the player has to decide for himself how many of these he is to essay to carry – the more the shorter and easier the hole, which is 345 yards. No 4, " Mount Ararat", 115 yards, is described by Kinnell as the most difficult short hole he has ever played. An isolated turf-capped mountain of sand, 50 yards broad and 100 yards long, is approached from a teeing ground of similar elevation cross-wise.

All the intervening ground, and all around the mount is sand. It may a 2 or a 10!

Teeing for the next, " Rhum", 230 yards, from the far end of " Ararat", another sand chasm has to be carried, and the feature of the tee-shot is that the longer you make the " Carry", the nearer you get to the hole, while there is an easy, if round a bout, way for the short players. " Dutchman's Cap" comes next, so named because the drive is towards that island – a fine swiping hole of 400 yards, with cross bunker from the tee, and flank bunkers beside the green. The succeeding hole is of similar length and character. " Dun Beg", No 8, is a splendid hole, with bold features, and is 420 yards long. The tee shot is over a hazard, not unlike the " Cardinal" at Prestwick, and thereafter the tail-ends of the promontories and bays encountered at No 3 have to be faced from the opposite direction, when you have to determine how many of these obstacles you are to venture to carry in your second shot. No 9 is 330 yards.

Situated on a tongue-shaped spit, the green is closely guarded with deep sand drifts close into the sides. A bunker has to be carried from the tee, but the important part is to place the tee shot ; otherwise the second shot will be rendered extremely hazardous.

The first four holes on the inward half are fine long swiping two-shot holes, round about 400 yards each, no two of which run in the same direction. Of these the 13th " Callum More", named after an ardent crofter enthusiast, is the most difficult by reason of the second shot being over another " Cardinal", type of bunker. Next comes the " Andes", 160 yards, a cross-

breed between the “Himalayas”, of Prestwick and the old “Maiden” of Sandwich – an excellent test of golf, but no so blind as either of the holes named, though the highest peak to be carried rises 50 ft., because of the teeing ground being on top of the hill.

No 15, “Iris”, has the tee on the summit of the “Andes”, is a dogleg hole of 345 yards, with a bed of irises close into the green as a hazard. “The Lodge”, No 16, is a testing hole running parallel to the seashore and crosses a burn ; while “Argyll” covers similar country back again, but further away from the beach. The latter is the longest hole, and measures 480 yards. To finish up there is a cunning punch-bowl hole, 220 yards, with but one entrance, and that a narrow one. Bogey is 41 each way. There are no blind approaches, if the “Andes” is excepted, and nothing wherein to lose golf balls.

Oban Times February 4th, 1911

The monthly medal competition was held on the Kirkapoll and Vaul golf course. The day was wet and unpromising in the morning but at 10am it cleared up. There was a good turnout of members...the course was in good order and some fine golf was witnessed...Mr Burton, HM Inspector of Schools played over the course [and] stated that people have only to know the testing qualities of the new links when they will come in large numbers to the island. As this was in February, it is likely that the course had been laid out at least the year before.

Charles McNeil

The man behind the transformation of golf on Tiree was Charles McNeil from Prestwick. His father John owned the Colonial Iron Works in Helen Street, Govan. This factory made machinery for sugar cane and rice milling in the British colonies and employed 500 men

Oban Times September 2nd, 1911

Tiree: Golf – devotees of the game continue to reach the island with each fresh arrival of the regular steamers. In the immediate neighbourhood of the course, housing accommodation is severely taxed, but both at Heanish and Scarinish the usual boarding charges are available at the moderate charges. It has been finally arranged that in the early spring an inter-Universities match, open to students of the four Scottish Universities, will take place on the course. The coveted trophy is a valuable gold cup, the generous donors being Messrs McNeil, Colonial Iron Works, Govan. McNeil also gave the new course a clubhouse.

Oban Times September 16th, 1911

A commodious club house, the gift of Mr Charles McNeil, Colonial Iron Works, Govan, has recently been erected on the golf course at Vaul. The erection, which is the work of Messrs J & L MacKinnon, Vaul, supplies a much-felt want, proving an inestimable boon to all who make use of the course, and especially to such enthusiasts as resort hither, welcoming the shine and not the shower. The course is now as perfect as can possibly be, Mr McNeil having spared neither time nor money in making it second to none on the western seaboard of Scotland.

Scarinish golf course

While putting the finishing touches to the new course in Vaul, Charles McNeil was eyeing up other promising sites on the island.

Oban Times June 17th, 1911

A new golf course is to be opened at Machair Heanish, which should attract visitors to the Scarinish, Heanish and Baugh districts of the island. Mr McNeil, Glasgow, has done yeoman service in this direction for the island.

Nothing came of this, but a golf course in Scarinish was set up in 1920 or 21 by the Heanish policeman, John Glenday and a visiting telegraph operator, David Murdoch. Johnny Brown from the Scarinish Hotel and Jack McEwan, who lived in Heanish, were also involved. The course had 7 holes.

Cornaigmore Golf Course.

Allan MacDougall came to Cornaigmore School in 1933 and became head teacher in 1938. Despite childhood polio he was a fit man and swam daily. He was a keen golfer and created his own private golf course on the machair between the school and the sea.

When I came to Tiree [as a teacher in 1962] the only golfing activity was on the machair in Cornaig, and that was Mr MacDougall and myself. When he found out I played golf he told me he had a wee golf course out the back of the house. There were about four or five holes, and by approaching the holes from different angles you were able to manufacture a nine hole course. We went out a few times in the summer. Gordon Connell, AC299.

Barrapol Golf Course

Tiree As A Health Resort

Perthshire Advertiser October 6th 1897.

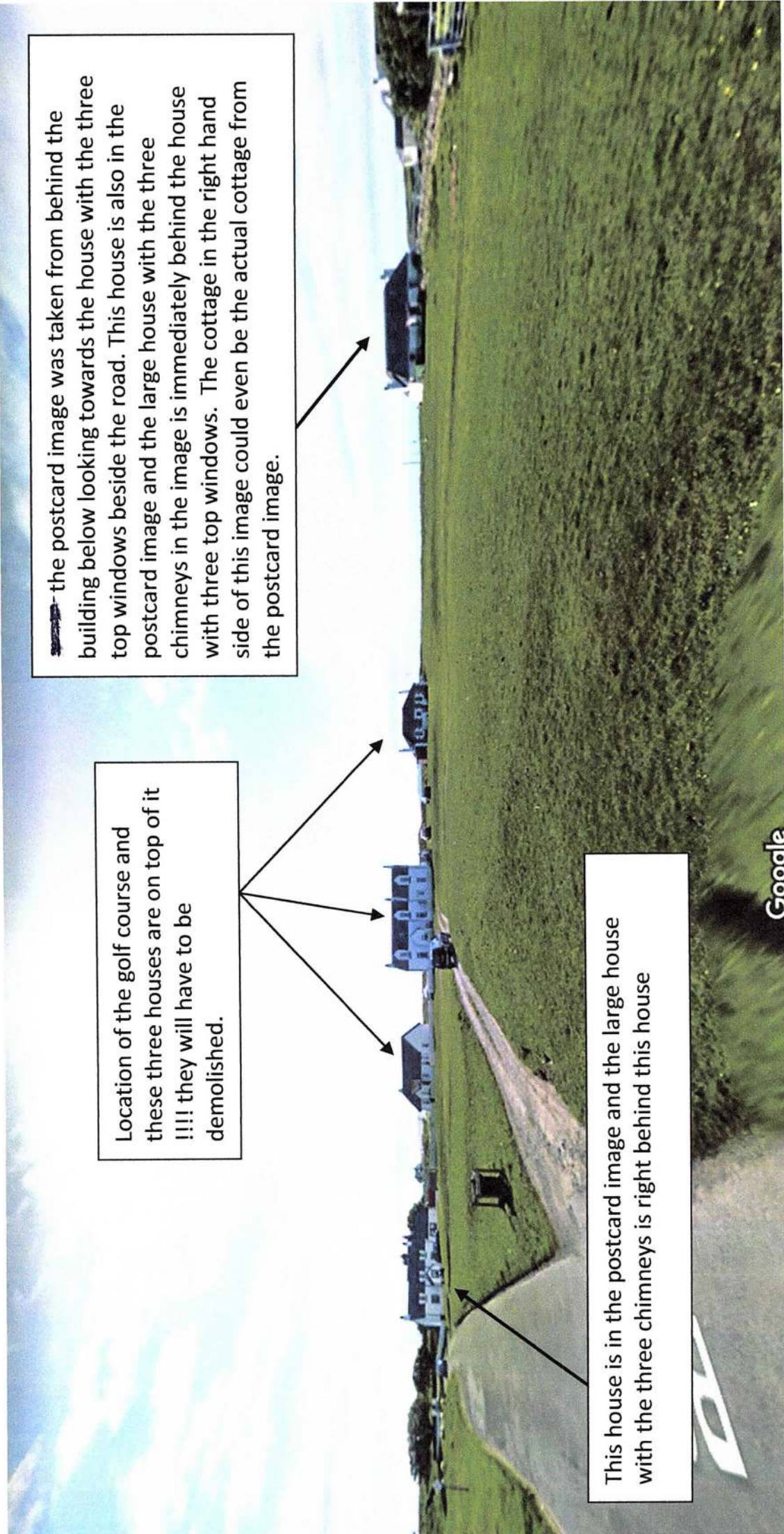
The following letter has been sent by Lord Archibald Campbell to the Standard :-
Coombe Hill Farm, Kingston-on-Thames, September 23rd, 1897.

Sir, - In this day's standard is a letter on the island of Tiree. Much remains to be added, however, and with your leave I propose to make a few remarks apropos of this most beautiful island – the earthly paradise of the golfer and to the bather. The very great dangers of the landing surely must be taken in hand by the Scotch Office and a proper grant be made – say of twelve thousand pounds – for a proper pier, from which and on which passengers and horses and cattle of all sorts could be safely landed at all times.

While I was on the island, and just before embarkation, a horse and man went over the rocks into the sea. There they struggled for their lives, and to all who witnessed the scene, it was a miracle how the man escaped being drowned or struck on the head by the struggling animal. Passengers and animals have to scramble down rocks of the most rugged character, and to women with children in their arms this passage over the rocks is one of extreme danger. The site of the pier has long been settled, and the natives are not likely to dispute as to this matter. With a population of upwards of three thousand, with the grandest bays in Great Britain, with sands shoaling very gradually and of the firmest quality, with an utter absence of dangerous currents, with golf links of the very finest quality, it is safe to predict that Tiree will ere long be acknowledged queen of Western watering places.

As to the details of the golf links, the finest are at Barrapol, eight miles from Scarnish Bay. There a five-mile course awaits the golfer. There are shallow valleys of wonderful turf, there are deep and deadly bunkers – and all that go to make “ Sporting Links.” You gaze on an apparent upland and reckon to find the ball lying snugly somewhere within view, when all of a sudden you find yourself on the brink of a sandy precipice – at the bottom of the bunker the ball awaiting you – six shots often failing to place you on the turf. In fact, the course is full of surprises and unsurpassable “ Approaches,” etc. For width it is undoubtedly the widest in Scotland. Mr Brown, the obliging host of the Scarnish Hotel, will drive people over to Barrapol, and on the return of the golf or bathing pilgrims will entertain them well with excellent viands such as mutton and very sweet chickens, for which dishes the isle has long been famed. Nothing could exceed the courtesy of the Captains and crews of the steamers plying to Tiree. The food is also good on these vessels, - I am, etc,

Archibald Campbell



~~the~~ the postcard image was taken from behind the building below looking towards the house with the three top windows beside the road. This house is also in the postcard image and the large house with the three chimneys in the image is immediately behind the house with three top windows. The cottage in the right hand side of this image could even be the actual cottage from the postcard image.

Location of the golf course and these three houses are on top of it !!! they will have to be demolished.

This house is in the postcard image and the large house with the three chimneys is right behind this house



The location of the golfers in the postcard scene for Kirkapol (U65) are playing the old Kirkapol and Vault course when it was an 18 hole layout and came right down to the road and beach etc. If you look at the Vault Blueprint you can just see a couple of holes at the bottom left of the blueprint which is our postcard location.

Best

Harry Ward
4 July 2021

U65



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