

MORAY AND NAIRN GOLF LEAGUE

THE EARLY YEARS

Introduction

The exact details surrounding the formation of the Moray and Nairn Golf League are "lost in the mists of time" given the original minute book was destroyed in a fire in 1954. However, from review of the Club Minute books of Elgin, Moray, Nairn and Nairn Dunbar (Forres in the late 1940's did not have similar records) as well as the 'Northern Scot' and 'Nairnshire Telegraph' newspapers of the time, some details of those early years have been found.

The first meeting

It would appear that the driving force behind the origins of the League was Dr James Bain, Captain of Elgin Golf Club (1946-1947) as recorded in both the Nairn Dunbar and Nairn Golf Club minutes.

The first reference came in the Nairn Dunbar minutes of 7th October 1947 when

"Letter read from Dr Bain, Captain of the Elgin Golf Club, proposing the formation of a Golf League between teams from Grantown-on-Spey, Elgin, Moray, Forres, Nairn, Nairn Dunbar and Inverness. It was proposed to play on the 'Home and Away' principle which would involve 12 games for each club. Members agreed that it would be a good system of play if practicable under present restrictions on petrol".

In the Nairn Golf Club Minutes of 19th November 1947 was

"Mr Gordon reported a conversation he had had with Dr Bain, the Captain of the Elgin Club on the proposal to form a Golf League in the area. Messrs Gordon and Cameron were appointed to represent the Club at any meetings held in connection herewith. "

That first meeting took place at Forres Golf Club as in the Moray Golf Club Minutes of 17th December 1947 it says

"It was decided to leave the Match & Handicap Committee the approval of the League Fixtures when drawing up the Club's 1948 Fixture List of Competitions & Matches. The Golf League was formed at a meeting of the interested Clubs at Forres on 26th November attended by J.F. Mitchell and the Secretary"

Nairn Dunbar provide the fullest account of that meeting as at their committee meeting of 2nd December is recorded

"The meeting of the proposed Golf league was held on 26th November and was attended by our representatives Mr A.A MacGillvray and Mr John Duggie. In effect it was agreed that, provided the 'Petrol' ban was lifted in time. to run a League for the following Clubs participating Nairn Dunbar, Nairn, Forres, Grantown-on-Spey, Elgin and Moray on the 'Home and Away' principle, 10 players a side, 2 points for a win, 1 point for a draw. Matches to be played as arranged between Clubs from 1st May to 1st September. In the event of a team turning out with only 9 players, the tenth game would be considered as a game lost by that team. Dr Bain, Elgin to be advised result of all matches immediately. In the event of a tie at the end of the competition individual matches won and lost would count just as game average counts in a four ball league. Subscriptions £1 to Dr J Bain, Jolaire, Petrie Crescent, Elgin after the competition has started."

Fixtures for the first competition

At the following meeting (*Nairn Dunbar Golf Club: 13th January 1948*) it states

"A timetable made up by Dr Bain, Elgin- so far the only date not suitable to our Club was a Home match against Moray Golf Club on 14th August, this being Nairn Games date. Secy. Moray Club to be written to for a more suitable date, a Wednesday during June being most suitable to us"

Whilst it was noted

"Proposed fixture list for the Moray and Nairn Golf League received."
(*Nairn Golf Club: 14th January 1948*).

However, playing the first season of the League was not going to be straightforward as the clubs had a problem due to the post war petrol rationing.

"After discussion it was decided that even although basic petrol might not be restored every effort should be made to proceed with the Golf League as originally planned. The Captain (Dr James Bain) undertook to send out other clubs for their views on the use of buses." (*Elgin Golf Club: 17th February 1948*)

"In view of the petrol difficulty it was agreed the Secretary should write to Dr Bain and suggest that(illegible) as far as be foreseen it appeared very doubtful whether travelling facilities at a reasonable cost would be available and that further consideration should be

suspended until the position becomes clearer" (Nairn Golf Club: 23rd February 1948)

It is unclear how the matter was resolved as petrol rationing did not end until 26th May 1950 (*BBC News*) but despite those difficulties the League was played and the first match was at Nairn Dunbar with Elgin as the visitors on 1st May 1948.

The first match

For that first ever match (Elgin Golf Club minutes 21st April 1948)

"On the motion of Dr H. Thomson it was decided that the Club Champion would lead the team in the coming Golf League. The following team was selected to represent the club against Nairn Dunbar on 1st May.

D. Auld, BW Wilken, WJ Clark,, WM Souter, AM Horne, JC Conboy, AG Shirran, RM Smith, CB Wilken, AL Still" (Elgin Golf Club: 21st April 1948)

There was one change to the selected team as seen in the result, which was reported in the 'Northern Scot' as follows:

"On Saturday (1st) the first match of the Moray and Nairn Golf League was played against Nairn Dunbar at Nairn and resulted in a draw. The individual scores were (Nairn first)

<i>M. Duggie</i>	<i>½</i>	<i>D Auld</i>	<i>½</i>
<i>W. Barron</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B.W. Wilken</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>D. Ellen</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>W.J. Clark</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>A. Duggie</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>W.M. Souter</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>D. Macdonald</i>	<i>½</i>	<i>A. M. Horne</i>	<i>½</i>
<i>A. Leith</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>J C Conboy</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>D. Main</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>R M Smith</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>A B Brown</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C B Wilken</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>A Mackintosh</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A L Still</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>J Mackintosh</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>G E Robertson</i>	<i>0</i>

Moray defeated Forres by 8 ½ - 1 ½ in the same league competition at Lossiemouth on Wednesday."

(Saturday 8th May 1948 edition)

Other results in 1948

Also reported later in the 'Northern Scot'

Forres 3 Elgin 7 (Forres first)

<i>F.A. McBeth</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>D. Auld</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>J. Shand</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B.W. Wilken</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>G. Cameron</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>J. Bain</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>R.A. Ferguson</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>W.J. Clark</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>H. Munro</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>W. Souter</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>S.C. Kirkland</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>H. Thomson</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Dr. Bethune</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A.M. Horne</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>D. Stronach</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A.G. Shirran</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>G. Stephen</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>J. C. Conboy</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>A. Cowie</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>R.M. Smith</i>	<i>1</i>

(Saturday 22nd May 1948 edition)

"In a match played over Hardhillock on Saturday a strong Elgin side defeated Moray by 7 ½ matches to 2 ½"

(Saturday 26th June 1948 edition)

"Moray defeated Forres 6 ½ - 3 ½"

(Saturday 3rd July 1948 edition)

The 'Nairnshire Telegraph' in 1948 carried results of a number of fixtures played which included:

**Nairn beat Nairn Dunbar 6 ½ – 5 ½ (5th May)*

**Nairn Dunbar drew with Nairn 6-6 (16th June)*

Elgin beat Nairn Dunbar 7 ½ - 2 ½

Nairn Dunbar drew with Forres 5-5

"In a match at Elgin, Nairn was beaten 8-2. RJR Gordon and K Cameron were the Nairn winners." (26th June)

**(12 man teams-see later)*

However, the tables were turned in the return match (21st August). with Nairn winning 8-2. The teams that day were as follows:

<i>D. Blair</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>W. Souter</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>K. Cameron</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A. Horne</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>R. Gordon</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>H. Halliday</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>K. Walker</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>D. Auld</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>D. McDonald</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A. Shirran</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>W. Wood</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>G. Cursitor</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>T.A.F. Noble</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>J. Conboy</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>J. Sinclair</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>D. Smith</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>L. MacKintosh</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A. Smith</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>W Barron</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C. Wilken</i>	<i>0</i>

In the 'Nairnshire Telegraph' of 21st September it is reported:

"The final fixture of the Moray and Nairn Golf League was played at the Dunbar course on Saturday when the Dunbar team beat Moray by 5 ½ matches to 4 ½ matches. The "Lossie" side who needed a win to oust Elgin from the League leadership included four scratch players. The course is now playing well despite the recent flooding".

<i>J.M. Duggie</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>W. Campbell</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>W. Barron</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>G. Wood</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>D. Ellen</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>G. Murray</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>D. Main</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>G. Calder</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>A. Duggie</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>D. Cowper</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>A. McIntosh</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A. Reid</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>J. McIntosh (c)</i>	<i>½</i>	<i>J. Inkson</i>	<i>½</i>
<i>J. McIntosh</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>H. Donald</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>P. Bruce</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A. Kinnaird</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>J.R. McIntosh</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>D. Gault</i>	<i>1</i>

The following week's 'Nairnshire Telegraph' published the final league table

	<i>Played</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Drawn</i>	<i>Lost</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Points</i>
<i>Elgin</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Moray</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>36 ½</i>	<i>23 ½</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Nairn Dunbar</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>27 ½</i>	<i>32 ½</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Forres</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>1</i>

Nairn's participation in that first season comprised of playing Elgin home and away but no fixtures against either Moray or Forres. Was it anything to do with petrol rationing that had concerned the Club earlier in the year (although, if so, why did they manage to play matches with Elgin)? They also played Nairn Dunbar but in 12 man rather than 10 man teams. The reasons for this are not known but presumably that is why they were not included in the final league table.

Interestingly plans for the match at Lossiemouth between Moray and Nairn Dunbar was noted in Nairn Dunbar minutes of 4th May 1948

"Letter received from Moray Club, Lossiemouth in regard to our League Match on 15th May. It stated they were prepared to take a number of players in excess of the team and games would be arranged for them. It was agreed that a bus would be engaged to take players to Lossiemouth"

The social side of golf in 1948 was clearly and rightly considered important!

Second meeting of Club representatives

At the Elgin Committee Meeting of 21st September 1948 it is recorded

"A letter from Dr J Bain intimating that Elgin Golf Club had won the Moray and Nairn Golf League for the present season was read by the Secretary. A further letter from Dr Bain asking that the Council consider proposals for the next year's League Competition and also the suggestion of holding a two ball foursome competition on the lines of the Northern Counties Cup was submitted to the meeting. It was agreed that Mr WJ Clark and Dr Thomson would represent the club at any meetings in connection with the League and would use their own discretion as regards suggestions submitted. The meeting considered the proposal of the two ball foursomes and were in favour of holding same, provided the matches could be played on one day."

No mention of the proposed two ball foursomes has been found elsewhere so it is presumed it did not take place.

Nairn Golf Club minutes provide information on the first entry fees:

*"Letter from the Secretary of the Moray and Nairn Golf League asking if this Club was prepared to enter the League Competition in 1949 and to elect two representatives to attend a meeting of the Committee to fix a programme
It was agreed to enter a team.*

.....it was also agreed to pay the membership fee of £1 for 1948 and 1949 (£2) (14th November 1948 -Match and Handicap Committee)"

At the end of that first year the club representatives met again as the Nairn Dunbar minutes of 16th November state

"Letter read from Dr Bain, Captain of Elgin Golf Club, intimating that a meeting of representatives for the Golf Clubs of Moray and Nairn was to be held at Forres at 7.15pm on Thursday 18th November in regard to the Golf League. It was agreed that Messrs. D Duggie and J MacKintosh go to the meeting as our representatives"

Again Nairn Dunbar provide an account of that meeting (Nairn Dunbar minutes 7th December) as follows:

"Messrs. Duggie and MacKintosh reported on the meeting of the Club Delegates at Forres recently. It was agreed there that teams be of 10 players Home and away and that in the event of a tie at the finish of the Competition, to be decided on neutral ground. The(illegible) Club had agreed and(illegible) Grantown had been asked to

compete but no reply received from them, if they refuse it was suggested Spey Bay be asked to compete. Subscriptions for last year and the coming year to be remitted to Mr Bain, Elgin.

It was agreed all Clubs accept bus load of players from visiting Clubs, so as to save expenses on transport. It was reported the Moray and Nairn players from all Clubs were to challenge Aberdeen City to a contest- 20/24 players"

The G.R. Thomson Shield

The background to the origins of the Shield can be found in the following extract from the Minutes of the 43rd Annual General Meeting of Elgin Golf Club on 10th March 1949:

"Mr JG Brown-Grant (Captain of the Club) congratulated Dr Bain on the successful first year of the Moray and Nairn Golf League and also thanked Dr Thomson for the Shield he had presented in memory of his father for this competition. (The Shield was on display at the meeting)"*

*The history of George Rutherford Thomson and his love of the game of golf can be found in the Centenary Book of Moray Golf Club - the relevant extract of which is kept inside the current minute book of the Moray and Nairn Golf League.

The 1949 Season

In its second season, from Nairnshire Telegraph and Nairn Club Competition reports of the time, results included:

<i>Nairn beat Nairn Dunbar 5½ - 4½</i>	<i>at Nairn Dunbar</i>	<i>(4th May)</i>
<i>Moray beat Nairn 5½ - 4½</i>	<i>at Nairn</i>	<i>(14th May)</i>
<i>Nairn beat Elgin 8-2</i>	<i>at Nairn</i>	<i>(21st May)</i>
<i>Nairn beat Forres at Nairn 5½ - 2½</i>	<i>at Nairn</i>	<i>(1st June)</i>
<i>Nairn beat Nairn Dunbar 6½ - 3½</i>	<i>at Nairn</i>	<i>(8th June)</i>
<i>Nairn beat Elgin 7-3</i>	<i>at Elgin</i>	<i>(18th June)</i>
<i>Moray beat Nairn 6-4</i>	<i>at Moray</i>	<i>(2nd July)</i>
<i>Nairn beat Forres 7-3</i>	<i>at Forres</i>	<i>(6th July)</i>
<i>Nairn Dunbar beat Elgin 5½-4½</i>	<i>at Nairn Dunbar</i>	
<i>Nairn Dunbar beat Forres 8-2</i>	<i>at Nairn Dunbar</i>	
<i>Forres drew with Nairn Dunbar 5-5</i>	<i>at Forres</i>	
<i>Moray drew with Nairn Dunbar 5-5</i>	<i>at Moray</i>	

Unlike the first year of the League, Nairn played all their fixtures and in reporting the Autumn General Meeting of Nairn Golf Club, 1949, the edition of 13th September records

"Another competition in which the Nairn Golf Club had participated in was the Moray and Nairn League and, although the result had not been declared officially yet, it was understood that Nairn had won the title. The team was only defeated twice, by Moray winning both meetings."

Nairn were according to their competition book records, presented with the Shield on the 25th November.

At the end of the second year of the League the meeting of club representatives took place on 8th December 1949 and considered the issue of hospitality!

"Dr Bain reported at a meeting of the Moray and Nairn Golf League it had been agreed that in future the home team would be responsible for supplying only 12 teas to the visiting club. He explained that this in no way restricted the visiting club the courtesy of the course to that number on the day of the match." (Elgin Golf Club: 13th December 1949)

Presumably this issue arose given it had been agreed at the meeting the previous year to accept "a bus load of players"! No doubt there were other matters discussed in those early years which reflected the social issues of the time but as said at the beginning they must remain lost somewhere in the mists of time.

In summary

During those early years, Kenny Cameron (Nairn Golf Club) became the League's Chairman and in 1952 Hugh MacLean (Nairn Golf Club) its Secretary.

However, it is clear that Dr James Bain was the driving force in the concept and development of the League together with Dr Horace Thomson, who through his generosity in donating the magnificent Shield, that is still played for annually to this day, being the two most important people who ensured that today's golfers can enjoy friendly but highly competitive golf in the best traditions of the game, of which their forefathers would surely have approved.



(Photographs courtesy of Elgin Golf Club: Club Captains' Board)

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of all member clubs in giving me access to their club records where available to put together this article.

Of course should it trigger any memories and hence more history of the League then I would be delighted to receive it as in researching this period of the League answers were found but more questions raised!

For example, why did Grantown or Inverness decide not play in that first year? Was it because of petrol rationing? Were Spey Bay ever invited to play in place of Grantown? What happened to the idea of a two ball foursome format? Nairn were not included in the final league table in that first year as their participation was limited: what was the reason for this?

Compiled May 2009
Alan Stanfield (Secretary)