

**Tom Morris**  
**Keeper of the Green at Prestwick 1851-64**



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*Andrew Lochhead*

*the Prestwick Golf Club archivist, offers his personal perspective on Tom Morris's life at Prestwick*

**T**OM Morris arrived in Prestwick in 1851 with his wife Nancy Agnes Bayne and his second son, one-year-old Tommy. The town and links that greeted them was a far cry from bustling St Andrews but it did offer Tom stability at a crucial part of his life. Tom duly set out the twelve-hole links starting with an eye-watering 578-yard hole. Whilst here, he would gain a wealth of knowledge in golf course design, course maintenance and become The Open Champion. Tommy would win all four of his Open titles on the Prestwick links. In the month of Tom Morris's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I'd like to share the story of Tom's time at Prestwick.

### *A new venture*

It's possible, but not a certainty, that the Morris family initially stayed at James Ogilvy Fairlie's Coodham Estate near Symington (five miles from Prestwick) until a suitable property in Prestwick was acquired. This was duly found at 40 High Street and became known as 'Golf House', comprising the living space for Morris and his family as well as his workshop and a storage place for the clubs of the members. Ideally, it was located less than a five-minute walk from the links and handily placed across the street

from the Red Lion Inn.

The title for Tom's new job was Keeper of the Green, Ballmaker and Clubmaker. However, unlike St Andrews where he was used to a large base of golfers in need of balls and clubs, he couldn't have expected such a lucrative source of business in his new town given the much fewer number of players skilled in the game. If anything, the most profitable part of his new venture was likely to have come from giving lessons to members who were novices at golf.

At the outset, the annual salary of £25 (subsequently increased to £39) paid quarterly by Prestwick Golf Club would have given him the financial security until he was able to grow his earnings from other activities.

### *The links*

Initially, his main task was to create a course for the new club. While golf had apparently been played at Prestwick, the golfing terrain was unlike that at St Andrews, being much more undulating and requiring many more blind shots over its many sand hills.



*The Sahara Bunker, Prestwick*  
Copyright image by Mark Alexander

Morris, however, was a man for a challenge and he must have seen enough potential in this landscape to identify some creative holes, which would have tested his own ability, let alone that of the less talented golfers who would be playing there.

He would also have appreciated the striking panorama of the surrounding coastline overlooking the Firth of Clyde, panning across from the Carrick Hills to Ailsa Craig and the summit of Goat Fell on Arran.

The links were also just a few steps from Prestwick's railway station that had opened in 1839. Such a facility provided for a much easier method of travel for those members who didn't live locally and afforded the potential to attract members to join the new Club from the metropolis of Glasgow.

Initially, a lease for £6 per annum was agreed for the use of the land (municipally owned and under the control of the twelve Freemen of Prestwick) for the playing of golf.

The course, designed by Tom, measured 3,802 yards. It must rank among his greatest achievements that he not only created some classic holes, notably *Alps*, *Cardinal* and *Sea Headrig* but also fitted twelve holes within the boundaries of the ground available.

The above-named holes (the present seventeenth, third and thirteenth holes respectively) define the essence of Prestwick's course with their grandiose challenges of mastering the carries over the sand hills and bunkers and the treacherous slope in front of the green in the case of *Sea Headrig*. Tom truly had a great sense of theatre in his hole design.

The very compact nature of the twelve-hole course meant that the shorter holes couldn't be retained when the course was extended in 1882.

However, they were equally devilish in their design if you have ever had the pleasure to play this original course.

### *The bunkers*

Tom's bunkers remain an integral part of the course as it's now played. On two holes in particular, *Cardinal* (the present Third) and *Alps* (the present Seventeenth), they are notorious for their moat-like defensive qualities; they're more akin to sheltered coves than sand-traps.

It's ironic then that such hazards caused the downfall of Morris when he lost out to Willie Park in the inaugural 1860 Championship and now recognised as the first Open. According to *The Ayr Advertiser's* report of the event:

The most veteran frequenters of the Links will also admit that in all their experience of Morris, they never saw him come to grief so often, because it is well known that the battle of Bunker's Hill is an engagement which he has very seldom to fight.

But it was no surprise that Morris made amends in 1861 and 1862 when he earned top spot in the Championship and the right to wear the Challenge Belt. He had played Park often enough in Challenge Matches to be confident that he would eventually prevail in this new championship played on the course he designed. After all, he was a proud man and would have been keen for the townsfolk of Prestwick to toast one of their own residents as the new Champion Golfer.

### *James Ogilvy Fairlie*

There would have been no happier celebrant in the win of Morris than James Ogilvy Fairlie, who was the driving force behind the foundation of Prestwick Golf Club. It was at his instigation that Morris had taken the bold step of leaving his hometown of St Andrews in 1851 for a new career on the west coast. Fairlie must have been a persuasive character for Morris to accept his offer of employment at Prestwick given there was only a limited footprint of golf there.

While there are various references to golf being played in Ayrshire as far back as the sixteenth century, the only constituted golf club in the west of Scotland was Glasgow Golf Club, which had been founded in 1787 but had been in abeyance since 1835. Among the original members of Prestwick Golf Club were three Hamiltons and two Kennedys, these families being mentioned among the golfers who played matches in Girvan in 1751.

In the 1830s and 1840s, Fairlie and his golfing colleagues from Ayrshire, notably the thirteenth Earl of Eglinton and Winton, were used to making the long journey to the east coast if they wanted to play on an established course. Fairlie and Lord Eglinton were members of the The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews (founded 1754) and North Berwick Golf Club (founded 1832). Both feature in Charles Lees's famous painting, *The Golfers*, set on the links of St Andrews in 1847. Fairlie captained the R&A in 1850; (likewise, the Earl of Eglinton in 1853) and North Berwick Golf Club in 1843.

As a very competent player himself, Fairlie had been a regular partner of Morris in challenge matches at St Andrews. The advice of Morris was clearly valued by Fairlie in 'sharpening up' his game and helping the pair to earn a winning reputation; in return, Morris gained from the pay-offs resulting from a share



*James Ogilvy Fairlie of Coodham*  
Copyright image courtesy of Prestwick Golf club<sup>9</sup>



Major Fairlie  
 BOUGHT by JAMES & WALTER MARSHALL  
 Goldsmiths, Jewellers & Watch Makers  
 41 George Street Edinburgh  
 1860  
 Oct 26 a Richly Silver Mounted Challenge  
 Golf Belt with Golf device  
 4c 4c 4c 4c 4c 4c 4c 4c  
 1860 Not a Pair  
 J. & W. Marshall  
 Edin. Wm. Mitchell

Receipt for  
 the original  
 Challenge  
 Belt  
 Courtesy  
 Prestwick  
 Golf Club

of the side-bets wagered on these matches.  
 In considering whether to move to Prestwick, Morris must have realised the earnings from such challenge matches would be much more sporadic, at least in the short term, given the club there had still to be established and there was certainly no pool of professional caddies who could partner the gentlemen players. When Morris, Nancy and Tommy, travelled to Ayrshire in May 1851, their arrival actually preceded the official foundation of the Prestwick Club numbering 57 members. The first recorded minute is dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July at a meeting in the Red Lion coaching inn.

Golf Club  
 Robert O. Fairlie Esquire, pro-  
 posed by Mr Campbell & seconded  
 by Mr Sloan were admitted a  
 member of the Club  
 The Meeting adjourned till Wednesday  
 the 17<sup>th</sup> Instant at 10 past 11 a.m.  
 L. Wilson & Co. Miller  
 At an adjourned meeting  
 of the Club held in the Club House  
 on Wednesday the 17<sup>th</sup> of Oct 1860 at  
 12 o'clock noon - present  
 Lord Dalrymple Major Fairlie Mr Wilson  
 Cap Pratt Mr Stirling Mr Sloan Mr  
 Campbell Mr Hay Mr Campbell  
 Cap James Mr Hay Chairman  
 of the meeting who was also appointed  
 umpire in case of any dispute arising  
 out of the matter in the Challenge  
 Belt  
 The minutes of yesterday's meeting  
 were read over in presence of the  
 undersigned Competitors for the Challenge  
 Belt and approved of and signed after  
 which the following pairs started

1. Thomas Morris Prestwick & Robert  
 Andrew Perth  
 2. William Park Musselburgh and  
 Alexander Smith Bruntsfield  
 3. William Steel Bruntsfield &  
 Charles Hunter Prestwick St  
 Nicholas Club  
 4. George Daniel Brown Blackheath  
 & Andrew Strath Sandreus  
 Thomas Morris completed  
 the Club appointed the following  
 markers for the respective pairs of  
 1 pair William Wallkhamer  
 2 pair Cap James  
 3 pair Cap Pratt  
 4 pair Major Fairlie  
 Thomas Morris completed the three  
 rounds in 176 strokes  
 Robert Andrew in 191 strokes  
 Wm Park in 174 strokes  
 Alexander Smith in 177 strokes  
 William Steel in 219 232 strokes  
 Charles Hunter in 195 strokes  
 George Daniel Brown 192 strokes  
 Andrew Strath 180

It was quite a leap of faith by Morris to place all his trust in Fairlie and his goal to make a success of this new Club. Although Fairlie must have obtained undertakings from prospective members during the early months of 1851, it wasn't until June that the first recorded names of those who accepted were documented, specifying payment of £1 for entrance and £1 for annual subscription.

The Open

Proof of the twelve-hole course's resilience is the fact that fifteen Open Championships were played on its layout with the last in 1881, being won by Bob Ferguson of Musselburgh. The quality of the roll-call of winners is testament to the enduring design skill exhibited by Morris: Morris himself, Willie Park, Andrew Strath, Tommy Morris, Jamie Anderson as well as Ferguson.

Prestwick GC Minute Book, detailing pairings and scores in the first match for the Challenge Belt  
 Courtesy Prestwick Golf Club

The legacy which Morris left to Prestwick wasn't just the course itself; his son, Tommy, who developed his own skills on the town's golfing terrain, wrote his name in the record books. His first win in the 1868 Championship at the age of seventeen must have been a bittersweet moment for his father, who was three shots behind in second place.

Two years later, Tommy claimed the Challenge Belt as his own when he won his third consecutive Championship. He then matched his father's four wins when he won the event again when it was resumed in 1872: his four consecutive victories remain unique to this day.

Tom had played a pivotal role working with Fairlie to organise the first Championship in 1860. His influence would have been critical in attracting the likes of Park, Strath and Robert Andrew to make the long journey from Musselburgh, St Andrews and Perth respectively to compete in the event.

Although these players would have earned work from the Prestwick members during their Autumn Meeting event, Prestwick couldn't have matched the 'jamboree' atmosphere of St Andrews during its equivalent event. With fewer Challenge Matches being staged, the prospective 'rich pickings' from such

From J. Morris Prestwick  
 Secretary of Golf Club's

St Andrews ✓  
 Musselburgh ✓  
 Bruntsfield ✓  
 Leven ✓  
 Carnoustie ✓  
 Montrose ✓  
 Perth ✓  
 Blackheath ✓  
 Farlington Castle North ✓  
 Berrinck ✓  
 Herdies ✓

List of invitees,  
 transcribed  
 from Tom  
 Courtesy  
 Prestwick Golf  
 Club



games would have been proportionately less.

Admittedly, Prestwick had a vested interest by hosting this new strokeplay championship; its members would have been confident 'their man' would triumph and so earn the right to claim the title of Champion Golfer in the wake of Allan Robertson's passing in 1859.

All the same, apart from the various costs, notably for the striking red morocco (leather) belt with its silver engraved clasps, much planning was involved. Fairlie had initiated correspondence with Prestwick's Treasurer, Charles Campbell, to agree a date for the championship and an organising committee (as detailed in the Club's minutes) was then set up to specify the event's rules and provide markers to record the scores of the players.

As well as a general notice advertised in various newspapers, it would appear that individual invitations were issued at the suggestion of Morris to eleven clubs: Aberdeen, Blackheath, Bruntsfield, Carnoustie Panmure, Dirleton Castle, Leven, Montrose, Musselburgh, North Berwick, Perth and St Andrews.

In fact, one entry appeared as *Darlington Castle* on the list recording the names of these clubs; the likely explanation maybe lies in the writer mishearing Morris or being unaware of the existence of this club, Dirleton Castle in Gullane, mistaking it for Darlington.

Although Tom did not win the first Open, he remains the only father to come second to his son at The Open. His records for largest margin of victory in 1862 by thirteen shots and the oldest winner at 46 in 1867 still stand. Prestwick's hope that their man, Tom Morris, would be the Champion Golfer was certainly achieved.

### Prestwick

For all the work that Morris did for Prestwick Golf Club, it should not be forgotten how much he contributed to the growth of golf in general in the town. He was a founder member of the Prestwick Mechanics (later renamed St Nicholas) Golf Club, which was formed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1851. Away from the golf course, Morris became a very popular member of the local community. His closest relationships were formed with the Hunter family, and in particular, William and his wife Elizabeth, the owners of the Red Lion Inn.

Not only was their son James one of the closest friends of Tommy Morris, he also married Tommy's sister, Elizabeth (Lizzie) in 1875. When James tragically died at the age of 37 in Mobile, Alabama where he ran a timber shipping business (drowning after falling from a rowing boat), he left a family of one son and three daughters.

Charlie Hunter, who was apprenticed to Morris and succeeded him as Keeper of the Green in 1864, was a first cousin of James Hunter. He was one of the eight players in the first Championship in 1860, finishing sixth.

It was Hunter who combined with Morris to design Prestwick's enlarged course when it was extended from twelve to eighteen holes in 1882, retaining six of the original greens and three holes. And this course, apart from one major alteration (the seventh hole on the 1882 course was replaced by the present

eleventh in 1922), is that still played.

So, even after the return of Morris and his family to St Andrews in 1864, Prestwick remained an enduring influence on his personal and golfing life through the connection with the Hunters and the growing success of the Championship in which Morris continued to play.

It's hardly surprising that Morris might have harboured a wish to return to St Andrews, given his family roots there and the fact that it was still Scotland's premier golfing venue. By 1864, not only was the Prestwick club well established but the four Morris children, aged from five to thirteen, were of an age to appreciate a new life in the cathedral town.

When Morris was offered the role of Custodian of the Links by the Royal & Ancient Golf Club (at the generous salary of £50 p.a.) it was an offer too good to refuse.

There was no question that Morris would have felt duty-bound to Fairlie and remain at Prestwick. In fact, so strong was the bond between the two that Tom and Nancy Morris christened their third son (their first had died in 1850 at the age of four), born in Prestwick in 1856, James Ogilvy Fairlie Morris.

Morris and Fairlie certainly owed much to each other: Fairlie would be grateful to Tom not just for creating a classic course, enabling his new club to flourish, but for helping establish a competition, the Open Championship, that has become the game's the most cherished (and Prestwick's own trademark).

Conversely, Morris returned to St Andrews with his reputation hugely enhanced. His eminent work on the Old Course at St Andrews is legendary but his Prestwick experience would have certainly been a huge contribution to the expertise, which he brought to bear in this golfing odyssey.

21st Nov 1856 - Best of 36 Holes Links  
2-3 of 4 holes No. 5 holes of 18 holes Links

Mr. Morrison			Park		
1st ROUND			2nd ROUND		
1st	2d	3d	1st	2d	3d
7	7	5	7	6	6
7	6	5	5	5	5
4	3	4	5	3	5
6	4	4	6	8	3
4	4	6	5	5	5
4	4	4	4	4	5
4	4	3	4	3	5
3	4	4	3	3	3
5	4	4	4	4	4
4	5	6	7	5	4
3	4	4	3	3	5
5	6	4	3	2	4
5	6	6	6	6	4
Sum	56	59	57	58	54
Sum			58	54	54

  

	Morris	Park
1st Round - Sum	56	58
2nd Round - Sum	59	54
3rd Round - Sum	57	54
Total	172	166

Prestwick was second of four greens played in Tom's 144-hole grand challenge match against Willie Park in 1856

Courtesy Prestwick Golf Club