

ALEXANDER MACHARDY

PIONEER OF GOLF IN THE HIGHLANDS AND HERO OF HIS TIME



Alexander MacHardy is a man to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude. He was founder not only of our course and our Club at “The Muir” but also the most enthusiastic driver of the explosive development in the popularity of golf in the Highlands during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.

He loved the game, encouraged many others into the game, and helped in the initial design of a great many Highland golf courses.

The then muddy fields of the old cattle market at Muir of Ord may have remained just that, but for the enthusiasm and drive of Alexander MacHardy. His enthusiasm for golf sparked events that inspired many others over the years to further develop and improve the great golf course we enjoy at “The Muir” today.

The detail of his life and achievements gathered below is selected to give a picture of the man, who can safely be described as a legend in his own lifetime, and ranges a wee bit wider than a mere focus on his involvement in the humble beginnings of our great Club.

A snippet of Alexander MacHardy’s family history (an edited extract from “The McHardy Boys” published in The Scots Magazine in August, 1998.)

Alexander MacHardy was known as Alister to some, and in these records his surname is given as McHardy. He came from a branch of the family in Braemar known as the “Buie” McHardy’s. His father William, born 1804, and uncle John, born 1806, both became head keepers on the Mar estate. They and their families before them were well known across Scotland for their physique, bravery and athleticism. The brothers, especially John, competed so successfully at the early Braemar Gatherings that the first formal rules had to be framed to enable lesser mortals to have some chance of sharing the prize money. William was described as “a great man for heavy lifts” and on one occasion was reported to have put the 268lb Inver lifting stone into a cart as a joke.

Alexander/Alister, one of nine siblings, joined the Aberdeenshire Constabulary in 1858, transferred to Sutherland, then Fife and, at the age of 25, came back to Sutherland as Chief Constable. He remained there for 16 years, and in 1882 successfully applied for the Chief Constable’s post in Inverness-shire, where he remained till his death in 1911. By then he had been a police officer for 53 years and a Chief Constable for 45. He became a Member of The Royal Victorian Order in 1909, and received the King’s Police Medal in 1910. He too competed successfully in heavy events.

His brother Charles joined the Dunbartonshire Constabulary in 1863, becoming Chief Constable in 1884. He died in office in 1914., he was a top-rate heavy, and his proudest boast was of beating Donald Dinnie at the caber at Braemar in 1864, when he was 20 and Dinnie 27. For such a big man, Charles had an

unusually delicate hobby — he carved walking sticks and fine ivory brooches, using only a pocket knife. So skilled was he that by royal command he carved a walking stick for Queen Victoria, receiving in return a fine oil painting of his father, which had been commissioned for the book, *Highlanders of Scotland*.

Not only are Alister and Charles unique in Scottish police history, but probably in the United Kingdom. Between them, the two brothers served in the police for 104 years, 75 of them as Chief Constable, and both served as president of the Chief Constables (Scotland) Club.

The late 1800's saw an explosion in the popularity of golf, and Alexander MacHardy who had developed a great love and enthusiasm for the sport in Fife became the driving force behind the introduction and growth of the sport in the Highlands. He was a man reportedly popular with folk from all levels of society, and this included such powerful men of the time as the Duke of Sutherland and Lord Lovat, which would prove advantageous in securing access to land for the earliest Highland golf courses at Dornoch and at Muir of Ord.

In 1875 Chief Constable MacHardy and ex Provost Alexander Birnie, of Wellhouse, Beaulie, laid out the original nine holes on the Muir of Ord Market Stance.

Enthusiastic recruitment and encouragement of new golfers was still a MacHardy priority twenty years later, and the results were clear, as evidenced in the reports below.

Edited extract from Inverness Courier 22 March 1895 - OPENING OF NEW CLUB-HOUSE AT THE LONGMAN

Sheriff Blair, Vice President of the Inverness Golf Club in his speech at the opening of the new clubhouse at the Longman course said that "He would therefore wish them all to know that the green was open to all. They would be very glad to see any friends of the members come and enjoy the sport. Any member of the Club had the privilege of introducing a friend, who might play with them during the day; or if any lady member had a friend, she was quite entitled to bring him or her. (Laughter and applause.) The more the merrier. He might mention that the success of the Club depended very much indeed on the use taken of the course by the townspeople. Captain Machardy and Mr Steele, the secretary, were willing to make arrangements for any of the young men in the shops who were able to spare an hour or two on their weekly half-holiday, so as to enable them to enjoy a game.

Edited extract from Inverness Courier 12 October 1894 – MEETING AT FORRES GOLF CLUB

Mr Finlay, Q.C. and President of the Forres Golf Club, was quoted as saying in his Dinner Speech at a meeting of the Forres Golf Club. "Gentlemen, the game of golf has spread at Forres as it has spread throughout the whole kingdom, and throughout the whole world." "It is a very extraordinary thing that you have a game practiced and enjoyed in one particular part of the country, and for a long time confined to that part; then on a sudden its merits are discovered, and yes have that game taken up all through the world. Golf is a very old game. I remember our old friend, Colonel Mackenzie, whom we are all glad and proud to see here – (Applause.) – quoting an old statute which ordained that the game should be utterly put down – (Laughter.) – and which prescribed heavy penalties if it were played, as the Government were determined to encourage archery as being more useful for encountering our auld enemies of England. (Laughter.) But for a long time golf was confined to one part of the country. Its original home, I suppose, was in Fife, and in the West and North of Scotland it was almost entirely unknown. I think to one gentleman who is present here tonight, Mr Machardy of Inverness, the North of Scotland owes a great deal for the introduction of golf. (Applause.) Mr Machardy has been the pioneer of the game, and from Dornoch where he introduced it, it has spread to Inverness, to Nairn, to Forres, to Lossiemouth – in fact one can hardly name any town in the North of Scotland which does not possess a Golf Club. Not only that, but it has spread all over England, and for every

person who played it, say twenty years ago, there is now a club possessing hundreds of members. (Applause.) And not only in Great Britain but on the Continent, wherever you find Englishmen and Scotsmen you will find golf courses.”

Edited extract from Golf Illustrated December 28th 1900 (Also reported in Inverness Courier 04 January 1901)

“The ancient game of golf is said to have been practiced in the Highlands some three hundred years ago. But the natives must have got sick of it, for when Mr Machardy went there some thirty years ago as Chief-Constable of Sutherlandshire, the name of the game was nothing more than a long-forgotten memory. Mr Machardy saw the great gift which a bountiful Providence had supplied to the unappreciative residents, and he along with the late Dr Gunn, of H.I.M. Indian Army, introduced the game which has brought” Dornoch “more glory than all its hoary respectability and interesting history put together”.

“Mr Machardy may well be called the pioneer of Golf in the North. He is an enthusiast of no ordinary kind, and in the early days of Dornoch he coached many beginners at the expense of much of his time and patience, to a mad devotion to the game. The sets of clubs he has presented to likely victims to induce them to begin are innumerable, and we do not know any man once he fell under his spell, who forsook the Royal and Ancient game afterwards.”

“About 1882 Mr Machardy was promoted to be Chief-Constable of Inverness-shire a county of immense proportions, but then barren of golf links. A golfer north of Aberdeen was a rara avis, except at Dornoch, which Mr Machardy had just left. So he began pioneering again. He got the torpid Celts of the highland Capital to enthuse and to practice at Muir of Ord, fourteen miles north, a country cattle stance - which is a mud heap - and thus began the Inverness Club now located at Culcabock.”

“With such an example even the town of Nairn - how dull and sleepy and dreary it was 10 or 15 years ago - awoke to its advantages. Mr Machardy again was to the front at the foundation of this famous green. So all along the rugged, blustering coastline greens began to appear, till now you can almost golf your way from Aberdeen to Inverness. Annals will tell you there are now 50 greens (of sorts) in this northern quarter.”

“Mr Machardy has been captain of the Dornoch and Inverness Clubs, and has won their club medals over and over again. He is a strong, rather an elegant player, excellent in temper, with a happy knack of encouragement to a poor player, which is very rare on the green now-a-days. The fact that he is Chief Constable of the largest, and at times, in crofter questions, the most rebellious of Scottish counties is the best evidence of his official capacity. But he has done much more for the inhabitants of the North than merely keep them in order.”

Inverness Advertiser 27 April 1883 - Edited Extract from PRESENTATION AND SUPPER TO MR MACHARDY, CHIEF-CONSTABLE, INVERNESS, AT DORNOCH.

“Last Friday evening, Mr Alexander Machardy, the recently appointed Chief-Constable of Inverness-shire, was presented at Dornoch with a handsome silver tea and coffee service, and entertained to supper, as a mark of the esteem and respect in which he is held by the people of Sutherland, in which he held the office of Chief-Constable for a period of sixteen years. The first part of the proceedings - the presentation ceremony, which was made the occasion of a pleasant social gathering - was held in the County Hall, Dornoch - Provost Fraser presiding.”

“There is no person, the Chairman said, who was more in contact with Mr Machardy than myself. In my position as Procurator-Fiscal. In his position of chief-constable, Mr Machardy had not only charge of the police, but he also had to superintend and look after the whole of the criminal business of the county. After long intercourse with him I can say that a more agreeable gentleman to transact business with I never met, and he always discharged his duties most efficiently and in the most satisfactory manner. (Applause) The many and various certificates Mr Machardy received from the gentlemen of the county when he applied for the important position he now holds fully expressed the sentiments of the community in regard to his

character and ability. (Applause) We all regretted his leaving Dornoch; for we know we shall have much difficulty in getting a gentleman of the same talents as he possessed to fill the position.”

“In conclusion, Provost Fraser said Mr Machardy had discharged his duties as chief-constable in a manner that was most satisfactory to the gentlemen and officials of Sutherland. He had also, apart from his official duties taken an active part in the demonstrations and amusements which took place in Dornoch, and helped very materially to make them a success. He had also taken his full share of the duties of a citizen, and altogether conducted himself in a manner that entitled him to their very best thanks. (Loud applause)”

“Mr Sutherland-Walker of Skibo said it was a great source of satisfaction to him to see that the testimonial was not subscribed for entirely by the wealthier persons of the county. Contributions had come from a very large number of all ranks, thereby showing that Mr Machardy really deserved the presentation. (Applause)”

“His loss would be much felt in the county, for he had not only discharged his public duties, but his duties also as a citizen, in a highly pleasing and satisfactory manner. (Applause) He had also endeavoured to promote the general welfare of the community, and he expressed the hope that Mr Machardy might long be an honour to the community to which he had gone, and that they would gain by the loss the people of Sutherland had sustained. (Applause) He had pleasure, in the name of the subscribers, in presenting Mr Machardy with this silver tea and coffee service, which bore the following inscription:- “This service presented to Alexander Machardy, chief-constable of Sutherland. 1883.”

At a later hour in the evening the gentlemen of the company assembled in the Hotel, and entertained Mr Machardy to supper. Rev Mr Grant proposed the toast of the evening to the health of their guest, Mr Machardy. Among the other praises of Mr MacHardy he said, “They knew the deep interest that he took in golf, and his efforts to promote the game at Dornoch; while there was no public movement in which he did not take a part, and use his utmost endeavours to make it a success.”

Inverness Courier 04 January 1901 - Edited extract from PRESENTATION TO CHIEF-CONSTABLE MACHARDY

“On New-Year's Day Chief-Constable Machardy, who has been in command of the Inverness-shire Constabulary for eighteen years, received an interesting present from the officers and men of the Constabulary. It was a large group photograph containing individual portraits of the members of the Constabulary. The presentation took place in the Castle, Deputy Chief-Constable Chisholm, Inspector Keith Webster, Sergeant Mitchell, Sergeant Maclaren, and the other officers at the headquarters were present.

Deputy Chief-Constable Chisholm addressing Chief Constable Machardy, said he had been asked by the members of the Force to present him with the group portrait in token of their regard and esteem in which they held their respected chief. They had long desired to show the feelings of deep respect they entertained for him, and thought the beginning of a new century was a fitting time for it to take tangible shape. They trusted the group portrait would long serve to remind him of those under his command, and they hoped that he would be long spared to direct the work of the constabulary.”

“The group picture which was prepared by Mr Macmahon was enclosed in a frame of polished oak, gold-edged. There were sixty-nine photographs, a strikingly good one of Chief-Constable Machardy being in the centre. A view of the Castle and the Flora Macdonald memorial was included. On a gold plate was the following inscription:- “Presented to A. Machardy, Esq., C.C., by the officers and men of the Inverness-shire Constabulary. 1900-1.” “

Special thanks to Harry Ward for sharing some of the information on which this story is based, and the Alexander MacHardy photo used

An excellent tribute to Alexander Machardy, with a different focus, by Harry Ward himself can be found at <https://www.forgottengreens.com/alexander-mchardy-who/>