

Golf history in the pro's shop

By GEOFFREY COUSINS

DELVING into the past is not always a question of digging. Archaeologists may wield the pick and shovel and spend a good deal of time on their knees sifting rubble for clues to the history of extinct races. But there are other forms of reasearch less arduous, and the game of golf provides an interesting field of study

Collections of old clubs, balls, club-making and greenkeeping implements, documents and books exist in many parts of the country as evidence of the interest taken in such things, but unfortunately most of them are in private golf clubs or other places not accessible to the general public.

There is a very fine collection in the Royal and Ancient clubhouse at St. Andrews. The Professional Golfers' Association have an assortment of relics at the Bishopsgate offices. At Hoylake, Muirfield, Prestwick and other championship clubs are to be found many objects of historical interest, but visible only to members and visitors privileged to use the clubhouses.

National Museum

I have felt for a long time that a National Museum of Golf should be instituted on the lines of that at Golf House, the headquarters in New York of the United States Golf Association. The only public museum of the kind in Great Britain, so far as I know, is that started some years ago by Mr Ralph Sammell, managing director of Spalding, who felt that a representative collection of golfing relics ought to be available to ordinary visitors to St. Andrews. This museum is in a room at the rear of Forgan's shop a few yards from the 18th green of the Old Course, and much of the credit for the taste and attractiveness of the display goes to Mrs. Laurie Auchterlomie, whose husband, one of the city's leading club-

makers, is the son of the late Wille Auchterlomie, until his death honorary professional to the R. and A.

Laurie Auchterlomie himself gave several pieces to the Forgan museum, and anyone who goes into his shop at Pilmour Links will do well to persuade him to open some of the lockers there, show sets of old clubs preserved with loving care, and gossip about their history and the great golfers or notable characters who once owned them.

Many other professionals who have an interest in the past possess collections of various sizes and this article is inspired by my visit to Walton Heath for the recent Artisans' Championship, when Harry Busson, the professional there, showed me some of his treasures. My eye was caught by three metal moulds used for the manufacture of gutta-percha balls, or, more familiarly speaking, the "gutties", which superseded the feather-stuffed ball and flourished for more than half-a-century before giving place in turn to the rubber-core ball.

Making the "guttie"

All these moulds were similar in construction, consisting essentially of two slabs of metal each containing a half-ball recess. The method of using them was simple. A piece of gutta-percha approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches cube was first softened in hot water and placed in the lower mould. The top mould was then placed in position, and the whole put in a press. The moulded balls were kept for some time to mature before being used, but retained for a long time their plasticity, so that a guttie misshapen or badly cut in play could be softened in hot water and remoulded.

On examining the moulds in Busson's shop I was struck by the fact that one was perfectly smooth inside, the next in-

dented with rough marks probably made by a centre punch, and the third having a regular pattern obviously made by mechanical means.

Here in front of me, was the whole history of the guttie—the first, intermediate and final stages of its manufacture.

The very first gutties were made entirely by hand, a suitable piece being first softened in hot water, and then rolled by the palm of the hand on a board until spherical. These balls, when first tried, were far behind the featherie in performance, having a very short and erratic flight. It was discovered by those pioneers that the ball behaved very much better towards the end of a round, but that on being softened in hot water and rolled again so that the dents and cuts were removed, it flew just as badly at the start of the next round.

Early morning methods

It did not need a great deal of thought to realise that the more marks a ball had the better it flew, and the next step was to make these marks in as regular a pattern as possible by hand, using a pointed hammer

When some enterprising ball-maker introduced a mould he made it smooth,

and hand-hammered the balls after they came from the mould. The next step was to punch marks in the surface of the mould so that the balls emerged covered with rough protuberances—the fore-runner of the “bramble” marking.

And finally we attained the patterned mould, which produced a ball complete with lines, checks, or “brambles”, according to the fancy of the maker or the fashion of the day

Golf ball manufacture of the mid-20th century is conducted on such precise principles that the depth of the “dimple” or “recess” marking is measured to thousands of an inch, and it has been proved that a certain depth of dimple will give a correct performance, whereas markings shallower or deeper than the optimum will give less satisfactory results.

All this, nevertheless, springs from the experiments of those pioneers who learned the dynamics of the golf ball by trial and error. And those moulds in Busson's shop at Walton Heath, side by side with the boxes of modern, precision-made rubber-core balls, glistening in their coats of sprayed polyurethane paint, remind us of the debt we owe to those ancient craftsmen who hand-hammered the early gutties.

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