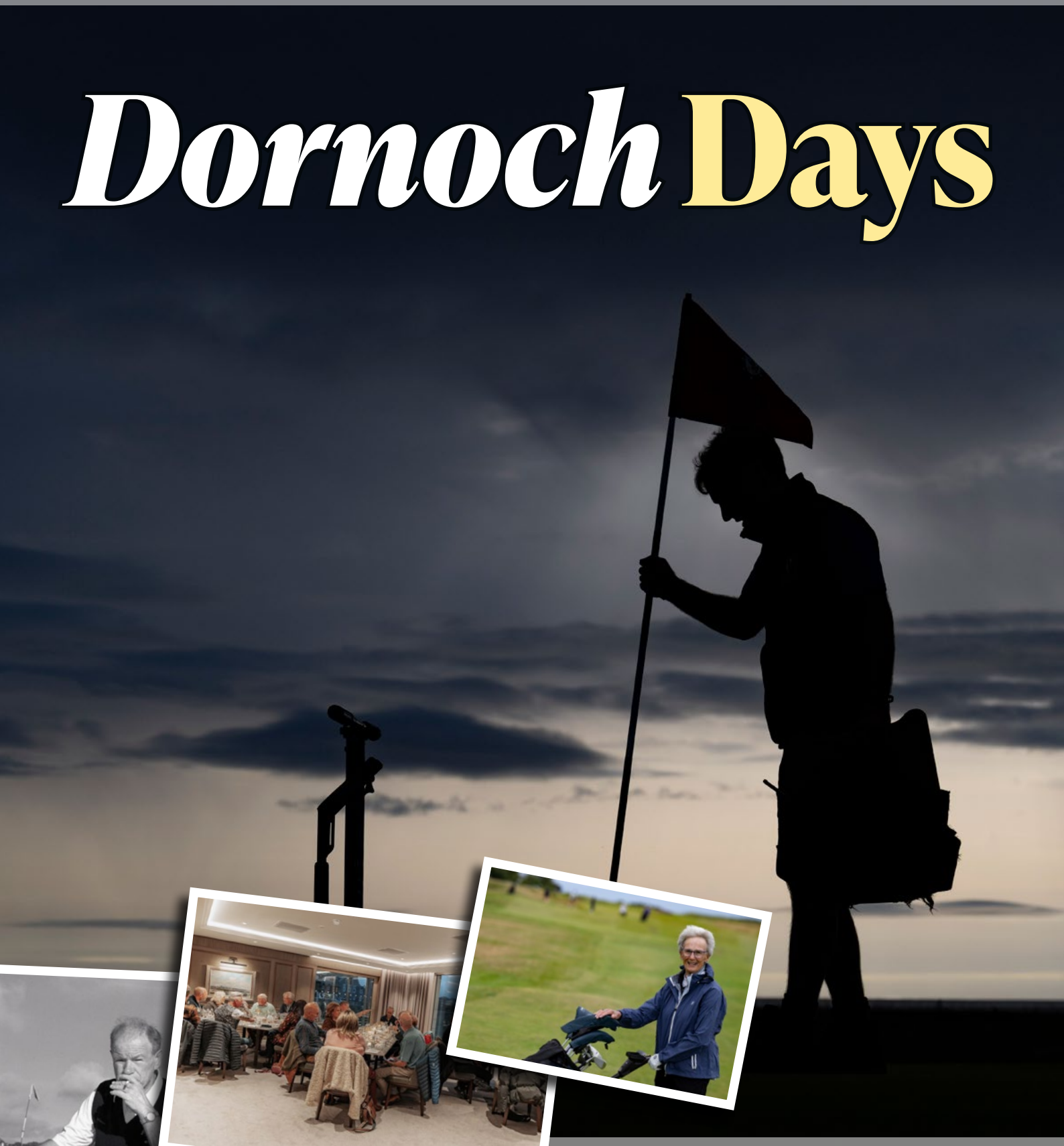
Dornoch Days





ROYAL DORNOCH

ISSUE 12 NOVEMBER 2026

The milestones keep coming at Royal Dornoch

It's been another exciting year for everyone involved with Royal Dornoch, with members and visitors from around the globe - and our staff - enjoying our splendid new clubhouse.

Despite all the forward planning, we were entering uncharted territory back in December last year when the doors opened for the first time.

Inevitably there were some teething problems to smooth out as we settled into our spacious new surroundings, but I am glad to say the feedback from all quarters has been reassuringly positive.

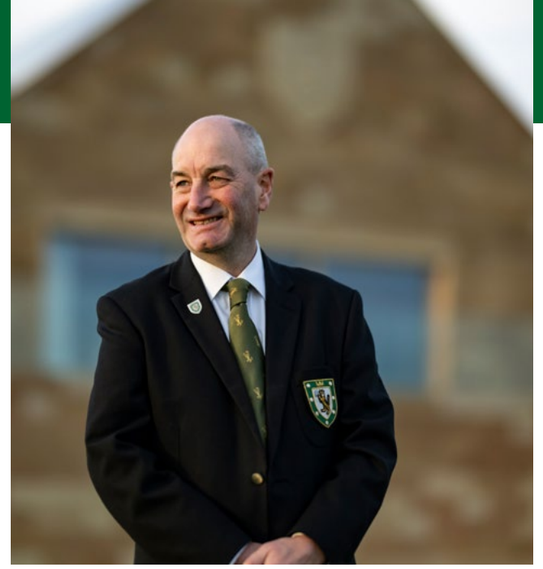
When we were going through the design process, we were determined to ensure that our clubhouse would continue to offer the warm welcome that Royal Dornoch has become famous for, while providing accessible facilities equal to the status of our renowned Championship Course.

As others said at the time, when we bid our farewells to the old clubhouse which had served us well for more than a century, the time was right for the current generation to create a legacy to be enjoyed by those who will follow us on our cherished links.

On a personal note, it has been a pleasure to see the faces of members of all ages light up as they have cast their eyes around the clubhouse for the first time.

We have received so many compliments, ranging from the spaciousness of the new pro shop and comfort of the locker rooms to the magnificence of the stairway heritage wall and restaurant and bar.

Cover photo of greenkeeper at work and back cover clubhouse photo © Matthew Harris.



Perhaps the most reassuring vote of confidence has come from seeing members and guests making more use of the clubhouse for socialising after a round of golf, enjoying meals with the family or just popping in for a coffee or a pint.

2027 will be another memorable year for Royal Dornoch, of course, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the club.

A team has been quietly working behind the scenes to ensure such an auspicious milestone will be celebrated in style.

With an eye to the future, we recently set the ball rolling with Highland Council as we seek the green light for our ambitious plans to create a third course, elevate the Struie and enhance the practice facilities available to members and visitors.

There is no hard and fast timeframe for this project but we believe it will be of benefit not just to the golf club but to the town and wider region as we encourage visitors to linger longer when they make the trip to experience all that the Highlands have to offer.

But for now, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Yours in Sport



NEIL HAMPTON, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Clubhouse cheer for the wider community







When a new state of the art clubhouse was in the planning phase for Royal Dornoch, its future role in the local community was integral to the lay-out.

Its predecessor had always been a popular year-round gathering place within the town, welcoming a wide range of groups and organisations for regular meetings.

December sees the first anniversary of the opening day celebrations which ushered in an exciting new era for a golf club celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2027, with various events in the pipeline to mark a significant milestone in the history of both club and town.

It's not just golfers, from around the world, who have been enjoying the sumptuous facilities within the building which has been created alongside the opening hole on the Championship Course.

The most recent example of the clubhouse providing a first-class hub for the town was served up by hosting the cornerstone gathering for the Dornoch Whisky Festival, which has emerged as a popular event on the calendar over the past 11 years. The spacious restaurant and bar area overlooking the links was the perfect setting for the Grand Tasting Event.

If whisky is your thing – or you'd like to know more about a drink that, much like golf, has become synonymous with Scotland around the globe – get the festival dates in your diary for 2027. Early bird discount tickets are already available.

The Grand Tasting saw 24 very different whiskies from the Highlands and beyond being sampled over the weekend, with exhibitors and those attending fulsome in their praise for the venue and the staff who looked after them. The 2027 Dornoch Whisky Festival takes place from October 22-24. See dornochwhiskyfestival.com

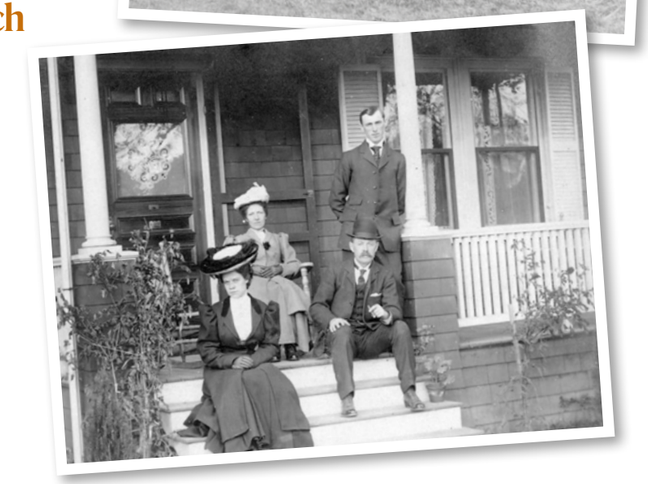
The clubhouse, unlike its predecessor, can comfortably accommodate much larger gatherings and various showpiece dinners have catered for around 180 members and guests since the doors opened last winter. Over the winter the clubhouse is hosting a variety of themed dining events which showcase the talents of the kitchen team.

Dornoch has much to offer beyond the famous links and beach, and anyone planning a Highland adventure really should take advantage of the various cultural offerings which help make any trip even more memorable.

Pictured above: An illuminated clubhouse welcomed guests to a tasting event for the Dornoch Whisky Festival (© John Wight).

Pressing the case for another Ross brother in the World Golf Hall of Fame





Donald Ross and Royal Dornoch have long been inextricably linked in the pantheon of golf. The Highlander who served as his local club's "keeper of the greens" and first professional before leaving for America, left his imprint on more than 400 courses in his adopted homeland.

Generations of golf course architects have credited Ross as a major influence on their own craft and many US golfers making the pilgrimage to Dornoch stop-off for a photo at the family's one-time home in St Gilbert Street, or by the statue of Donald and club secretary John Sutherland which was unveiled earlier this year in front of the clubhouse.

Countless books have been penned on Ross and his rich legacy, which includes Pinehurst No2, now a fixture on the US Open rota and America's equivalent of The Old Course at St Andrews.

But the focus of a Global Golf Post feature fell upon Donald's younger brother Alex (or Aleck as he is often referred to in US reports of the day), who became synonymous with the Detroit Golf Club for more than three decades.

The high-water mark of his professional career was winning the 1907 US Open and a 300-dollar purse in Philadelphia, along with half a dozen high profile North and South Opens which brought him widespread recognition in contemporary golfing circles.

Promoting the "Second Wind" feature, publisher Jim Nugent flagged-up the intriguing story of "two brothers from a small Scottish town, one enshrined in the Hall of Fame, the other still waiting, both shaping the game as it crossed an ocean."

The illuminating essay by Pinehurst resident Bill Case highlighted by the Global Golf Post to an international online audience first featured in the PineStraw Magazine in 2021 and begins with 27-year-old Alex edging out his big brother (by seven years) in the play-off for the 1907 North and South Open at Pinehurst, where both were professionals at the time.

While Alex went on to claim the US Open title that year, Donald saw his "crowning achievement" unveiled at Pinehurst in the autumn.

At 14, Alex had joined his eldest brother – there were four in the family – at the then Dornoch Golf Club. Seven years later, with Donald settled in and honing his design skills at Oakley Golf Club near Boston, the board sanctioned the appointment of an assistant professional – paving the way for Alex to try his luck in the USA.

After arriving at Pinehurst, while retaining seasonal ties to Oakley, the Ross brothers played exhibition matches with members and guests to enhance their pay.

After Donald had been drafted in to design two courses in Detroit, Alex was invited to take on the role of professional in 1916, serving the club – and Michigan as its first PGA president – before his retiral in 1945.

Along the way, he found time to win three Swiss Open Championships on his travels in the 1920s.

In closing his warm tribute to the Dornoch brothers, Bill Case noted that while Donald was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1977, his younger brother has never been nominated.

Perhaps it's a case of "Watch this space?"







Above: The Ross family cottage in St Gilbert Street, which was extended with money sent back from the USA by Donald. The black and white photo pictures it in 1928 (© Historylinks Museum).

Above Left: Alex (left) and Donald Ross thrived together at Pinehurst. (© Tufts Archives at the Village of Pinehurst); The Ross brothers and wives pictured at Oakley circa 1903 (© Oakley Country Club).

Dornoch Curtis Cup trip will reward fans

Royal Dornoch will welcome the Curtis Cup to the Highlands in 2028 and a former USA team player has given it her stamp of approval.





Judy Street – then Eller - represented her country in a crowd-pulling victory over GB&I in 1960.

At 19, she was the youngest team member in the 11th Curtis Cup match but posted wins in her foursomes and singles matches, en route to a four-point US victory at Lindrick Golf Club in Nottinghamshire.

During a recent trip to the Highlands, West Virginia based Judy enjoyed an opportunity to play the Championship Course which will be hosting the 45th match between the trans-Atlantic rivals.

And she is no doubt that Royal Dornoch and the town will delight competitors and supporters alike.

"On a previous visit we came to Scotland on a tour with Kate Myers who is a writer for Golf for Women and I absolutely fell in love with Royal Dornoch," admitted Judy.

"For my latest visit I was delighted to be a guest of past ladies captain Irene Hart.

"The course is just beautiful, everything is so natural. It's not man-made. There are so many fabulous golf holes. The weather was wonderful for our stay and the people were welcoming and just so nice to us.

"It will be a great experience for anyone thinking of attending the Curtis Cup in 2028.

"We also got the opportunity to enjoy Brora and Tain, thanks to Royal Dornoch managing director Neil Hampton and Tain professional Stuart Morrsison.

"I first visited Scotland for a month with my former husband and our family 40 years ago, and it has been close to my heart ever since."

Judy, now a sprightly 86, was delighted to share memories of her Curtis Cup appearance.

"It was so memorable for me for many reasons. There were around 13,000 spectators on day two. It was the highlight of my golfing career," she admitted.

"There is nothing quite like playing for your country. It will be very special for the teams when they raise the flags on the first tee. The enduring friendships you forge with players of both teams are also very special.

"I fondly remember being invited to stay with Angela Bonallack – wife of Sir Michael – for a week before the British Amateur.

"That trip was my first time out of America. I come from Tennessee and had never even visited New York before the team got together before leaving for London.

"In England, everything was in pounds of course and we had no idea about the exchange rate. I remember buying some Cadbury's chocolate. I handed over money and Angela joked that I could probably have bought the store!

"It was all very different from today. One of the girls' mothers had knitted red, white and blue head covers for us. We didn't even have uniforms and when our captain Mrs Henri Prunaret saw the British girls in their outfits she quickly ordered red and blue shorts for us from Boston."

Judy put away the clubs and turned to tennis for many years, noting: "I quit golf to raise the children when I was 30 and didn't take it up again until I had turned 60. I had moved to Florida by then and went back to college, and played for Barry University.

"It was actually the Curtis Cup which inspired me to take up golf again when my former teammate Judy Bell got in touch to say there would be a reunion match in Chattanooga, where I was living at the time, and playing a course designed by my favourite architect, Donald Ross. They call it the Saucer Cup and former Curtis Cup players enjoy it every two years.

"Looking ahead to the Curtis Cup at Dornoch, I would advise the US team to turn up early to get used to links golf. They can lay up their wedges and start practicing right away with the putter from off the green!

"It will be very different from what they are used to back home but I can guarantee they will love the Royal Dornoch experience."



Above: Managing director Neil (right) welcomes Pam Allen, Brin Cox, Judy and Irene Hart to the Championship Course.
Above left from top: Judy celebrates her first ever hole in one during a recent game at home club Cobb Glade Springs in West Virginia; Judy (back row, second right) pictured with her 1960 Curtis Cup colleagues.

Dornoch Legend Pipey still remembered

Colourful tales of Scottish caddies abound but few have left a mark as indelible as Sandy "Pipey" Matheson.

The son of a ploughman brought up in the rolling countryside outside Dornoch, he was late to the game, first picking up a club at the age of 27.

But for the next 50 years, golf was integral to the life of a proud family man who became the stuff of legend at his beloved Royal Dornoch, and far beyond.

A four handicapper in his prime, who took to caddying in his fifties, Pipey's services, and dry wit, were in demand from American visitors, having featured prominently in a 1987 Rick Reilly article for "Sports Illustrated" and Michael Bamberger's classic "To the Linksland."

The latter, like so many of his countrymen, was captivated by this wee Scot, his "fingers browned by decades of nicotine, and a face reddened by decades of whisky and wind."

Twenty-five years ago, long-time friend and "A Season in Dornoch" author Lorne Rubenstein observed: "Pipey doesn't take any guff from people, even the supposedly high and mighty."

Hard on the heels of another summer sojourn to Dornoch, from his home in Toronto he tells Dornoch Days: "People loved that about Pipey. Even if you played a bad shot he injected a bit of humour, which was fun. Pipey knew it was just a game really. That's why golfers wanted him to caddy for them again and again."

To Linda, William (Pippa) and Kevin Matheson, he was just their dad and husband to endlessly patient Dona. "The Pipey nickname came from his grandfather, who played the pipes. Dad played the mini-accordion," recalled Linda.

"He was something of a jester on the course and a great raconteur, but he was actually rather quiet and private at home.

When I got married, he asked Rev Jim Simpson to do the traditional father's speech. Standing up and talking in front of people wasn't his style."

Kevin said: " Some of my mates caddied with and loved dad. He was just one of the lads to them; the evening of his funeral they danced and sang to 'there's only one Sandy Pipey' on the first tee.

"When he started out caddying it was all very different from these days at the golf club. Only local members were caddies back then.



Main picture: Pipey prepares for another round (©Jules Alexander); Pipey with Greg Norman.

"If any American was waxing lyrical about the golf course and asked about memberships, if he liked them, he'd get a form and get them signed up in the clubhouse."

One of their favourite tales involves an altercation between Pipey and close friend and fellow caddy Alex Campbell, with whom he shared a locker. Past US Vice-President Dan Quayle, having read the Sports Illustrated article, visited Dornoch.

"Alex was on his bag this day and as it was raining heavily took it upon himself to borrow dad's excellent set of waterproofs proofs, gifted by a client," explained Kevin.

"Caddying later in the morning, dad had to pull on an old leaky oilskin jacket. Out on the course, he spotted Alex on the 12th and made a beeline for him. Alex knew he was in trouble and quickly explained to Mr Quayle that this was Sandy approaching, the caddy from the article.

"Alex nervously introduced Dan Quayle, as the past Vice-President of America. Dad's response was 'I don't give a BLEEP who he is, I'm going to BLEEPING kill you when you get in!'

"Dan turned to Alex and laughed 'Jeez, that's just how I imagined him.' Dad treated everyone the same, whether it was golfing greats like Bob Charles, Greg Norman and Darren Clarke or pals in the bar."

During a long and chequered career Pipey spent 20 years at the Nigg Fabrication yard, making a lot of friends from his time there and from previous employ. He was always trading one-liners and stories with colleagues.

(Continues on next page)

Fond memories of a special character

Long-time American member Curtis Behrent forged a special friendship with Pipey, sharing four Ryder Cup trips and countless rounds together on the Championship Course.

And the Texan, who became a member in the late 1980s after Pipey took care of the paperwork, fondly recalls some of the caddy's wry observations.

During a Sunday round in his pomp, Greg Norman watched as a substantial crowd gathered around the first green. The Aussie turned to Sandy and inquired "Doesn't anyone go to church around here?"



Sandy observed: "That would be difficult, sir – that's the minister (Rev James Simpson) over there."

Curtis admits the sluggish pace of play by some visitors could test Pipey's patience. Catching the look on his caddy's face, one American asked if he was bored, to be met with the retort "No, just homesick."

On another occasion, far removed from the fairway, Pipey was asked for club selection by his golfer. "I wouldn't know sir, I've never been here in my life," came the reply.

Famously, a links man to his core, Pipey didn't enjoy courses with trees.

"Once at Golf de St Cloud I told him we had lost 400 trees in a hurricane," recalled Curtis. "Pipey's response was 'not enough!'".

Linda recalled her dad enjoying a celebration with American friend Curtis Behrent in a posh Paris restaurant.

“Curtis took him into the kitchen to meet the chef, who inquired ‘Did you know President Mitterand was dining here this evening?’ Typically, dad responded ‘and does the president know I’m dining here this evening?’”

Lorne said the Mathesons rolled out the welcome mat all those years ago and an enduring friendship was forged.

“In a lot of ways Pipey defined the term character. You knew that after talking to him for 10 seconds,” he said.

“Political correctness didn’t matter to him. He said what he felt about people. It didn’t matter who they were, if they were of high status, rich or poor, a Tour pro, scratch player or a 30 handicapper, he treated everyone the same.

“He made every round such a treat. It was great to be around him. It’s often said that people who travel to Scotland for golf want to get a caddy and hear their stories. But Pipey was special. It wasn’t just his stories but the way he conducted himself - and if you were smart you took his advice.

“He would tell people what he felt was the right shot or the right club. After a few holes people didn’t mind his direct approach.

“Sometimes it takes time for North Americans to get used to the caddies in Scotland, where maybe they are more abrasive than back home. But Pipey knew that golf course intimately. He knew every hump and hollow and, of course, how to read the greens. He was a tremendous asset in any round of golf.





“There is plenty cause for Pipey to be regarded as a legend at Dornoch. Word gets around, even today, about caddies and that was certainly the case with Pipey. It’s lovely that he is remembered with a tournament in his name.

“It was the late Don Greenberg who told me when I was in Dornoch that I just had to meet his neighbours, so I made a point of doing that. They invited me in for a whisky and a shortbread. That was the first and last time I ever knocked on the Matheson’s door. They told me just to come straight in.

“The family made me and Nell feel very much at home that summer. They welcomed us into their world. I was there four or five times a week to watch golf. Sandy particularly admired Ben Hogan and Seve. There was always a whisky or a cup of tea. They were the most generous, kind people and I loved being around them.”

Nowadays, he is remembered with the annual “Sandy Pipey Young Masters Tournament,” renamed in his honour 15 years ago, following his death in 2010 a day shy of his 78th birthday.

Linda said: “That was a lovely touch by the club and dad’s great friends, including Don, who we lost recently. It was Don who suggested renaming the event in memory of dad, he was a great supporter of the tournament.

“It is a real source of pride, and a little bewildering, that our father made such an enduring impression on so many people.”

Pictured left: This year’s winner of the Sandy Pipey Young Masters, Taylor Kerr (Carnegie Club), receives the trophy from club captain Colin MacKay (©PGA Scotland).

NEWS BOARD

EXCITING TIMES AHEAD FOR ROYAL DORNOCH

The milestones keep coming at Royal Dornoch. In December last year, the new clubhouse was unveiled and now attention is turning to the 150th anniversary of the golf club.

Preparations for the 2027 celebrations have been taking place behind the scenes and all will be revealed in the weeks and months ahead.

Members will be drawn from near and far for a series of events, and visitors will be eager to share the Royal Dornoch experience as the year unfolds.

Looking further ahead, an ambitious masterplan for improvements to the Struie Course, enhanced practice facilities and a new championship standard course sees the club working towards submitting a planning application to Highland Council next summer.

ROSS ROOM TABLE GIFT DELIGHTS THE CLUB

Royal Dornoch enjoys close ties with the Country Club of North Carolina.

The bonds have been highlighted by a remarkable gift from US club members who wanted to mark the start of a new era with the opening of the new clubhouse.



Now, the Donald Ross Room is graced by a beautiful, hand-crafted boardroom table made by locally based Treecraft Woodwork.

Made from American Black Walnut, it features the club’s instantly recognisable Highland Tiger coat of arms, created with African ebony, Namibian Rosewood and maple. It is a distinctive piece of furniture which will be used for generations to come.

Past captain Gary Bethune noted: “It truly is an extraordinary gesture by our friends at the Country Club of North Carolina Country Club.”

JUDY THRILLED BY HER FIRST VISIT



Personalities from the world of sport are often spotted on the links at Royal Dornoch.

Welsh footballer Gareth Bale and basketball superstar Michael Jordan are among many whose passion for golf have enticed them to the Highlands to experience the famous links for themselves.

In recent months the club welcomed tennis coach – and Strictly Come Dancing personality – Judy Murray to lead celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of women enjoying full membership of the club. Judy waxed lyrical about her first experience of our Championship Course on social media and the guest of honour delighted those attending a celebratory dinner at the clubhouse.

She noted: “For all the prestige that Dornoch enjoys in the world of golf, I was struck by the warm welcome and the sense of community among the staff and members.”

Managing Director Neil Hampton was delighted to hear that Judy had enjoyed her visit, on and off the course.

“The Championship Course may be our pride and joy but Royal Dornoch has always been proud of our reputation for providing a warm Highland welcome to anyone crossing the threshold,” he said.

LOCAL CAUSES SELECTED FOR SUPPORT

Members and guests at Royal Dornoch have an impressive track record of supporting good causes and local charities.

Doubtless, that will continue into 2027, with captains Colin MacKay and Debbie Bethune recently selecting their chosen charities.

Having previously supported the East Sutherland Rescue Association to the tune of £28,000, ESRA will again benefit from club fundraising events.

Dornoch Beach Wheelchairs is also being supported over the next 12 months.

Both are very much local charities, based within sight of the Championship Course, and their work in the community is much appreciated.



Merry Christmas and best wishes for a Happy,
Healthy and Prosperous New Year.
We look forward to giving you a warm Highland welcome in 2027.

ROYAL DORNOCH

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