

THE BRILLIANCE
OF **BRAID**

**150 YEARS OF
GOLFING GENIUS**



Not content with winning the Open five times, Scots golfing legend James Braid's all-encompassing talent allowed him to design courses the rest of the world has strived to emulate

• ED HODGE

Golf courses and railways are often synonymous. Picture the tracks that run down the right-hand side of the opening hole at Prestwick, simply exacerbating first tee nerves. Think back to when a railway line skirted the Old Course in St Andrews, images from a bygone era. Gleneagles is famous for the development of its 'railway hotel' and associated golf courses, while clubs in England such as Royal Birkdale, Formby and West Lancashire also sit near a train station. If your game is going awry (off the tracks shall we say), at least the passing trains can act as a pleasant distraction.

The association between golf and railways is deep rooted in history, particularly at the Home of Golf in Scotland. If golf's pioneers were limited by personal mobility, the advent of the train altered this. Step forward James Braid as a prime example. This month, February 6 to be precise, marks exactly 150 years since the birth of the famous Scot, one of the most notable players and architects in golf history.

By 1910, only 14 years after turning professional, Braid had remarkably become the first player in history to win The Open five times. For the Fifer from the village of Earlsferry, who had honed his game on the Elie Links before relocating south to a club pro role at Walton Heath, a distinguished career as a course pioneer was also underway – and trains were his preferred, almost only, mode of transport. He was one of the dominant 'Great Triumvirate' of the sport alongside Harry Vardon and John Henry Taylor – indeed Braid's 1906 victory in The Open Championship was the last successful

AUCHTERARDER - An aerial view of the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th holes on the Kings Course at Gleneagles Hotel on September 21, in Auchterarder, Perthshire, Scotland. (Photo by David Cannon/Getty Images)

defence of the title by a European until Pádraig Harrington replicated the feat in 2008 – but his fear of flying and motion sickness on ocean travel meant he never contested a golf event in America, or even worked on a course in the US. While his design contemporaries Harry Colt and Dr Alister MacKenzie, he of Augusta National fame, were drawn elsewhere, taking the new game of golf to America, Braid limited his work largely to the UK. A train journey north to Scotland was typical of his lifestyle.

"He travelled by train anywhere," his granddaughter, Marjorie Mackie, told me. "Harry Vardon and J H Taylor he played with a lot. Vardon won quite a few things in America, but my grandfather would never travel there. His whole life was golf and trains took him where he wanted, because he was such a very bad traveller. We didn't see an awful lot of him because he never took holidays. We saw him occasionally, first when we were in Cheshire and then in Dunbartonshire. When he came up to take a look at a course or look at grounds to make a course, he would stay with us for a night. But mostly he didn't even do that, as he was a quick architect. He took the train up, walked the ground with his stride – he never measured with a tape measure or anything like that – strode the course out, stored it in his head and organised the course on his return train. It was just like that, quite often. He could create a course from just going over the ground once. He just simply lived for golf;

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James Braid
five-time Open
Champion 80th
birthday round

“James Braid had the vision to create something of great beauty,” says former Ryder Cup player Ronan Rafferty, a great lover of Brora along with the likes of two-time Major champion Sandy Lyle. “For the connoisseur, Brora is well worth the journey.”

he was just an all-round golf man. It’s often said that, if anything, even though he won The Open five times, his course design was even more important to him.”

Braid’s background, keen eye and understanding of design allowed him to set a standard for the rest of the world to follow. Here was a man in whom hard labour, craftsmanship and core values were deeply engrained. Originally trained as a carpenter and joiner within a family living on small means, he reconditioned old clubs for his own use and later, in 1893, took up the position of clubmaker at the Army and Navy Stores in London. Allied to such skills, he used his Fife farming background to ensure that courses were properly laid out and well drained. Braid went on to design or re-model more than 250 courses around the UK, with Stranraer in Scotland’s south-west his final layout in the year of his passing, aged 80 in 1950.

The King’s and Queen’s Courses at Gleneagles are among his finest works, striking examples of the celebrated architect’s achievements. Sensing the potential for greatness among the dramatic landscape of heathland and woodland that he encountered on the Perthshire estate, Braid went about his business like a talented craftsman to carve courses that still challenge and inspire, enchanting the eye at every turn. To nature,



James Braid (1870 - 1950) drives off in an exhibition match with John H Taylor, Bailey and Crock, after the Mayor of Belfairs opened a new 18-hole golf course constructed by the Southend Corporation. Braid, born in Earlsferry, Fife, won his first Open title in 1901 and went on to become the first of 'The Great Triumvirate' of Braid, Taylor and Harry Vardon to win 5 titles (1903, 1905-6, 1908 and 1910). Horace Hutchinson said that Braid had a 'drive with divine fury' and he pioneered the explosion shot from sandy bunkers. Original Publication: People Disc - HD0435 (Photo by Adams/Getty Images)

Braid added the wizardry of his art. He was never one for moving great amounts of turf, instead shaping from the wilderness using only manual labour, pick and shovel, horse and cart. The result at Gleneagles is an idyllic golfing landscape with many of the large undulating fairways and greens splendidly isolated from neighbouring holes by the gravel ridges, so giving the luxury of almost playing your own private, exclusive course.

Braid's influence was such that he also lent his hand to the famous Scottish links venues of Carnoustie, Royal Troon and Royal Musselburgh and weaved further magic, for example, among the Highland valleys and upon its stunning coastline, putting his name to the likes of Brora, Nairn, Boat of Garten and Fortrose & Rosemarkie. Royal Aberdeen, the world's sixth oldest golf club, originally designed by the Simpson brothers, Archie and Robert of Carnoustie, was also re-bunkered and lengthened by Braid. Other gems such as Tenby, North Hants and Thorpeness in England bear his name. Yet, despite spending the larger part of his life south of the border, his pride in his Scots origin and connections always remained strong. Impressive work at Blairgowrie also raised his notoriety, as well as at Forfar.

Just before the First World War, this tall, slim, quiet

Scot was already a formidable architect at a time when course design was in its infancy. Braid's legacy to golf was much more than his feats on the fairways aided by an elegant, powerful swing that gave him considerable length; he remains one of the most prolific golf course designers and was pivotal to the profession's development.

Fittingly, The James Braid Golfing Society (JBGS) exists to honour the player, the character and the course architect. The society came into being in 1996 to celebrate his memory, whilst enjoying the fun and fellowship that golf brings. The great Peter Thomson, also a five-time Open winner, helped to set the ball rolling and presided over its affairs until his recent passing.

Peter Stanbrook, from the JBGS, said: "The JBGS constantly seeks to extend its network and welcomes the opportunity to visit Braid-influenced golf clubs across the land.

"We do so normally on an informal basis, with enjoyment of golf to the fore. Sometimes we play a friendly match against the host club. If, in so doing, we swell our ranks with new members from Braid courses,

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AUCHTERARDER -

A view from behind the green on the 525 yards par 5, 18th on the King's Course at The Gleneagles Hotel on August 9, 2017 in Auchterarder, Scotland. (Photo by David Cannon/Getty Images)



then so much the better. On our visits, we always ensure that we leave something for the benefit of junior golf at that club. It is one way of helping young players to enjoy the game of golf and to understand its traditions and values."

In the far north, Brora is also recognised as one of Braid's best. Amid delightful dunes, humps and hollows you are offered a challenge and views to take the breath away. The welcoming clubhouse offers a majestic sea frontage, before the links offers a truly awe-inspiring and authentic golf experience. Standing on the second tee, with the panorama of seascape and landscape, it is simply unique in golfing terms.

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Still accessible by rail to a town of approximately 1,200 inhabitants, you can almost picture Braid steaming north to Brora in 1924. While the course was

AUCHTERARDER -

A view from behind the green on the par 3, 14th hole showing the recently constructed new tees to the left side of the picture on the Queen's Course at Gleneagles on August 12, 2019 in Auchterarder, Scotland. (Photo by David Cannon/Getty Images)

founded in 1891, it was the re-design undertaken by the famed Scot that continues to stand the test of time.

Yet, throughout his glittering career, Braid remained grounded and always demonstrated restraint whatever the circumstances.

For example, at Walton Heath, he was an honorary member of the club for 25 years but it was typical of his unassuming nature that he always insisted on entering the clubhouse by the back door. "James was a very modest man, he just got on with his business," adds Marjorie Mackie. "He wasn't a man to show his emotions, he was a man of few words. He went over to Ireland a couple of times and designed some courses there, and he did go to France, in fact he won the French Open in 1910. He did the faraway courses of New York and Singapore by post. I think he did very well staying where he did, working hard and enjoying his golf and design work."

Wherever you experience a Braid course, it is impossible not to celebrate the majesty of his work - this month more than most.