



Old Tom Morris: a Scottish treasure

A golfer tees off in a competition at the Old Course at St Andrews where Old Tom Morris was 'Keeper of the Greens' for many years

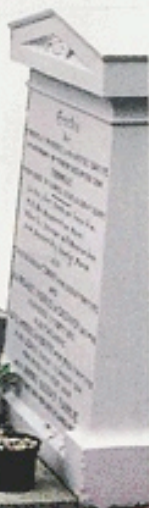


Bob Jones, a friend of Historic Scotland from Oregon, USA, delves into St Andrews' golfing past, and in particular, the father and son golfing heroes, Tom Morris and Tom Morris Jnr. Bob, a retired high-school teacher, also contributed the masons' marks article in the Summer 2003 edition of *Historic Scotland*.



OF MEMORY BY
TOMMY
SON OF THOMAS MORRIS
WHO DIED 17th FEBRUARY 1875 AT 24 YEARS
HIS DEATH WAS SO SUDDENLY THAT HE HAD NO TIME
TO WRITE TO ANYONE AND HIS WIFE AND CHILD
DIED IN HIS ARMS AND HE WAS BURIED IN THE
GRAVE OF HIS WIFE AND CHILD IN THE
CATHEDRAL CEMETERY ST ANDREWS

The memorial to young Tom Morris and the grave of old Tom Morris reside in the St Andrews Cathedral cemetery



In looking at the big picture it can be easy to overlook the small, but significant detail. It could be easy to do just that at the spectacular Historic Scotland site of St Andrews Cathedral and St Rules Tower. These magnificent grounds in St Andrews, Fife are so awe inspiring and full of such rich history that a unique monument tucked into a side of the cathedral cemetery could easily be missed. And it would be such a shame to miss the golfer's shrine that contains the graves of both Old and Young Tom Morris.

Old Tom Morris is a legendary figure in the history of one of Scotland's greatest gifts to the world, golf. And his son, Tom Jnr, shone bright as a nova star in his short 24 years. The memorial grave site was originally the grave of Young Tom Morris who, after winning the British Open Championship four times in a row (the first time when he was only 17 years old), died of a broken heart because of the loss of his wife and child in childbirth. When Tom Jnr died in 1875,

60 golfing societies from all over Scotland contributed to his memorial stone which was erected in the St Andrews cemetery.

Tom Morris Jnr wasn't the only legacy to golf left by Old Tom. Tom Mitchell Morris, born in St Andrews in 1821, left his mark on all aspects of the game loved (and hated) by golfers the world over. As a player, a golf professional, and a course architect Old Tom will be remembered wherever golf is played.

As a player Old Tom's record is second only to his son, Tom Jnr. Old Tom won almost all major competitions of his era, including four Open titles. It was said that when partnered with his mentor and one-time business partner, Allan Robertson (who is also buried in the St Andrews cemetery), they were unbeatable. Among Old Tom's accomplishments are being the oldest to win the Open at age 46, winning by the largest margin (13 strokes in 1862), and playing in his last Open at age 75.

But it is as a golf professional and golf course architect that Old Tom Morris will be remembered most. After a stint with Allan Robertson as golf ball and club maker, in 1851 Morris became the 'Keeper of the Greens' at Prestwick Golf Club in Ayrshire. It was here that the first British Open Championship was played in 1860 – Morris placed second to Willie Park winning the tidy sum of £3!

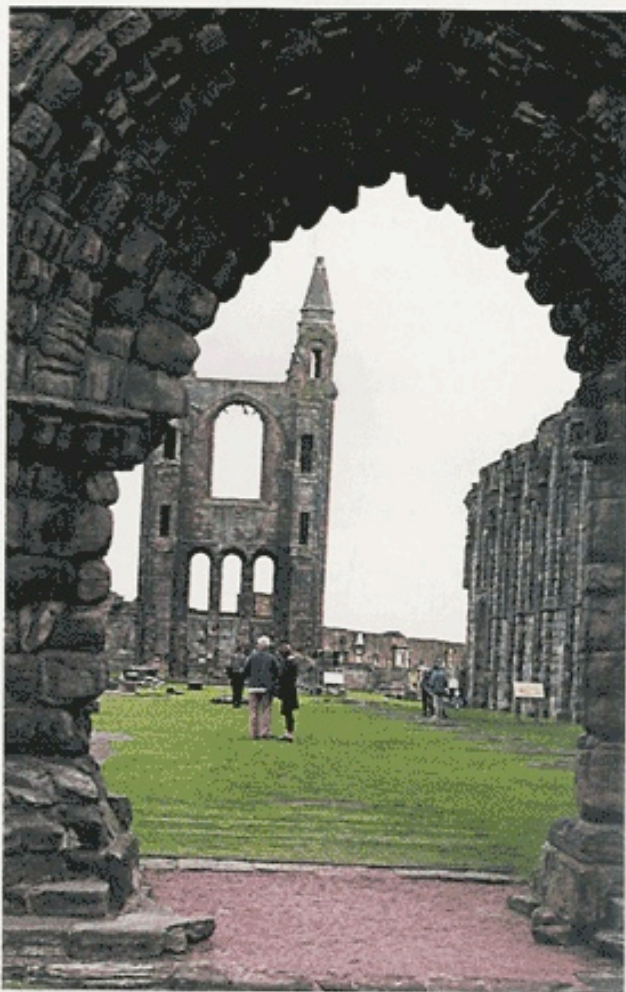
In 1864 Morris moved back to St Andrews to become 'Custodian of the Links and Keeper of the Greens', a position he held until 1904. While at Prestwick and St Andrews Old Tom changed the face of golf forever, literally. He was instrumental in codifying golf courses to 18 holes (St Andrews had originally been 22), planting sea grasses around bunkers to keep wind from blowing the sand away, and discovered that 'top dressing' putting greens (periodically putting sand on greens) would smooth the surface and encourage new growth.

As well as his work on the Old Course at St Andrews, Old Tom Morris had a major hand in the design of many of Scotland's famous courses. Carnoustie, Crail, Muirfield, Royal Burgess, Royal Dornoch, St Andrews New, West Kilbride, and Tain are but some of the courses where Scotland's golf visitors pay tribute to Old Tom Morris.

And for all his design work at courses such as Macrihanish in Kintyre (where Morris declared, 'The Almighty had gowf in his e'e when he made this place'.) Morris was paid the munificent sum of £1 per day plus expenses! Although many of his original designs have been altered over the years, there is still at least one course where today's golfer can play a course just as Tom Morris laid it out – the nine hole Bridge of Allan Golf Course near Stirling.

Morris's influence as an architect wasn't limited to Scotland, it has been spread throughout the world by designers who studied his work (such as Alister MacKenzie of Augusta National and Pebble Beach fame) or those who grew up playing on Tom Morris' courses (such as Donald Ross who designed Pinehurst).

When Old Tom Morris died in 1908 after a fall down stairs at the St Andrews New course he was buried beside his beloved son in the cathedral cemetery. The memorial to Young Tom Morris and Old Tom's grave in the cemetery should remind all who visit Scotland's treasures to look closely for there are many great stories waiting to be found at Historic Scotland properties.



Above: St Andrews Cathedral - the west doorway leads to the spectacular ruins of St Andrews Cathedral which holds many stories

Below: The town of St Andrews stretches out below St Rules Church



For more information on Old Tom Morris and his golf courses:
The Golf Courses of Old Tom Morris by Robert Kroeger
The Scrapbook of Old Tom Morris compiled by David Joy