# Golf’s enduring role in Scottish conflicts revealed in new R&A exhibition



The intertwining of golf and conflict is a narrative woven deep into the fabric of Scottish history, as illustrated by a new exhibition at The R&A World Golf Museum in St Andrews. Titled *Bunker Shots: Stories of Golf and Conflict*, the exhibition presents a colourful array of stories that trace the evolution of golf against the backdrop of military strife. It highlights how the sport has both influenced and been influenced by moments of societal upheaval, revealing nuances that are often overlooked in conventional discussions of golf’s heritage.

The origins of golf in Scotland can be traced back to the 15th century, with the first recorded mention being a ban imposed by King James II in 1457. In a bid to prepare his subjects for the frequent conflicts with England, the king sought to redirect their focus from recreational pursuits like golf to essential military training, especially archery. This was not merely a passing thought; the Act prohibited both golf and football, charging local barons with enforcement, and imposing penalties on violators, a clear sign of the seriousness with which the monarchy approached military readiness. The ban would remain in force until 1502, when King James IV recognised the game’s enduring appeal and allowed it to flourish once more.

As Kieran George, a curator at the museum, elaborates, the connection between golf and military service persisted through the years. The Society of St Andrews Golfers, which eventually became The Royal and Ancient Golf Club, was established in 1754, with many members coming from military backgrounds. This enduring relationship with the armed forces is perhaps encapsulated in the ceremonial red jackets worn by the club's captains, echoing the attire of military uniforms.

The exhibition not only recounts the historical significance of the game but also delves into poignant stories of resilience. It showcases how golf has served as a form of rehabilitation for soldiers, both physically and mentally. Archival footage reveals wounded veterans from World War I and World War II taking to the greens during their recovery. One particular story features a soldier who, having faced the grim realities of conflict in Afghanistan, attributes a significant part of his healing to the sport. Artifacts from these eras, including testimonies and film footage, vividly illustrate golf’s role in helping those scarred by war reclaim a sense of normalcy.

Among the prominent figures highlighted in the exhibition is Freddie Tait, a celebrated amateur golfer and member of the Black Watch, who tragically lost his life in the Boer War at the age of thirty. His legacy continues to resonate within the golfing community. Similarly, the exhibition encapsulates the stories of other golfers who faced severe wartime injuries yet returned to the sport. For instance, Tommy Armour, known as ‘The Silver Scot’, was blinded by mustard gas but famously regained his sight to win The Open at Carnoustie in 1931.

The contributions of women in this realm also receive due attention. Figures like Doris Chambers and Pam Barton exemplify the integral role women played during wartime. Chambers, a member of The Curtis Cup side, risked her life driving ambulances between field hospitals, while Barton, reigning champion at the Women’s Amateur Championship in 1939, tragically died in a plane crash during her service in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force.

Moreover, the exhibition touches on the ingenuity of prisoners of war, who crafted golf balls from makeshift materials such as leather shoe soles and cane, demonstrating the sport's enduring allure even under the direst circumstances. The Red Cross facilitated the delivery of golf clubs to these camps in response to requests from captured RAF officers, underscoring golf's significance in maintaining morale.

Compounding the narrative is the impact of the world wars on golf’s domestic scene, where championships like The Open were suspended. Notable golfers, including Henry Cotton, took part in fundraising exhibition matches to support war efforts, raising impressive sums for the Red Cross.

*Bunker Shots: Stories of Golf and Conflict* runs until March next year, inviting visitors to explore the multifaceted relationship between golf and human resilience amid conflict. Through artifacts, artwork, and personal stories, it paints a comprehensive picture of how a beloved sport has navigated and influenced the tumultuous waters of history.

As this exhibition unfolds in the birthplace of golf, it serves as a poignant reminder of how sport can bridge divides and foster healing in even the darkest of times.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/when-scotland-banned-pointless-football-and-golf-598011), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_golf)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/sport/golf/10-important-dates-in-the-history-of-golf-in-scotland-3354196)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/), [[3]](https://www.scotland.org/inspiration/top-10-facts-about-golf-in-scotland)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_golf), [[7]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/a-brief-history-of-golf-in-scotland/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/when-scotland-banned-pointless-football-and-golf-598011), [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/sport/golf/10-important-dates-in-the-history-of-golf-in-scotland-3354196)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.scotland.org/inspiration/top-10-facts-about-golf-in-scotland), [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_golf)
* Paragraph 10 – [[5]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/), [[7]](https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/a-brief-history-of-golf-in-scotland/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25190835.learn-golfers-showed-iron-will-wartime-new-r-exhibition/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/when-scotland-banned-pointless-football-and-golf-598011> - In 1457, King James II of Scotland banned both football and golf through an Act of Parliament, aiming to redirect the populace's focus from these games to archery practice, which was deemed essential for military readiness. This legislation was part of a broader effort to ensure that citizens were prepared for potential conflicts, particularly with England. The ban was enforced by local barons and the King's officers, with violators facing penalties. The prohibition remained in place until 1502, when King James IV lifted it, allowing golf to be played once again.
3. <https://www.scotland.org/inspiration/top-10-facts-about-golf-in-scotland> - Scotland is renowned as the birthplace of golf, with the first recorded mention of the game dating back to the 15th century. In 1457, golf was banned by parliament as it was seen as a distraction from military training. The ban was repealed in 1502, and King James IV made the first documented purchase of golf clubs in the same year. The country boasts over 550 golf courses, including some of the finest links courses in the world, such as Turnberry, Royal Troon, and Old Prestwick.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_golf> - The modern game of golf is generally considered to be a Scottish invention. The word 'golf' is thought to be a Scots alteration of Dutch 'colf' or 'colve', meaning 'stick, club, bat'. The first documented mention of golf in Scotland appears in a 1457 Act of the Scottish Parliament, an edict issued by King James II of Scotland prohibiting the playing of the games of 'gowf' and 'futball' as these were a distraction from archery practice for military purposes.
5. <https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/world-golf-museum/> - The R&A World Golf Museum in St Andrews is hosting an exhibition titled 'Bunker Shots: Stories of Golf and Conflict', which explores the deep-rooted connections between golf and warfare. The exhibition delves into historical instances where golf intersected with military events, highlighting how the sport has been intertwined with conflict throughout history. It features artifacts, artwork, film footage, and testimonies that shed light on the relationship between golf and conflict. The exhibition will run until March next year.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/sport/golf/10-important-dates-in-the-history-of-golf-in-scotland-3354196> - The history of golf in Scotland is marked by several significant events. In 1457, during the reign of James II, the first mention of golf occurred when the game was banned by the Scots Parliament. This ban was reaffirmed in 1470 and 1491, with the 1491 Act under James IV using the spelling 'gouff'. The ban was lifted in 1502, and James IV made the first recorded purchase of golf equipment, a set of golf clubs from a bow-maker in Perth.
7. <https://www.bunkered.co.uk/golf-news/a-brief-history-of-golf-in-scotland/> - Golf's origins in Scotland trace back to the early 15th century. In 1457, King James II banned golf, along with football, through an Act of Parliament, believing these games distracted his subjects from military training, particularly archery practice. The ban remained until 1502, when King James IV lifted it, allowing golf to be played once again. This period marked a significant moment in the history of Britain, paving the way for the Union of the Crowns just over a century later.