

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
AYR and ALLOWAY CURLING CLUB
1854-2010**

The Early Years

The origins of the Club, which was originally named Ayr and Alloway Agricultural Curling Club, are relatively unknown due to the incomplete nature of records at the time.

However there are references in local curling records to the digging of a Curling Pond at Rozelle Estate in 1853 in the area between the existing ponds and the Slaphouse (or Curtecan) Burn. [NB-The sides of the Pond and location of the sluice into the Burn can still be found in the wood which grew up on the site from the 1950's onwards].

There are also references to the appointment in 1853 of Lady Jane Hamilton of Rozelle as Patroness of the Ayr and Alloway Agricultural Curling Club, which seems to have become active in **1854**, long held to be its foundation year.

Lady Jane was a daughter of the 12th Earl of Eglinton and married Archibald Hamilton of Rozelle. In 1857 she presented a handsome gilded silver medal to "the Curling Clubs of Ayr possessing the Rozelle Flushes to be annually competed for". The Ayr and Alloway Club is the only one of these clubs to have been continuously in existence since then, and still has this medal in its possession.

Over the years the Club has acquired a number of other trophies which are still competed for including The Club Medal (1862), The McCreath Medal (1876), The Fergusson Rose Bowl (1900), The Blairston Medal (1900), The Sandra Giles Salver (1997) and The Tom Clydesdale Quaich (1998).

There are few records of the Club up to the 1880's although results of matches can be searched out in the copies of local newspapers of the period – e.g. on 9 December 1869 there were 5 matches played on Rozelle Pond between the Agricultural Club and the then Ayr Curling Club, with the Agriculturalists winning by 130-55 in aggregate.

The Balgarth Connection

Mr John B Fergusson of Balgarth was President of the Club in 1891. Over a period of 40 years from 1880 he held various offices in the Club, and in June 1919 he published a booklet in which he "thought a few notes might be of interest to my brother members and might recall happy memories of old friends and good games as they do to me after being one of the Club Skips for 30 years".

This booklet is a detailed record of games played and trophies won (including the Eglinton County Jug on 18 February 1888 at Craufurdland Loch by James Hutchison, J B Fergusson, John Steel and David White), and of Skips and Office-bearers over the 40 year period. It also helps to highlight the scarcity of information available about certain other periods in the Club's history.

What we do know is that outdoor curling in this part of the country – in spite of the 6 or so Ponds available locally – was neither frequent nor regular. Our winters were too mild! For example in a six year period from 1903 only 4 days competitive curling took place on Rozelle Pond. There were more Curling Dinners than Curling Matches in that period – the social side was to the fore, not neglected.

There were other, better years and in 1915-16 in a period of severe frost for 10 consecutive days all Club Competitions were played to a finish and Matches were played against 5 neighbouring clubs. The war effort, one supposes, was suspended for an enjoyable time! However just think about the logistics of communicating times of matches, other arrangements etc, then transporting stones and necessary equipment where needed, often by horse and cart – must have been fun in those more restricted times.

It is worth noting here that Mr John B Fergusson JP of Balgarth was involved in many activities during his life (1855-1930). At different times a member of Ayr Town Council and Ayr County Council, of The Royal Company of Archers (the Royal Bodyguard in Scotland), prominent in the affairs of the Ayrshire Agricultural Association, Ayr Philharmonic Society and as a director of Whigham Fergusson Cunningham & Co, Wine Merchants, he was best known as President of the Board of Directors of Ayr County Hospital from 1896-1929 during which time several important extensions to the Hospital were completed to the benefit of many local people as patients. A bronze bust of him by Benno Schotz can be seen in the Carnegie Library Local History Section.

During the first 30 years of the 20th century all the earlier Ayr Curling Clubs ceased to exist except one, Ayr and Alloway Agricultural Club.

Successful Times Leading to the Centenary

The Annual General Meeting on 9 October 1930 marked with respect the death of Mr J B Fergusson, and at the same meeting Mr J W Carnegie resigned as Secretary and Treasurer after filling these posts for 15 years. He was presented with a pair of silver-mounted ivory curling handles, a writing bureau, a wristlet watch for Mrs Carnegie and a wallet containing £13.10/- in notes.

Mr Carnegie seems to have enjoyed the experience, for not only did he return as Secretary and Treasurer from 1932-38, but also skipped the Club Rink which won the Eglinton Jug in April 1931 at Crossmyloof Ice Rink, Glasgow, with his rink of J F McGill, H F Smith and J Cameron.

A Celebration Dinner in the Burns Monument Hotel that year was attended by 105 Curlers and on the same evening a Curlers Court was held. 40 of those present were admitted to the Brotherhood of the Broom.

On 21 December 1934 a Dinner attended by 126 people was held at the Burns Monument Hotel (followed by a Curlers Court when another 40 were admitted as Brothers of the Broom) in honour of the Club Rink which had won the Orr Ewing Trophy open to all Ayrshire Rinks but played at Crossmyloof. This winning Rink of J Beckett McGill, John Watson, Charlie Carnegie and Hillie Goodwin became known as "The Boys" Rink, and in 1939 when Hillie Goodwin had to stand down due to ill health to be succeeded by James (Bunty) McWhirter, became the very successful rink known as the "Four Boys" who eventually became the principal founder members of The Gangrels Curling Club in 1940.

Curling continued sporadically as conditions allowed at Rozelle Pond through the years until 1949. At the AGM that year it was reluctantly agreed to leave Rozelle and make use of Indoor Ice at the new Rink at Beresford Terrace, Ayr, where many members were already becoming active with other clubs.

There was obvious affection for the Club's old-established traditions and customs outdoors which had grown up with it, but the modern trend of indoor curling made it very difficult for these sentiments to find any real and practical expression. The young men like those who had brought such success to the Club after being fostered by it (and probably ensured its survival when other clubs had fallen by the wayside) would move to other clubs playing indoors. Thankfully, the members made the right decisions which allowed the Club to survive and prosper.

From 1950 all Competitions took place indoors, and from that date activity within the Club increased.

On 22 November 1954 a Dinner was held in the Burns Monument Hotel to celebrate the Centenary of the Club. Over 100 members, friends and representatives of other clubs attended under the chairmanship of Mr John Watson, who had recently been appointed as President of The Royal Caledonian Curling Club. Mr David Callan, President of Ayr and Alloway Agricultural Club, was happy to stand aside in favour of his fellow member who had achieved the prestigious appointment with the RCCC.

The Last 50+ Years

In 1957 the first Lady President of the Club Mrs Maimie Highet was appointed. It is now one of the strengths of the Club that it offers curling to everybody, and the Presidency has alternated between ladies and gentlemen for many years now.

In 1964 a new Constitution, largely drafted by Mr John Watson, was adopted and at that point the name was changed to **Ayr and Alloway Curling Club**.

In 1972 the Ice Rink at Beresford Terrace closed and subsequently in 1974 the Club moved to the new location at Tam's Brig, Limekiln Road, Ayr. The only curling recorded in 1973 was at a week-end spent by members at North West Castle, Stranraer.

In September 1995 70 Club Members and friends enjoyed a week-end Bonspiel and Dinner at North West Castle, Stranraer, to celebrate 100 years of membership of The Royal Caledonian Curling Club, a very special occasion.

In January 2001 a brief return was made to outdoor curling when 16 members were hurriedly rustled up to enjoy a gloriously sunny and crisp day up in the hills at Barskelly Farm near Crosshill. A great reminder of the sort of fun our ancestors must have enjoyed when the word went round that the ice was holding. A bit of curling doggerel composed to commemorate the occasion is at the end of this article.

In January 2010 4 members enjoyed a friendly outdoor match against Dalmellington CC at their invitation when the ice was solid up at Craigengillan estate – lets hope for more of these freezing winters!

The Club has gone from strength to strength in offering good social and competitive curling. The number of Club Rinks increased from 8 to 10 in 1994, and to 12 in 1998. There are presently 48 Playing Members, with 23 Reserves and 20 non-playing Members, a total of 91 members, one of the largest in the area.

These Members have been associated with the Club for up to 30 years, and there is a very good mix of experienced players as well as those new to curling amongst the Reserves.

It is a fine sight to see the 6 sheets of Ayr Ice Rink filled with Ayr and Alloway Club Members on a Wednesday at 5.00, 6.15 or 7.15 pm, enjoying their curling in League, and in Knock-Out Cup (where Skips move down to Lead and others step up accordingly) with enthusiasm and good fellowship. Our Members also participate fully in external competitions such as 2 rinks in the Ayr Day Leagues, the Province Knock-Out and Medal, the Ross Low and Parish competitions, as well as friendly matches against local clubs including regular annual matches against The Gangrels and Auchincruive in addition to challenge matches each season against different Ayrshire clubs.

The social side is not neglected, eg members have enjoyed recent Pre-season Barbecues thanks to the generosity of several members with large gardens capable of entertaining 50-60 hungry and thirsty souls. They have proved an excellent way to shrug off the summer blues and make contact before the tussles on the ice commence.

Ayr and Alloway Curling Club is in very good heart as it moves on past its 150th Anniversary which was celebrated with a Bonspiel, Civic Reception and Grand Dinner at Brig O'Doon Hotel on 19 November 2004 involving more than a hundred enthusiastic curlers, and a week-end away at Stranraer in February 2005 attended by over 50 members and friends.

More recent highlights include –

Winning the **Province Medal** in January 2007 with our 2 triumphant rinks being Graham Boyd, Neil Beattie, Walter Walsh and Milly Beattie; and Charlie Steele, John MacLeod, Pat MacLeod and Anne Paterson.

A tutorial and master-class in September 2007 by Olympic Gold Medallist Rhona Martin who enthused our members to improve their aims and ambitions.

A Club which was big enough in season 2008/9 to field 2 teams up in the Ayr Ice Rink “B” Day League with one of them going on to promotion to League “A”, and subsequently maintaining that position for Season 2010/11.

Winning the Ayr Ice Rink **Ross Low Trophy** in Season 2009/10 for the first time of trying over 40+ years, with a team in the semis and finals of Graham Boyd, Neil Beattie, Ken Gray and Bella Kennedy.

The Club looks forward to being at the forefront of Ayrshire curling for many years to come.

Ode to Outdoor Curling

(at Barskelly Farm, 20 January 2001)

At half-past six, on a Friday night,
The Secretary's telephone rang.
"Have you fire in your belly? There's good ice at Barskelly.
How many could come along?"

The phone-lines went red, to those who had said,
"If the Grand Match is on, please ask".
And about a dozen, and somebody's cousin,
Got ready their gear and their flask.

Sat'rday dawned bright, and it seemed just right
For a match that was grand, tho' small.
To Crosshill we sped, with maps being read;
Most got there nae bother at all.

The gear owned by Sandy, proved very handy,
And two measured rinks soon looked fine.
T' mark the house you use a plank fixed wi' screws,
And a chisel creates the hog line.

The first stones are thrown, there's a collective groan,
You need muscles to become a star.
"Sweep, sweep, you swine! Will it reach the hog line?"
"What d'you mean, the near or the far?"

But the effect of the sun, and the brooms and the fun,
Soon had most folk sliding stones in.
It was time for a break, and a chance to take
A bite, and a dram (or sloe gin).

More curling was done, till we lost the sun,
And the strength had flowed out of our boots.
What a wonderful day, hip-hip hurray!
Ayr and Alloway's back tae its roots.