

Awa' Ye Go, Ma Bonny Bird

Part II

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FROM late 1884 to late 1885, it seemed the world was against Douglas Rolland. The judgement of Lord Lee against him in the Court of Session left him with potentially crippling debts and the powers at Royal Liverpool had prevented him playing in the new Amateur Championship. The case brought by Louisa Campbell against him had not gone well for him and the version of events that he was indeed the father of her child, put forward by Miss Campbell's lawyer, William Dunn, remained unchallenged as Rolland did not appear in court, despite two summonses.

This was a considerable financial burden and the amounts specified may have been influenced by a comment in the *Condescence* reading,

The Defender is an expert Golf Player and at this game he makes large sums of money. He takes part in Golf matches all over the country both in England and Scotland.

The judgement required Rolland to pay £100 for the seduction of Miss Campbell and a further £100 for breach of promise, together with an annual support payment of £8 for twelve years. The Court also ruled that Rolland's assets should be frozen, or in the language of the time

in the meantime ye lawfully fence and arrest all and sundry the whole readiest moveable goods and gear, debts and sums of money and other moveable effects belonging to or addebted to the said defender.

Under this sort of pressure and in line with the rumours of the time, it may have seemed reasonable for Rolland to retreat to England, where he may have been outside Scottish jurisdiction. Except he didn't go to England immediately. He remained in Scotland at least a full four months after the judgement. He lived with his sister Margaret Manderson (née Rolland) in Leith and participated in a Leith GC competition on New Year's Day 1885, on Leith Links. He also played and won an Earlsferry Thistle competition on the 21st of February 1885.

The judgement of the Scottish Court of Session could be applied by an English Court, but the practical and financial difficulties in finding a defender in England and applying through the County Court system were significant hurdles for many, including Louisa Campbell.

Life in England

He did move to England in 1885 and applied to play in the newly founded Amateur Championship, but as we have seen, the Committee found a form of words which allowed Ball to participate but excluded Douglas Rolland from the competition. Rolland had moved south by the time Bob Martin won that year's Championship, but he had not been forgotten; at the prizegiving that year Old Tom said in a clearly audible whisper that 'they should all thank the Lord that Dougie Rolland is holed out in England'.

Rolland lived in Liverpool where he worked on the largest civil engineering project of the day – the Mersey Rail Tunnel. Three tunnels were to be dug, one for the two tracks, a drainage tunnel and a ventilation tunnel. Significant ventilation shafts were also built. It is estimated that some 38 million bricks were used for the construction of the main tunnel. Sufficient to keep even Rolland busy.

In his obituary of Rolland, published in *Golf Illustrated*, Harold Hilton wrote,

He was following his profession as a stone mason and was employed for some time in connection with the excavation of the tunnel under the Mersey. At odd times one would see him playing a game at Hoylake or Blundellsands. (West Lancashire GC)

Money was found to build extensions to the tunnel, and these could well have kept Rolland occupied until he secured a position in golf. It is also possible that he took this job in Liverpool, working at his trade on a project where continued employment was assured, not to avoid the reparations due to Miss Campbell, but in order to meet them.

Rolland reappeared in a golfing capacity in February 1888 as the Professional and greenkeeper at The Worcestershire Golf Club in Malvern. This appointment was the stroke of luck he was waiting for, but it nearly didn't happen.

The Worcestershire Golf Club (Feb 1888 – Feb 1891)

Facing the resignation of their Professional and greenkeeper Peter Paxton, the Hon. Sec. sent a letter to William Dunn of Westward Ho! offering him the position of Professional at the Malvern Club. However, this was done without the full approval

of the Committee and when this was discovered, the offer was withdrawn.

Some members had another candidate in mind and John Erskine Douglas Stewart Rolland was quickly approached. He attended Worcestershire GC on the 22nd of February 1888 and accepted a six-month contract starting on 27th of that month. This was the norm for the time.

It is recorded in the minutes that a Mr Scott of the Committee says,

Rolland expressed a wish, with which the committee seemed to agree, that he should bring his wife and sister to live in and to run the clubhouse. At this appointment Rolland was 28 years of age and in the prime of his life.

None of his five sisters was ever in Malvern and neither was he married. Rolland was returning to type. This could be the reason why, a few years later, a caddy made his own view of Rolland clear by writing in pitch on a prominent green 'D.R. is a man.' Little more needs be said.

The Worcestershire GC was a prime appointment in the growing world of golf in England and his six-month contract was extended as soon as the Malvern club realised his qualities. In July 1888 he was offered a permanent engagement, including 'accommodation free of rent, rates, coal and water' on the proviso that he kept the clubhouse clean and attended to members' needs. He was also fortunate that his arrival at the Club coincided with their expansion from twelve holes to eighteen, with nine holes on either side of the railway. A year to the day after he joined The Worcestershire GC, the Committee agreed to pay him five pounds for his work supervising the creation and fabrication of this extension. This is the first of many instances of Rolland's work on design and construction of holes or entire courses.

The condition of the existing course was improving too. The Worcestershire Chronicle of the 8th of September 1888 notes in its report of the Monthly Cup that 'the greens being in excellent condition owing to the care of the professional, Douglas Rolland.'

He made a major impact on the playing side too. In September 1888, Rolland played with Major Lewes, a committee man who had favoured his appointment, scoring 71 for the new eighteen-hole course. This was significantly better than any score seen at Malvern before and was unmatched for years.

An important event in Rolland's life took place in October 1890, when he met Harry S Colt at Malvern. On Wednesday the 1st of October, Mr Colt returned an 84 - 5 = 79 in difficult conditions to win the monthly medal. They must have met, and the pair developed a strong relationship over the years, co-operating in designs and at Rye, where they were Secretary and Professional respectively and at Bexhill-on-Sea where Douglas became the Professional and Harry was a member.

Rolland's record in professional matches from 1888-1890 was exceptional. So far, I have found that he played twelve matches and three stroke play events in this period, winning eleven matches (losing to Archie Simpson in the other), and winning all three stroke play events he entered.

St George's

It would be fair to say that the concept of a professional golf tournament was born at St George's GC in 1888. This was the first in a series of professional tournaments, which sat neatly alongside the money matches that had been the catalyst for establishing golf in England. The St George's tournament assembled an extraordinarily strong field of 32 professionals (see draw sheet).

In *A Course for Heroes. A History of The Royal St George's Golf Club*, edited by FR Furber, he notes that, 'they (the professionals) had been tempted south by the offer of not one but two tournaments, together with subsidiary events and cash prizes.' Comparing the fields for the St George's tournament and that year's Open Championship at St Andrews you could make a compelling case for the former being stronger. HG Hutchinson thought that the St George's meeting 'as representative a gathering of professional talent as has ever been seen in the whole of golfing history.'

One conspicuous absentee was the Open Champion Jack Burns, who remained in St Andrews rather than travel south. Rolland did meet Burns seven months later, in June 1889, and beat him 8/7, albeit at Douglas's home course at Malvern.

Dr Laidlaw Purves was, of course, the driving force behind this enterprise. The first competition of the week was held at the new Littlestone club, a few miles from Sandwich, which had been designed by Dr Purvis himself. The main professional match play event took place from the 5th to the 7th of November 1888 and may well be the first such tournament. As was the norm, there was a significant purse on offer and betting on the outcomes was actively encouraged. Douglas played well in difficult conditions with wins against Alexander, Gow, David Brown and Willie Park, but lost to Archie Simpson in a closely fought final where an extra hole was necessary to separate the two Earlsferry friends.

Rolland had been the favourite to beat Archie Simpson in the final and it is reported that the standard of play was high and clearly there was little between the protagonists. Rolland went one better in the following 36-hole stroke-play competition, winning it by four shots from Willie Park Jr (second) and eight from Archie Simpson (third). Rolland's first round of 82 was the lowest of the week.

Thus, the concept of a week's intensive golf had been established at St George's. This mixture of stroke play and match play and professional and amateur competitions was the model followed by Royal North Devon the following year and again in 1894 when the Open Championship was first played at St George's. If this is correct, it is difficult to think of the 1888 tournament at St George's being anything but the genesis of professional golf.

Westward Ho!

On Tuesday the 18th of June 1889, professionals teed off on a beautiful Devon day at Westward Ho! Like the event at St George's the previous year, both a match play and stroke play competitions would be played. Also following the format of the

St George's event, the amateur events would be held before the professionals were unleashed. To take the trophy, the winner would face five rounds of competition before he would win the twenty pounds first prize.

A strong field of 26 was scheduled to play, but Willie Fernie (Troon) did not appear. Rolland beat Peter Paxton 4/3; John Kay 6/5; Ben Sayers at the 21st; Archie Simpson 5/3 in the semi-final; and in the final he overcame David Brown 2/1 to win first prize.

The stroke play competition was contested by the whole field and would be decided by the best aggregate score over two rounds played on Thursday afternoon (the 20th of June). Douglas Rolland showed a level of consistency that was not always in evidence in his play and won with rounds of 83 and 85 for 168 and a prize of eight pounds.

A good week's work and together with his performance the previous year at Sandwich laying a strong claim to be the player

to beat in both forms of the game. Douglas had done well in his three years at Malvern but decided on a move south.

In *Famous Golf Links*, 1891, Horace Hutchinson notes, This club has had a professional for the past four years, Douglas Rolland, whom members of the club are not alone in thinking the finest golfer of the day.

This was the earliest claim that Douglas was the best player in the world.

Limpsfield Chart (February 1891 – August 1894)

Douglas travelled south to Limpsfield Chart GC, a few miles west of Sevenoaks. It is unclear exactly what drew him to this specific club. Golf in the south of England was booming and the options for a professional/ greenkeeper with his growing reputation in both aspects of the role were considerable. Limpsfield Chart was (and remains) a charming nine-hole course, newly

Professional Matchplay Tournament					
St George's GC, Sandwich, 5 th - 7 th November 1888					
Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Semi-final	Final	Winner
B Sayers J Kirkaldy) Sayers, after a tie) Park, 6 holes) Park, 1 hole) Rolland, 1 hole) Simpson After a tie
W Park B Campbell) Park, 4 holes				
R Kirk C Thomson) Kirk, 2 holes				
P Fernie T Morris) Fernie, 4 holes				
J Gow JOF Morris) Gow, 2 holes) Rolland, 10 holes) Rolland, 1 hole		
D Rolland A Alexander) Rolland, 6 holes				
D Brown T Dunn) Brown, w/o) Brown, 7 holes) Campbell, 5 holes		
F Park C Crawford) Park, after a tie				
D Anderson H Kirkaldy) Anderson, 2 holes) Anderson, 2 holes) Campbell, 4 holes		
G Fernie D McEwan) Fernie, 1 hole				
R Tait D Grant) Tait, 3 holes) Campbell, 4 holes) Simpson, 2 holes		
W Campbell J Simpson) Campbell, 4 holes				
D Pinkerton J Burns) Pinkerton, 3 holes) Simpson, 2 holes) Simpson, 3 holes		
A Simpson Merrit) Simpson, 10 holes				
J Thomson P Paxton) Thomson, 6 holes) Fernie, 6 holes			
W Fernie J Kaye) Fernie, 5 holes				

designed by James Paxton (professional at Eastbourne) and his son Peter, making use of the wonderful golfing conditions of the Surrey heathland.

The 1891 Census shows Douglas boarding above a pork butcher's shop in Limpsfield, owned and run by the Webster family. Rolland was there with his 'wife,' Emma from Leeds in Yorkshire. It may be possible that Emma was one of the two women who had worked at Malvern, but we may never know. Irrespective, his desire for company was undiminished.

His new position appears to have allowed him the opportunity both to develop his own game and to play professionally. His reputation as a long hitting, exciting player was undoubtedly key to the growth of exhibition matches in the south of England in the 1890s; Rolland was a major draw. His prolific distance with a gutta-percha ball was well known to the rapidly expanding legion of devotees and players new to the game that attended in large numbers to witness this phenomenon, which in turn attracted backers to him.

His record from 1891-1893 was again exceptional. Rolland competed in two stroke play tournaments and seven matches, winning both stroke play events and six of the seven matches. Rolland had not long been at his new home in Limpsfield when he played Ramsay Hunter from nearby Ashdown Forest and Tonbridge GC. Douglas was clearly in fine form taking the first leg of the home and away match by a score of 9/8. The return was played at Limpsfield Chart on the 16th of February 1891 and Rolland was again victorious winning by 4/3.

He also overcame Hugh Kirkaldy over 36 holes. A contemporary report records, '... However, for Kirkaldy to be beaten by ten holes in thirty-six hardly seems true form and I shall be surprised if the return match at Limpsfield is not a much closer affair'. Rolland won the second rubber 4/3 over 36 holes at Limpsfield Chart and had the match under control at all times.

In mid-September 1892 *The Illustrated Sporting and*

Dramatic News, reported on a match at Blackheath between Mr. Schacht and Rolland:

In the afternoon however, Rolland was in tremendous form and having acquired some knowledge of the links, he actually did the twenty-one holes in 100, which is *eight strokes in front of the record of the green*.

The scale of Rolland's achievement that afternoon with his score of 100 is demonstrated by the fact that it was only beaten fifteen years later in 1907, by JH Taylor using the new Haskell ball when he covered the 21 holes at Royal Blackheath in 99 strokes.

1893 matches

In 1893, I can find Rolland featuring in six matches, winning four. The match between Rolland and Hugh Kirkaldy in March 1893 has been beautifully documented in the June 2012 edition of *Through the Green* by Richard Williams in an article entitled *A Great Match*.

Kirkaldy had moved south to Ashdown Forest the previous year, following his brother's advice to 'follow the siller' and this was a much-anticipated match between 'two of the best professional players of their time'. The two courses they represented in 1893 were close together and they had played on a number of occasions with Rolland coming out on top each time. Williams quotes Darwin crediting Rolland for having 'largely started the fashion' for exhibition matches, something that the records reviewed for this article sustain.

The two golfers clearly got on well together – sharing a passion for hitting the ball as hard and as far as possible and their taste for whisky. They were two of the old school, who saw 'taking a nip' during a round as being an integral part of the game and its enjoyment. Kirkaldy was known for 'nippin' at his whisky 'to help his cough' but Rolland didn't bother to make an excuse for his considerable consumption.

Rolland won a fascinating battle 2/1, but it is worth noting



Archie Simpson, driving, against Douglas Rolland at St George's, 1888

that both played 105 shots for the 21 holes. Rolland completed the second round of seven holes in 32 shots against Kirkaldy's 37 and held on to the advantage this gave him. *Golf* magazine reported that Rolland had started the 'nippin' process' halfway through the match and it looks like it brought out his best golf.

A match against Robert B Wilson is interesting for a peculiar reason. In modern terms, Rolland gave Wilson six shots, and this must be taken into account when considering that this match is counted in the loss column.

Rolland's next match was up at East Lancashire GC. The Club arranged a foursome between Mr John Ball (who had tied for the £25 prize for best nett score) and Mr HH Hilton (who had tied for the best scratch score) and Sandy Herd and Douglas Rolland and many in the large crowd – estimated at over 1000 who came by special bus and train – thought that Sandy and Douglas would have their hands full. This is not surprising. Mr Hilton was the reigning Open Champion and Mr Ball the reigning Amateur Champion. The play was of a high standard, but the professionals Herd and Rolland, carried the day with a 4/3 win.

In November 1893 a match was stuck between Rolland and JH Taylor over 72 holes, 36 holes home and away. The first match was at Limpsfield on the 18th of November and remained tight over the front nine. However, they lunched with Rolland 5 up (Rolland scoring 76 to Taylor's 82). He sustained his excellent play and won the match 8/6.

At Winchester, Taylor came out fighting and a back nine of 35 meant they lunched with Taylor 2 up. The match finished three up to Taylor on the day; Rolland winning 5 up overall. One

specific incident is worthy of repetition: *Golf* reported,

A piece of good luck enabled Rolland to half the thirteenth. Both were on the green in 3. Rolland's putt lay about three feet and Taylor laid his ball eighteen inches from the hole, leaving Rolland in a dead stymie. He attempted a lofting putt with his mashie, but pitched on top of Taylor's ball, driving it to the left of the hole and running in himself.

The writer concludes his report,

It will be interesting to see what these two grand players will do, should they happen to meet at Sandwich in the Open Championship competition next year, as we hope they may.

The figures again demonstrate that Rolland was the best golfer in the country in 1893.

1894

The opportunity to contest the Championship once again certainly seemed to be firmly in Douglas's mind as he entered 1894. The defending Champion was Willie Auchterlonie and he saw little need to venture far from his thriving business in St Andrews for anything less than the Championship itself. In 1894, Rolland featured in two tournaments and 21 matches, registering a second and third place in the tournaments and winning sixteen matches during the year and halving one.

The January match between Douglas Rolland and J Pearson vs CR Smith and James Braid at Limpsfield Chart was interesting for one reason, that three of the four competitors learnt their golf at Earlsferry. The golf was very even over the two rounds played with Rolland's side winning 2/1 in the morning but losing one down in the afternoon. Indeed, the year was wonderfully



Rolland driving against Hugh Kirkaldy, Blackheath, 1893
Image courtesy Royal Blackheath GC

bookended as his final match of the year at Chiswick was Rolland and George Keddie playing James Braid and James Keddie. All four were from Earlsferry.

Rolland played a match with Ben Sayers in February at the opening of Norwich GC which attracted significant crowds, including a large number of young ladies, not least because of the physical differences between the players. One lady was heard to say, 'I do hope the little one will win'. Rolland led most of the way, but Sayers stuck to him, and they played the final hole with Sayers leading for the first time in the match. However, Rolland's power told at the final hole and the match finished all square.

The Lytham and St Anne's Golf Club took the initiative early in the year to bring together JH Taylor and Douglas Rolland in a 36-hole challenge. Despite the bitter February weather their presence drew a large crowd, who had travelled in special buses and trains, and they were rewarded with a first-class match. *Golf* notes:

As Taylor was a bona fide Englishman this match has taken the form of an England vs. Scotland game.

Both players were out in 43 shots, but Rolland was 1 up, which given the strong north-west wind was excellent scoring. Rolland's inward nine of 38 was only good enough to win one further hole – 2 up at lunch. The afternoon conditions were worse but again Rolland had the better of the scoring. In both rounds Rolland had scored 3 shots fewer than Taylor and consequently won by 3/2.

He played a match against Tom Dunn also in February 1894 at Tooting Bec which became infamous. Rolland appeared at Furzedown in a dishevelled state and without boots or clubs. He borrowed a few clubs and a pair of boots from his host and in the words of Harold H Hilton 'proceeded to hammer him most unmercifully and lowered the course record at the same time'. Rolland won 5/4 and outscored Dunn by nine shots – breaking the course record with a 74 (40/34). His back nine included three 2s.

Rolland again faced JH Taylor at Mitcham on the 25th of May. He was 'off his game', which I take to be a euphemism for being hung over. His play in the morning was woeful and *Golf* records that 'he practically missed his tee shot' at the first hole. In the morning he scored 95 against 85 by Taylor and lunched six down. Rolland seemed to come round in the afternoon hitting his driver with menace and scoring a three at the 400-yard seventh hole. His rally, however, came too late and Taylor won the match 3/1 but it is clear that the two were very evenly matched at this stage in their careers

So, what does all this tell us?

Rolland was unbeatable between 1888 and 1890. His wins in three significant strokeplay tournaments at St George's, Royal North Devon and Llandrindod Wells were exceptional – beating his compatriots by a margin in each case.

His matchplay record during this period was also unmatched, winning eleven out of twelve games and losing the other to Archie Simpson after extra holes.

It is a similar story in 1891 and 1892. Rolland played in two strokeplay tournaments and won both. He participated in seven matches and won six.

In 1893, he played in six matches winning four, although as we have seen one of these losses was when giving RB Wilson 'a third' at Furzedown.

Rolland played more matches than anyone else in 1894, and he won more matches than anyone else in 1894.

He had played the emerging JH Taylor four times and beaten him twice.

On his day, Rolland was unbeatable. His scoring could be exceptional, and his long play was unmatched. However, his putting remained a significant weakness and could not be relied upon under pressure. Peter N Lewis in *The Dawn of Professional Golf* began his detailed statistical analysis in 1894 and concluded that Douglas Rolland had the best points average for that year.

Between 1888 and 1894 Rolland played in a total of 46 matches winning 38, an astonishing success rate of 83%. Over the same period he played in seven strokeplay tournaments winning five (a win rate of 71%). In the other two, he finished second and third.

However the incidents in the matches against Tom Dunn and JH Taylor reveals his increasing reliance on alcohol and gave a glimpse into the change in his fortunes that would overtake him over the next few years.

In a subsequent article I will explore a remarkable week in June 1894, when Rolland took on the world in a £100 challenge match; The Open Championship; a match play competition which brought together the best Amateurs and Professionals of the day, and the opening of Cinque Ports GC.

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