

Early Games

The Flemish impact on the cultural development of Scotland has been felt through influences on games such as bonspiel, caets and colf, the forerunners of curling, tennis and golf respectively. To understand how this influence from the Low Countries developed, and fully appreciate the evidence supporting this, it is necessary to explore how the Scottish language developed. See box 16A below.

16A

The formation of the Lallans language and culture

Following the Anglo Saxon settlement of Britain in the 5-7th centuries the standard language had become Old English in southern and eastern parts of Scotland, a language very similar to, and phonologically resembling to Old Frisian. Meanwhile, Old Dutch evolved into Middle Dutch around the 12th century. Old Dutch was spoken by the populace that occupied what is now southern Low Countries or Netherlands, northern Belgium, part of northern France, and parts of the Lower Rhine and Westphalia regions of Germany. The language of the Flemish was therefore Middle Dutch. The inhabitants of northern Dutch provinces, including Groningen, Friesland and Holland, spoke Old Frisian mutating to Middle Dutch.

Therefore all these languages are closely related and have remarkable phonological resemblance. In Scotland the Lallans language would develop from Old English and Middle Dutch and would later be known as Old Scots. Lallans is the original Scots as spoken in southern and eastern Scotland, referred to as the Lowlands of Scotland, and dates back to the period of migration of peoples from the Low Countries between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. It is an assimilation of the locally spoken English language and Flemish (Dutch) spoken by the immigrating people from mainly the southern Low Countries.

Lallans is nowadays mostly referred to as Old Scottish by linguists and is mostly forgotten as a language denomination. Numerous Lallans words of Flemish origin entered the Scots language. Lallans is a derivation of the Flemish (Dutch) word *laaglands*, meaning lowlands, and has a geopolitical and demographic connotation.

The Conquest of England by William Duke of Normandy, changed the Anglo-Saxon world in England, and later in Scotland too, into a modern Normanised culture and government with Franco-Norman (French) and Latin as prevailing languages replacing Old English in official documents. The influence of Flanders in the Normanisation process in Britain was substantial. Regionally in the Scottish burghs Flemish (Middle Dutch) was also introduced. Ultimately the new Anglo-Norman culture would assimilate with the Old English civilisation developing into a new Scottish Lowlands civilisation.

The establishment of new burghs – a Dutch word for a fortified town – changed the long-term economic and ethnic contours of Scotland through new inhabitants from Flanders with a different culture and language, pushing the traditional Gaelic culture further back and introducing the new Scottish Lowlands culture. Lallans became the new Scots language with substantial influence from the southern Low Countries region with Flanders as its main representative.

As explained in chapters 5 and 6 the relationship between Scotland and the Low Countries is marked by the large influx of Flemings – noblemen, merchants, artisans – during the Normanisation process of Scotland during the reign of David I and lasting through the reign of William I of Scotland (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries). Later there were also many Scottish – mercenaries, merchants, students – who settled in the Dutch Republic (northern Low Countries) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Republic included a large and influential Flemish population following the secession of the northern provinces. During the first period, known as the Davidian Revolution, there was a significant influence of Flemish/Dutch culture and language on civilisation in the burghs of Scotland, including the development of early games, the precursors to curling, tennis and golf.

Bonspiel

Illustrations nrs 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The game of curling or the curling bonspiel is considered a traditional Scottish game and certainly the game as it is today played worldwide has its origins in Scotland. However,

whether there has been an influence from the Low Countries on the early development of the game of curling itself has been the subject of lengthy discussions by historians (see bibliography at the end of the book). To date historians may not have sufficiently

16C

Curling's origins – the linguistic evidence

English dictionaries state that the game of curling is played with stones on ice (1610s) and that a description of a similar game is attested from Flanders (c. 1600). The word *curl* as a verb is derived from the metathesis of *crulle* (c. 1300), from Old English or Middle Dutch *krul*. In present day Dutch language *krullen* means to curl (v.), i.e. to cause an object to make a curling movement or motion. The word *bonspiel* (n.) consists of two elements, the word *spiel* and the prefix *bon*. The word *spiel* as a noun is related to Old English or Middle Dutch *spilian* (v.) meaning to play, and *spil* or *spel* (n.) meaning a game. Curling historians in Scotland have discussed the origins of the word or prefix *bon* in combination with *bonspiel* in length but without reaching consensus. However, it is highly probable that *bon* is related to Old English or Middle Dutch *bolle* (n.) meaning a round (wooden) object. This is similar to present-day English *bowl* (n.) and Dutch *bol* (n.), used in games. In the Germanic language the letters *-en* is added at the end of a word to create verbs and plurals. Therefore to play with a *bol* is *bollen* and the plural of *bol* is also *bollen*. In Dutch dialects the middle letters may dissolve in the pronunciation. Therefore *bollen* becomes *bol'n* or *bo'n*. The traditional Scottish curling word *bonspiel* is therefore possibly related to the Dutch *bollen spel* and *curling bonspiel* to *krul bollen spel*. Interestingly, today *het krulbol spel* is still played in the Netherlands and Belgium (area of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen) and is considered an old Flemish folk game, even protected by UNESCO as part of the national cultural heritage. A striking linguistic similarity.

recognised the role played by the Lallans element in Scottish history. In the words “curling” and “bonspiel” there may be sufficient etymologic (or word-based) proof that there is a Flemish connection. Traditionally the game of curling itself was referred to as a *bonspiel* played outdoors on ice. Today curling is mostly an indoor game and the word *bonspiel* is almost obsolete.

There is additional proof that the game of curling has been influenced by Flemish (Dutch) elements. In the medieval era in the Low Countries various ball games were

played with wooden objects according to various archaeological finds. The origins of many ballgames and stick- and ballgames from the middle ages are clouded by the lack of clear documentary evidence other than archeological finds. What evidence that exists is usually found in edicts banning certain games being played in the streets inside the town walls or in images painted in religious books of hours. In 16-17th century art of the Low Countries there are multiple paintings and drawings with illustrations of the *bollen spel*, whereby wooden bowls are rolled on flat land towards a stake as target.

Winters in Northern Europe during the Middle Ages were particularly cold and peaking during the so called Little Ice Age. In this manner the *bollen spel*, and similarly the game of colf too, was taken to the ice and played as a winter pastime in the Low Countries. The wooden *bol* was laid on its flat side and a wooden stick handle attached to aid the throwing over ice. Of particular significance is an archeological find of a set of six wooden *bollen* in Middelburg, dating from the fourteenth century. Clearer iconographic evidence is provided by a remarkable engraving by Robert de Baudous. Here we can clearly see a group of men playing a game on ice, most probably wooden *bollen* on their side, very similar to the curling bonspiel as it is played in Scotland.

It is very likely that in the period before c.1500 the game of *bollen* was introduced by Flemish immigrants to Scotland. The engraving by De Baudous indeed shows a variant of a game *krulbol spel* and demonstrates that the Flemish people may have played their game on ice in wintertime. It seems likely that there may have been some association between *krulbol spel* and curling, although the matter of origin and eventual adoption of curling may need more clarification.

It is therefore quite reasonable to conclude that the *bollenspel* – played both on land and on ice in the Low Countries – was introduced to Scotland by immigrant Flemings prior to c.1500 and that this game was merged with the native Scottish game of throwing kuting stones on ice after c.1500 to become the curling bonspiel we know today as the game of curling firmly integrated in Scottish culture.

Caitchpule

Illustration nrs. 5, 6, and 7.

Caitchpule in Scotland or *caets spel* in the Low Countries was originally played as a handball game and is considered to be a forerunner of the modern game of tennis. In England the game was referred to as tennis (or tinnis) but in Scotland the now almost extinct word caitchpule (a derivation of *caets spel*) was used to denominate the handball game. The word tennis (in a 1400 document spelt as tenetz) is derived from the French imperative *tenir*. 'Tenez' was used as a warning required by the rules of medieval tennis before serving the ball.

Discussing the game's origins David Murison, the renowned editor of The Scottish National Dictionary, suggested that:

"A sure indication of the close and cordial relations existing between the Netherlands and Scotland appears in the various names for games which the Scots borrowed chiefly in the 15th century and in one instance at least appropriated for good: cache, and later the combination cachepell, tennis, are Middle Flemish caetse(-spel); golf (Middle Dutch kolf, a club, kolven, a game with clubs), despite the disbelief of some Scottish devotees, is too well illustrated in Flemish painting to be anything else than of Dutch origin, however it may have been developed or modified in its adopted country..."

The early hand ball game was originally an outdoor game played on the open field or in the streets. The clergy played the game in enclosed courtyards of the cloister or palace.. Traditionally the game was played between two opposing teams of three players. Court play was limited to single or double players and also a cord or net was introduced for the ball to be played over as an additional obstacle. Ball games, like *caets* and *colf*, became hugely popular games in the Low Countries, especially Flanders and later Holland.

Racket tennis played on courts in Europe and Britain mostly replaced the handball game played outside and was a game of aristocrats and royalty due to the exclusivity of available space and buildings. An enclosed tennis court required large dimensions and was usually attached to palace buildings or otherwise special tennis houses were built.

In Scotland the construction of an open caitchpule (or tennis court) at Falkland Palace began in 1539 and still stands today as the earliest existing tennis court in Britain.

In its heyday the game in Scotland was not called tennis but rather caitche, a term originating from the Dutch word *caets* used in the Low Countries. The game of *caets* or caitche was undoubtedly first introduced by the wave of Flemish immigrants during and after the Normanisation period of Scotland. Most of what is known about caitchpule in Scotland relates to the royal Stuart reign from the late fourteenth century, although there is reference to the game as early as the reign of Alexander III in the thirteenth century. Dynastic ties with the royal court in France are the main reason for the games popularity amongst Scottish nobility. During the Stuart period there is mention of caitche being played in Perth, Stirling, St Andrews and Edinburgh.

Caitchpule remained a highly popular game at the royal courts of Scotland and England until the Civil War of the 17th century from which the game never fully recovered, that is until the introduction of the new Victorian form of lawn tennis, introduced in 1874 by Major Winfield. The old game of tennis played inside walled courts has sporadically continued to this day and is better known as real tennis as opposed to lawn tennis. The mention of caitche as a game is important here as the stuffed leather ball played with made a cross-over to colf (or golf), most probably in the late fifteenth century in Scotland.

Golf

Illustrations nrs. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18.

The origin of the game of golf is probably the most debated subject among golf historians. By whom and where golf was invented is an inappropriate question to pose as early games are not invented but rather evolve over time and are influenced by numerous cultural developments. Moreover stick and ball games in medieval times were played in varying forms and were not governed by standard rules as is the convention today.

Golf historians have commonly focussed on the comparisons and analogies between the game of golf in Scotland and the game of *colf* (also spelled *kolf*) in the Low Countries, especially during the 17th century in the Dutch Republic in the north of the region. The reason for this focus is the abundance of images representing the game of *colf* in popular landscape paintings and portraits by many well-known Dutch masters. The similarities between the two games in Scotland and the Dutch Republic are indeed quite striking. There is documentary evidence to suggest that the two games are closely related, leading historians to the unsubstantiated conclusion that golf has its origins in Holland. A closer analysis however suggests that there is a distinct Scottish influence in the game being played by the Dutch in Holland. There is little doubt, however, that the words golf (or goff, gouwf, and other spellings) and colf (or kolf) are linguistically related. But there is an issue as to whether an earlier Flemish connection gave rise to the game of golf in Scotland.

A starting point for addressing this issue is to look at the game of *colf* played in the northern Low Countries. With the founding of the Dutch Republic, following the fall of the city of Antwerp in 1585 during the 100 Years War, large numbers of people from Flanders and Brabant fled the southern Netherlands and settled in the northern towns and cities. Almost half of the population left Flanders to settle in Holland and other provinces. This included the upper crust of Flemish society consisting of wealthy merchants and bankers, intellectuals and artists. This influx of Flemings substantially influenced cultural development in the north, including an increase in popularity of games such as *caets*, *bollen* and *colf*.

In the northern Low Countries vice versa numbers of Scots also settled in the Dutch Republic, either attracted as students to the University of Leiden, the now famed bulwark of religious and intellectual freedom in Europe; or as mercenaries in support of the Dutch military warfare against the Spanish Habsburg armies; or as merchants to protect the important Scottish staples of commodity goods stored in the Dutch warehouses, such as wool stored in Veere and Rotterdam.

There is an abundance of evidence of the Scottish influence on the game of *colf* in the northern Low Countries at this time, both in paintings and in literature, especially the

typical Scottish wooden jointed clubs as opposed to the single one piece club (*colf*) used by the Dutch. The development and popularisation of this Dutch game of *colf* benefitted from the traditional game of golf being played in Scotland at the same time and that there was a distinct cross fertilisation between the two games. Notable is that large quantities of leather golf balls were exported from the Low Countries to Scotland.

It is most probable that golf in Scotland would have originally been introduced by Flemish settlers in Scottish burghs during the Lallands period following the Davidian Revolution and Normanisation of the country, forging a new culture and language. As noted earlier in the chapter several games were introduced to Scotland from the Low Countries, especially Flanders. These dominant Flemish games assimilated with local Celtic and Anglo-Saxon games and customs to form the games known today in Scotland. There is sufficient linguistic and phonological proof that the Scottish word golf derives from the Middle Dutch word *colf* used by Flemish immigrants at the time.

The early game of golf in Scotland was probably played in various forms. From illustrations in early books of hours made by Flemish masters in the fourteenth century we can discern two basic forms of play of stick and ball games by the name of *colf*: one with two opposing teams with a number of players contesting a single ball (similar to today's shinty game in Scotland); and the other with two or more individual players playing their own ball towards a set target (similar to today's golf).

Another interesting fourteenth century illustration is found in the Flemish book of hours by Simon Bening with three *colf* players each playing their wooden balls on land towards a hole in the ground. The fourth man is probably the person acting as neutral arbiter and pointing at the inn where the waiting innkeeper stands in the doorway ready to serve beer after the game when the customary wagers are settled. Arbiters were necessary because of the heavy gambling and betting habits of the players.

Comparable is another illustration of *colf* players in a similar book of hours, depicting a player in full swing and another attempting to stroke his ball into a hole. In the background the contours of the town of Antwerp are visible. The game is played on land and contradicts the assumption by some Scottish golf historians that the Flemish game was a short distance game played on ice towards a post as target. Clearly the early game of *colf* was originally played on land and not on ice as later became customary. It is also

demonstrably a long game requiring a full swing at the ball. And finally the ball is played into a hole as target. The game of *colf* was originally played with a wooden ball, that was succeeded by the leather ball stuffed with hair, that made a cross-over from the game of *caets* (known as *caitchpule* in Scotland). It is probable that this cross-over was realised in Scotland where golf had become increasingly popular whereas in the Low Countries *caets* was still the dominant game.

The earliest written record of golf played in Scotland is the Act of Parliament of 1457 banning playing the game of golf in Edinburgh and other cities in Scotland. Military training was essential at this time, with archery practice made compulsory for men, starting at a young age. Both golf and football met with the disapproval of the civic establishment and military authorities in part because it took time away from archery practice and in part because it caused havoc when played in the town streets.

Golf, although considered a royal and ancient game by the House of Stuart in Scotland, had not yet made it to royal status in England. With James' ascension to the throne in London he had moved his court and entourage from Edinburgh to London and with it a large retinue of Scottish noblemen and gentleman merchants. In this manner the Scottish game of golf of Flemish descent was introduced to England and instituted at Blackheath in London as a royal pastime. The arrival of these Scots strengthened London's position as the centre of merchant trade with its close links to the particularly successful staple-market economy of the Dutch Republic, aided by the traditionally strong commercial ties with the Royal Burghs in Scotland, originally established by Flemish immigrants, firstly with Flanders but later shifting northward to Holland where Flemings had made their new home. In this manner of regular contacts between the three nations the Scottish game of golf in Scotland and the Dutch game of *colf* in the Republic, both having strong Flemish roots, adapted to and adopted from one another. In Scotland, including the Scottish enclaves in England, golf had become the favoured game of a new class of wealthy citizens, gentlemen and burghesses. In the Dutch Republic *colf* followed this same example. Confusingly this has led to the belief by some historians that the game of *colf* in Holland was the origin of golf in Scotland, whereas the true origins of golf go back to the Normanisation period and Lallans culture introduced by Flemish settlers in Scottish burghs.

It is very reasonable to conclude that the highly popular games of golf and *colf*, simultaneously played in the 15-17th centuries in both Scotland and the Dutch Republic, were very similar and closely related, not only linguistically and phonologically but also in the manner of play and material used, and that therefore the two games have a joint and shared ancestry. In view of the close ties between Scotland and the Republic it also reasonable to conclude that both games influenced one another. This is clearly visible in numerous Dutch paintings portraying Scottish players and players using Scottish jointed clubs.

In view of the Flemish migration to Scotland from the southern Low Countries during the Normanisation period and the later migratory move of Flemings to the Dutch Republic the logical conclusion is that the shared ancestry of golf in Scotland and *colf* in Holland is the Flemish origin of both games.