

Henry Burrows (1891-1957)
A legendary professional golfing pioneer in the Benelux

By Robin K. Bargmann



Following the popularity explosion of the game of golf in last decade of the 19th century golf, Scotland's 'ain game' also landed on the shores of Holland. Before the turn of the century four golf clubs were established there, the first being Hague GC (or Haagsche GC) in 1893, followed by Doornsche GC (now UGC De Pan near Utrecht) in 1894, and then Roosendaelsche GC and Hilversumsche GC, both in 1895. These clubs idiosyncratically were founded by the Dutch aristocratic upper crust of society, having a close affinity with popular British sports and leisure activities of the Victorian age.

All four 9-hole courses of these first four clubs were designed and laid out by the young Scottish golf professional John Duncan Dunn (b.1872 in Wimbledon), who may be considered the first golfing professional golfing pioneer in the Netherlands. John Duncan Dunn was the grandson of the renowned golfer Willie Dunn Snr (b.1821 in Musselburgh), apprenticed under the Gourlay family of Musselburgh, who together with his twin brother Jamie Dunn created a legendary golfing dynasty. The Dunn's were probably the single most influential family in the history of golf, often overlooked by everyday historians. Willie and Jamie Dunn were almost unbeatable in foursome matches in the days of Alan Robertson and Old Tom Morris. In 1852 they jointly became the first club professionals of Royal Blackheath GC and were largely responsible for the popularity growth and expansion of golf in England following the introduction of the gutta percha ball.

Willie Snr had two sons, Tom Dunn and Willie Dunn Jnr, who were to become influential golf professionals in their own right as players, club makers and course designers. Willie Dunn Jnr

moved to America in the late 1880's and would win the first (unofficial) US Open in 1894. Tom started his professional golfing career in North Berwick and then moved to Royal Wimbledon before returning to his father's business at Leith Links. Having returned to North Berwick first in 1882 he then moved south again to become the club professional at Tooting Bec GC near London, where Arthur Balfour was a member and whom had learnt his golf from Tom Dunn at North Berwick. He then moved on to London Scottish GC, that shared its golf course with Royal Wimbledon.

Tom Dunn together with his son John Duncan established a successful golfing business, the Corporation Golf Links of Bournemouth in 1894. He had built an excellent reputation as a course designer as well as club and ball maker, expanding his business also to the European continent, where his services became much in demand. John Duncan was thus employed as partner in the family business and was sent by his father to Europe to commercially exploit golf's expansion there. John Duncan Dunn also visited The Hague and was contracted by Baron Van Brienens to set out the initial five holes on his Clingendael estate for his daughter Daisy's 18th birthday. He remained in The Hague in the summer of 1893 to expand the course to a proper 9-hole course and to give lessons to the members of the newly formed club. John Duncan Dunn was very well mannered and became very well accepted in the aristocratic golfing circles in Holland due to his excellent education at Clydesdale College in Hamilton, one of Scotland's best private schools. Building on his reputation he was able to repeat his pioneering business the next few summers in Holland before emigrating to America together with his young

brother Seymour (b.1882) to join their uncle Willie Dunn Jnr's business in the USA and both young men lived out the American dream as very successful and popular golfing professionals. But John Duncan Dunn would remain particularly proud of his association with the early Dutch clubs and their members mirrored by his popularity and friendship.

Haagsche Golf Club would employ a Scottish merchant based in The Hague as their first club professional in 1894. His name confusingly was also John Dunn but was not related to the Dunn family dynasty of Musselburgh. He was not a renowned golfer himself but was hired mainly to run the day to day matters of the club relating to course maintenance and selling/repairing golf balls and clubs to members, and organising club competitions. For this reason a proper golf professional, Albert J. Ife, was temporarily hired from England 1904 to give lessons to members during the summer months and improve their golfing standards. Ife was simultaneously retained by Doornsche GC and Roosendaelsche formember golf lessons in order to spread the costs per club for his services. Both Dunn and Ife would remain connected to Haagsche GC for a long period of time, until their respective deaths in 1932 and 1927.



Exhibition match between H. Burrows, Albert Ife and Ed Hill at Doornsche In 1911

However, the professional to become a legendary golfer in the Low Countries was the young Englishman Henry Burrows from Sunninghill in Berkshire. Following the founding of the more ambitious Kennemer GC in 1910 matters were taken in hand more seriously by the other four existing 'old four' golf clubs. The short lived Oranje GC, founded in 1900 in The Hague as an annex to Grand Hotel d'Orange

in Scheveningen, had unfortunately been forced to close doors in 1910 due to the city's railway expansion plans. Oranje GC had employed Bertram Dunn, the son of John Dunn of Hague GC as its golf professional. In that year too Haagsche had decided to retain and fully employ Albert Ife as their club professional. Doornsche too decided it was time for a club professional of its own to properly maintain its course on the Heidenstein estate in Driebergen. Most probably introduced by Ife, the young and ambitious Englishman Henry Burrows, only 20 years old, was contracted as its first club professional. From the club minutes it can be determined that after the first trial period a longer term contract was offered to Burrows from 1 October 1911 to 1 August 1912 with a probation of two months. He was to be supervised by the member of committee Gérard van Tets. It is also noteworthy that Doornsche received a request form Hilversumsche for Burrows to assist as a weekend teaching professional for its members starting in 1912. It appeared that Doornsche was quite satisfied with this talented young professional, who had started as a caddy at Sunningdale GC and had graduated to assistant golf professional with very good playing and teaching skills, but moreover a thorough understanding of course design and turf management. He was an all round golf professional who would leave his mark on the golf scene in Holland and later in Belgium and Luxemburg.



Henry Burrows after scoring a record 68 at Doornsche in 1913 (Revue der Sporten)

At the same time as Burrows' arrival at Doornsche another young English professional was contracted by the newly founded and ambitious Kennemer Golf Club. He was Edward J. Hill, who, however, was dismissed by the club committee in his first year of employment to be succeeded by another Englishman Ernest N. Kettley. Hill was fortunate that Hilversumsche was in need of its own club professional and retained his services starting in 1913. Burrows and Hill became good friends and would remain in Holland for another decade. Although the Great War broke out in 1914 the Netherlands would remain reasonably stable due to its politically neutral position and did not face the horrible war atrocities of neighbouring Belgium and northern France.

Burrows was elected as member of the British Professional Golfers Association and remained a member all his life until his death in 1957.



Henry Burrows putting (c. 1915)

Other clubs in Holland would call on the professional services of Burrows too. He was invited in 1916 to be the summer golf professional at the Domburgsche, a newly established golf course by the local society club Luctor et Emergo. In that same year Hilversumsche acquired their new premises at Kievietsdal and Burrows was contracted to design and lay out the new 9-hole course (later in 1928 redesigned and expanded to an 18-hole course by the renowned golf architect Harry S. Colt). Burrows terminated his activities as club professional at Doornsche GC at the end of 1919

after a fruitful period of nine years. In that period he also married Cato van Essen in 1915, a local girl from Driebergen, who he had acquainted through her brother Bertus van Essen being a groundsman at Doornsche GC and assisting Burrows with his duties as the club's keeper of the green. Burrows brought his brother-in-law along with him when working on the new 9-hole course of the Hilversumsche. Bertus van Essen would subsequently be retained by Hilversumsche GC as their new greenkeeper and he would remain in that position until his retirement, passing the baton on to his son Ben van Essen, greenkeeper of Hilversumsche for another forty years. Through his Van Essen relatives Burrows left a substantial mark on the development of the golf course in Hilversum he had initially designed.

In 1915 and in 1919 two daughters were born, Carrie and Catherine. Later in 1929 a third daughter named Dolly was added to the family. After Doornsche GC Henry Burrows moved on to Belgium although the records are not quite clear. He was a good friend of George Pannell, long time club professional of the prestigious Royal Golf Club de Belgique at Ravenstein near Brussels. He was also closely acquainted to E.C. (Chas) Warren of Royal Golf Club Le Zoute in Knokke.

In "The British Professional Golfers 1887-1930" published in 1994 by Alan Jackson – the information contained in this book is mostly taken from the Scottish Golfer's Handbook – it is stated that Burrows was connected to Royal Antwerp GC in 1920-1921. Thereafter he was connected to GC Sint André in Koksijde from 1922-1927. Thereafter he returned to Holland to become the club professional of the newly founded Oostvoorne GC.

Unfortunately, both the clubs of Sint André and Oostvoorne were unsuccessful and the golf courses became defunct. Sadly, because both Sint André, designed by Harry Colt, and Oostvoorne were wonderful links type golf courses situated on the North Sea coast. Clearly both new clubs had retained the services of Burrows because of his supreme knowledge of course layout and ground maintenance.

Harry Colt would describe the design and layout of GC Sint André as his best ever work on a most suitable terrain. An interesting article Courses in Belgium in The Times of 17 September 1923 by

its special Golf correspondent gives an excellent survey of this new course, initiated by Col. F.T. Bacon, a British golfing pioneer in Belgium.. The course was situated between Oostduinkerke and Koksijde and can still be viewed via the wonderful satellite images of Google Earth.

Similarly, the excellent golf course of Oostvoorne has almost disappeared from memory and the defunct course can be reconstructed and viewed from the sky. The Oostvoorne GC initiative on the terrain of the wealthy Rotterdam family Van Hoey Smith sadly failed following the collapse of the financial markets in 1929 and the ensuing lack of interest of Rotterdam families to make the long trip to seaside resort Oostvoorne and build new holiday homes there. Even an airfield strip alongside the golf course was to no avail.

According to an extract taken from the Autumn 1954 edition of 'Turf for Sport' Henry Burrows in 1929 was appointed Head Greenkeeper at the Waterloo Golf Club near Brussels in Belgium. In this capacity he did extensive advisory and construction work on the course in conjunction with the club secretary, Major J. C. Symonds. In 1935 he also did the construction work for the newly founded GC Grand-Ducal in Luxembourg following the course design of Major J. C. Symonds, with whom Burrows had closely collaborated at Waterloo. During the time of his appointment at Waterloo, Cato Burrows with her three daughters would remain living in Oostvoorne until 1935, when he moved to Luxemburg with his family as the newly appointed club professional and where he maintained a strong personal relationship with golfing enthusiast Prince Felix of Bourbon-Parma, husband of Grand Duchess Charlotte of Luxemburg.

Burrows would eventually return to England in 1939 before the outbreak of hostilities of WW II and the German occupation of Luxemburg. He would become club professional at Reading Golf Club. In 1951 he joined the staff of Sutton & Sons Ltd. Benefitting from his vast knowledge of golf course maintenance he was made in charge of Sutton's Grass Advisory Station in Reading.

The field of expertise of the golf professional of old was quite diverse. He required a full understanding of the golf swing techniques, of playing and teaching skills, of club and ball making and repairing, of course lay out and maintenance, of turf management and green keeping. Henry Burrows as a traditionalist mastered all of these skills. But probably most of all he was an agronomist with a love of grass and turf. He was responsible for the creation and/or the maintenance of the courses of Doornsche, Sint André, Oostvoorne and Grand-Ducal Luxembourg. Unfortunately all but the last are now defunct and the legend of Henry Burrows as a unique golf professional has become almost forgotten. Except for his three Dutch Open Championship titles. Names of champions always remain engraved in history. Keepers of the Elysean fields are usually lost in the mist of time.



Henry Burrows and George Pannell, in a studio, celebrating Burrows' win of the Dutch Open Championship in 1920 at the Kennemer GC, in traditional Dutch costume.

