

Who needs an 'Aide' to play the game

By Geert & Sara Nijs

IN golf and its continental cousins players frequently made use of a sort of assistant for all kinds of jobs to make the game for the players more relaxing and comfortable.

With the exception of the golf assistants not much is written about the servants in the other games; however such servants did exist on the continent.

Golf: caddies

The word caddie, also written as cadie, caddy or cady, was not used in Scotland before half-way through the 18th century. According to David Hamilton, ('GOLF - Scotland's Game', 1998) such caddies were hired by the bourgeois golf players to carry their clubs from home in Edinburgh to Leith Links. It is obvious that they were hired as well to continue carrying clubs on the links for their 'masters'.

The earliest documented use of a servant on a golf course was from 1628 when the Duke of Montrose paid a boy for carrying his clubs.



The Caddie, known as an unnamed Greenwich Hospital Naval pensioner and well-dressed in a sort of uniform, carries several wooden clubs for his master from the painting by Lemuel Francis Abbott, 1790

In the famous poem 'The Goff' by Thomas Matheson, 1743, some of the duties of a caddie are described:

- carrying his masters clubs
- making a wet sandy 'tee' to place the ball of his master on
- warning the people on the links or in the field that his master was going to tee-off
- going into the field to see where the ball had landed
- warning the people in the field that a group of players is advancing
- preventing the expensive feathery balls from being stolen
- retrieving the feathery ball as soon as possible from water and moist areas
- cleaning balls and clubs.

He probably carried spare balls in his pocket too and certainly a bottle of encouragement for his employer.

They carried the clubs under their arms, having no golf bags yet. It is not sure that each player had his own caddie. It could well be that in match play, the usual form of golf, the caddie carried the clubs of his 'team'.



Early 16th century wall painting in Rochechouart Castle. When the lord of the castle went on a hunting party, he did not go on his own or with one or two friends and a servant but with the whole court who joined in the hunt, including the ladies and several other servants. Would King James have played golf with the Earl of Bothwell with only one servant? - Salle des Chasse, Château Rochechouart, Limousin, France

It is suggested that the first caddie known by name was a certain Andrew Dickson who as a boy seems to have carried clubs for the Duke of York in 1681 on Leith Links, during the often called 'first international golf match' between two English noblemen and the Duke of York and his partner John Paterson, a local Edinburgh cobbler.

Long before the Duke of Montrose paid a boy for carrying his clubs, there must have been assistants who were hired or 'ordered' to carry clubs for kings, aristocrats and the bourgeois. When King James IV played on the 3rd of February 1503 with the Earl of Bothwell he played with different golf clubs or with one club and some spare ones. It is far-fetched to believe that he carried these clubs himself. The same goes for spare balls. He certainly must have had a servant to carry the golf equipment and to look to see where the king's ball came to a stop. There were probably several other servants, such as a fore caddie and one for holding hats and coats of the players when they were going to hit the ball.

In the month of February when the king played against the Earl, the parkland of North Inch must have been fairly wet, cold and windy. The game was not played on passable paths but cross country. On such terrains the going must have been fairly rough and it is difficult to imagine how the king and the earl were dressed. Could it be that the king and his partner made use of a horse-driven carriage during their match with a servant holding the reins and the players leaving the carriage to make a next stroke?

It could well be that when the king played golf he was not alone with his partner and some assistants on the golf court but was followed by his court from hole to hole.

Jeu de crosse: verseurs

As far as documented information goes jeu de crosse has always been a game for commoners. These commoners played the game with only one 'dual purpose' crosse club, and sometimes the members of a team played together with only one club. They also carried some spare inexpensive wooden balls in their pocket. There was no need to have caddies to carry clubs and balls for the players or to perform other simple jobs on the field. Even if there would have been a need for assistance, players would not have had the money to pay young boys for whatever assistance.

The players wore simple, 'mud-resistant' clothes in the cross country game. The players made their own sandy tees to put the ball on, and there was no need to have someone to warn other people on the 'unlimited' playing field. If needed they could shout 'Gardez' themselves.

The situation changed somewhat when players made their balls from pressed wood, celluloid and nylon, which were too 'precious' to lose during play in the fields. Therefore the players sometimes hired young boys, called 'verseurs', to look for these valuable crosse items during the game. These boys, often the children or grandchildren of the players, avid crosse players themselves, were rewarded for their assistance with wooden

'chouettes' (balls) and an all wooden 'chambot' (children's crosse club) followed up by the real thing: the iron-headed 'crocheton' (crosse club).

(Edgard Hismans, mayor of Quaregnon, in *'Mail Crosse Golf ou l'Histoire du crossage en plaine'* by André Auquier, 1983)

Because the crosse game was a game for the common people there was no interest in pictures of boys acting as verseurs. They would carry spare clubs and balls to sell or loan them in case the player would break one. Furthermore they probably would look for 'out of bounds' balls or retrieve balls from water or other hazards.



In this traditional school class photo from 1934 in the French Avesnois region, there are certainly several young boys who played crosse on their free Thursday afternoon and no doubt acted as 'verseurs' for their fathers or grandfathers on the Sunday afternoon. - From 'En Avesnois... au fil des saisons 1919-1939', Robert Leclercq

At the beginning of the 20th century, verseurs sometimes fulfilled a very peculiar function unknown with the other games. Farmers went to the schools on Thursday to invite the schoolboys to come and to play on their lands on the afternoon when they were free from school. The farmers liked the boys to play on their sown lands to stamp down the soil.

(*'En Avesnois... au fil des saisons 1919-1939'*, Robert Leclercq, 1985)

Mail: porte-lèves or porte-mails

Jeu de mail was a game popular with kings and commoners. Contrary to golf and crosse, the mail game was not a cross-country game but played on flat, beaten earth courts on private lands or in or just outside the city walls and in the streets of the town and on the sandy paths in the countryside. The game was played with one dual-purpose (mail) club. The people who played in the streets or in the countryside did not make use of assistants to carry the one club and perhaps one spare mail ball. No documents have been found referring to such caddie-like assistants. When players hit the ball off-line, they searched to find the ball themselves. Breaking a club might mean the end of the game.

The 'assistant' situation on the mail alley is a bit different. When players went to play a 'round' of mail there, they probably hired clubs and balls. The manager of the mail court, the 'palemardier' (club and ball maker), employed several assistants for all sorts of odd jobs on the court and in the workshop but

The oldest reference we could consult about a caddie in the mail game dates from 1696, in *'Divertissements innocens, contenant les règles du jeu des eschets, du billiard, de la paume, du palle-mail, et du trictrac'*. Under the heading *'Regles du Royal Jeu de Palle-Mail'* one can read under rule 70:

'Les Porte-leves & les Laquais qui suivent la boule de leurs Maîtres, doivent être hors du Mail, afin qu'ils n'avancent ou reculent les boules.'

(The porte-lèves (literally translated into 'carrier of the lifter') & the lackeys following the ball of their master have to stay off the course in order not to move the balls forward or backwards.)

In the booklet *'Nouvelles règles pour le jeu de mail'* (New rules for the game of mail), 1717, Joseph Lauthier already gives a 'job description'; under the rules for the *'maître du mail'* (mail master), or his *'commis'* (assistant) or the *'porte-lèves'* the last rule is dedicated to the porte-lèves:

"Les Porte-Leves doivent aller toujours devant le coup, autant qu'il est possible, pour crier gare, prendre garde aux Boules, empêcher qu'on ne les change ni qu'on ne les perde, et les remettre dans le Jeu quand elles sont sorties, vis-à-vis l'endroit où elles se trouvent."

(The porte-lèves always have to be ahead of the players if possible, to shout 'gare' [fore], to look after the balls and to make sure the balls are not changed or lost and to put them back in play when they are out of bounds and this alongside where they are found.) Lauthier does not use the name *'laquais'* anymore.

In *'Le noble jeu de mail de la Ville de Montpellier'* from J. Sudre (1772), the responsibilities of the porte-lèves are still the same but Sudre changed their name into *'porte-mails'*.

The king and the aristocrats employed their own

palemardiers and some porte-mails to accompany them or their guests on the court in their private gardens. Of course they were not deployed for assisting the mail players only.

The French royal family counted several officers as *'porte-mail and billard'*, a situation that lasted up to and including the reign of Louis XV which ended in 1774 (*'Jouer autrefois'*, Elisabeth Belmas, 2006).

Colf: ballemerkers

In the course of the centuries not much has been written about the game of colf other than an endless series of ordinances and decrees, mainly concerning banning the game from the towns. Fortunately we dispose of an even endless series of illuminations, drawings and paintings, telling us almost as much as words can do.

Before the Little Ice Age (roughly between 1550 and 1700), from the 14th century onwards no pictures have been found showing this type of assistant. Furthermore, the game of colf was played with only one club. There was no need to have a servant to carry (spare) clubs, while players could easily carry some spare balls in their own pockets. Moreover colf players were mainly common people who could not afford hiring boys to make sand tees, or to warn other people of approaching balls, or to look for lost balls.

This changed when during the Little Ice Age more than ever before, colvers moved to the frozen surfaces of the canals, lakes, ponds and rivers to play their game. The many paintings and drawings of colf on the ice made during that period show that



Detail of a painting (1624) from the South Netherlandish painter Paul Bril with a boy on the right, a porte main, carrying a spare club in his hand and several balls in a sack over his shoulder. The long stick was used for retrieving balls from unplayable lies. – Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund



A German aristocrat, playing *'baille maille'* on his private court in Schleißheim. In the foreground two lackeys, as the mail caddies were still called in Germany (*'Das Golfspiel'*, Ph. Heineken, 1898). – Painting from an unknown painter, displayed in Schlossanlage Schießheim, Oberschleißheim, Bavaria, Germany

sometimes assistants, so-called ballemerkers (ball pointers), were hired to help players to find their way on the crowded ice fields. Most of these pictures show men standing near a stake in the ice to indicate to the player the position of the target.



Colf player on a frozen lake. In the background at the right a 'ballemarker' shows the player the position of the target. – 'Ijsvermaak', drawing by Hendrick Avercamp, c.1620 – Teylers Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands

We suppose that these colf caddies kept an eye on where the ball was going and warned other people to step aside when a ball was coming, and of course looked for lost balls. When looking somewhat closer at the pictures it looks as if people of a somewhat higher echelon had entered the (ice) colf scene. times even filled with feathers. These players could afford to engage caddies to be of service to them during play.

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