

# **John Sutherland – A Year to Remember**

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# John Sutherland – A Year to Remember

*In the first of a series profiling Royal Dornoch Golf Club's legendary secretary,  
Todd Warnock describes the 1909 Muirfield Invasion  
and Hoylake's John Ball and Harold Hilton's subsequent quest for revenge*

JOHN SUTHERLAND served as Royal Dornoch Golf Club's Secretary for more than half a century and his influence on both the Club's evolution and the game in Scotland proved immeasurable. He was appointed in 1883 at a time when the Sutherland Golfing Society consisted of a primitive nine-hole links and the town was in serious decline due to the Third Duke of Sutherland's decision to build the railway inland, thus bypassing the royal burgh. The Duke was among the wealthiest aristocrats in Britain and owned virtually all of Sutherland shire. He was advised a bridge over the Dornoch Firth was impractical and routed the first train north inland away from Dornoch to Bonar Bridge up to Lairg, then down Strath Fleet to his resplendent castle at Dunrobin. Despite the lack of rail access, Secretary Sutherland conceived a 'Vision of Prosperity' to develop the links as a means to advance Dornoch's economic prospects.<sup>1</sup> Today much of what we know of the Club and see on its links which is man-made, is a result of Sutherland's efforts and foresight.

Sutherland was aged 18 when he became Secretary and had benefited from the mentorship of two men who imparted an intense work ethic and professional ambition. The first was Sutherland's Procurator-Fiscal and Dornoch Provost William Fraser (1800-1889). Fraser served 67 years as Procurator-Fiscal and as the first independent Provost of Dornoch, taking office upon the retirement of the Third Duke of Sutherland in 1868. When Sutherland graduated from Dornoch Academy at the age of 15 he was hired by Fraser to be his deputy and under his tutelage developed exceptional administrative and communications skills; in fact, both were fluent in English and Gaelic as well as shorthand. Both were also members of Dornoch's Free Church and strict adherents to its Calvinist principles of evangelicalism, community service and temperance.

Sutherland's second early mentor was Alexander McHardy MVO KPM (1839-1915) who had been promoted to Constable of Sutherland shire in 1866. McHardy had begun his constabulary career in Dornoch and was promoted to St Andrews as Deputy Chief Constable of Fife in 1861. Whilst serving in Fife, McHardy

was at the forefront of the explosion of golf in Scotland, and its unequivocal epicentre, St Andrews, where he developed a passion for the game. He was promoted to Chief Constable of Sutherland shire in 1866 and returned to Dornoch as a golf enthusiast solidly aware of what the game could deliver by way of enjoyment, tourism and related economic benefit. He founded the Sutherland Golfing Society in 1877, dominating the Club's competitions winning five of its first seven Silver Medals. And in 1883, when he was promoted to Chief Constable of Inverness-shire, McHardy selected Sutherland as his successor. It was McHardy, given his relationships in Fife, who aided Sutherland in recruiting Old Tom Morris to come north in June 1886 and expand the Dornoch links to 18 holes. When he died, he was the oldest serving Chief Constable in Scotland and the only one ever elected to two terms of the Presidency of the Scottish Chief Constables' Club. Despite being a life-long Catholic, McHardy was a favourite of King Edward VII, whom he escorted on all his trips to the north and from whom he received both the Royal Victorian Order and The King's Medal.

Initially not a golfer, Sutherland worked diligently at this game and eventually became the greatest golfer in the history of the North, winning the Club's Silver Medal 11 times, leading it in 10 consecutive Northern County Cups and, at the national level, competing in the Amateur Championship seven times. His steady implementation of Old Tom Morris's design and his prodigious management talents advanced Royal Dornoch Golf Club into the highest echelon of the sport. He designed and oversaw the building of almost all the courses in the North including Dornoch, Brora, Golspie, Tain, Portmahomack, Bonar Bridge, and Wick, as well as private links for Andrew Carnegie, the world's wealthiest man, at Skibo Castle, the Duke of Sutherland at Dunrobin Castle, and the Duke of Portland at Berriedale Estate. Herbert Warren Wind, the renowned American sportswriter, summarised Sutherland's accomplishments:

Royal Dornoch was nurtured into greatness around the turn of this century by John Sutherland, one of the finest all-around golf men ever and very likely the outstanding club secretary in golf history.<sup>2</sup>

1. Sutherland used the phrase 'Vision of Prosperity' in a speech given in September 1933 at a ceremony honouring his 50 years of service to Dornoch's club and town hosted by Louise Carnegie and the Fifth Duke and Duchess of Sutherland.

2. Preface by Herbert Warren Wind to the reprint of Donald Grant's book, *Personal memories of Royal Dornoch 1900 - 1925*. 1985.

Sutherland was also a renaissance man surrounding himself with the most influential artists, athletes, capitalists and intellectuals of the era, knowing full well their attraction to Dornoch would strengthen the Club's reputation and the town's prosperity. These included: Arthur Ryle, a London painter and founding chairman of the Professional Golfers' Association who served as Royal Dornoch's Captain from 1905 to 1915; JH Taylor, a co-founder of the Professional Golfers' Association and five times Open Championship winner, first played the course in 1904 and returned every year, often attracting the best players in Britain to join him and practise out of the limelight; and Carnegie, who had purchased Skibo Castle in 1897, was recruited by Sutherland to serve as Vice President. Carnegie would become the Club's principal benefactor along with founding Club President, the Fourth Duke of Sutherland.

Finally, Sutherland became an accomplished golf journalist, frequently providing articles for many British newspapers and publications including *The Golfing Annual*, *Golf Illustrated* and *Golf Monthly*. He wrote a weekly article titled 'Golf Causerie' in the *London Daily News* from 1906 to 1912 which covered a wide spectrum of golfing topics.

By the Spring of 1909, Sutherland's confidence in his 'Vision of Prosperity' was in full measure. In January, he had profiled the new clubhouse in *Golf Illustrated*, acknowledging 'distant Dornoch depends very much indeed upon London golfers, who form about a third of the Club membership, and contribute something like half of the occasional visiting golfers'.<sup>3</sup> The article also included a sketch of the new building set to open in July.

Sutherland had spent the winter completing the installation of the Club's first watering system and various 'heavy and expensive works on the old course', much of it recommended by Taylor.<sup>4</sup> The *Aberdeen Daily Journal* summarised Sutherland's most recent efforts:

It has taken nearly eight years to carry into execution the scheme behind which lay the best professional and amateur advice in the country. And these are some of the marvels of perfection, and what is satisfactory above all is that the natural undulations have been religiously retained.<sup>5</sup>

And in April, Sutherland was honoured with a short profile in *Golf Illustrated* citing his 26 years of service as Club Secretary, his work as a golf architect as well as being 'a constant attendant at the championship meetings, few travelling such long distances'.<sup>6</sup> It also included a nice career summary and an excerpt from his *Golf Causerie* article on the putting grip.

Although the article did not mention it, Sutherland had become a mentor himself. He followed closely the success of his first class of protégés: brothers Donald and Alec Ross. Donald had emigrated in 1899 to Oakley Country Club in Watertown,

Massachusetts, and then moved to Pinehurst Resort, North Carolina, in 1900 as the head golf professional. Although he had won three North and South Opens, two Massachusetts Opens and finished fifth in the 1903 US Open, he had largely devoted his efforts to his burgeoning course design practice by 1909. Alec had followed Donald to America in 1900, serving as head professional at Brae Burn Country Club outside Boston, Massachusetts, and remained dedicated to his professional golfing career. By 1909, he had won four of his eventual six North and South Opens, three of his eventual six Massachusetts Opens, and participated in seven of his eventual 16 US Opens, finishing sixth in 1906 and, most importantly, winning in 1907 at the Philadelphia Cricket Club. These two first protégés set the standard for young Dornochians' aspirations in golf and the world beyond the Highlands. Many would follow in their footsteps.

By April 1909, the golfing season was getting underway, and Sutherland was excited by his prospects as well as those of his second class of young protégés he had mentored since childhood. Sutherland was particularly excited about a quartet of players who had come to the fore: 28-year-old Alexander Morrison, 25-year-old Tommy Grant, 23-year-old Walter



Sutherland, as featured in *Golf Illustrated*

3. 'Royal Dornoch Golf Club: New Club-House' in *Golf Illustrated*, January 22, 1909

4. *Northern Times* February 4, 1909

5. *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, April 30, 1909

6. *Golf Illustrated*. April 30, 1909

Matheson, and 19-year-old Donald Grant; in tandem with their mentor, they had become the best players in the North.

On the Dornoch links, Sutherland had won the Club's Silver Medal eleven times in total, nine consecutively from 1888 to 1896, while Morrison was the first of his protégés to break through, winning the 1898 Silver Medal. Tommy Grant followed by winning the inaugural Carnegie Shield in 1901; Matheson won the 1907 Silver Medal; and Donald Grant won the 1908 Carnegie Shield. All four had featured prominently in every annual Royal Dornoch tournament in recent years, but their most impressive contributions had been alongside Sutherland in the six consecutive Club victories in the prominent double foursomes competition, the Northern Counties Cup since 1903.

The opening event of the 1909 Dornoch golfing season, the Secretary versus Captain's competition was held on April 10 in balmy yet windy conditions. Sutherland appeared to get the benefit of the draw having secured the Matheson brothers Walter and Sandy, Club Professional TD Currie, and AS Weir in his 15-man team, whilst the Captain's team included Morrison plus Tommy and Donald Grant. Just as the prior year, the first three pairings proved prescient, Sutherland teed off first against Tommy Grant losing by one, whilst Walter Matheson and Donald Grant halved, and Currie beat Morrison by one. The match ended 9-6 to the Secretary.<sup>7</sup> Yet as he reviewed his protégés' performances on the day, Sutherland was confident that they could go further than dominating play in the North. And it was time for them to compete on the national stage.

### *The Muirfield invasion*

Sutherland pointed his young cadre with razor focus and diligent practice, towards the upcoming 1909 Amateur Championship in May at Muirfield. With the Royal Dornoch links in fine shape and the Northern Counties Cup essentially conquered, the time had come to take the next big step. Collectively, their effort was rewarded with three days of extraordinary achievement, forever referred to as 'The Muirfield Invasion'.<sup>8</sup> After more than 25 years of tireless effort to make the golfing world aware of the marvels of his home town and its magical links, no other accomplishment by Sutherland brought greater fame and pride than those spring days at Muirfield.

Matheson and Tommy Grant had proved to be the best young golfers in the North while Donald Grant and Morrison remained in close contact with Sutherland despite moving to Edinburgh to attend its university. In fact, Donald Grant had raised Dornoch's national profile further by serving as Captain of the university golf team as well as having set the course record of 74 in the Club Championship at Royal Musselburgh.<sup>9</sup> Yet Sutherland knew only he had ever felt the pressure of the national stage and participated in the most important tournament in Britain: The Amateur Championship.

In late April the press began reporting on the upcoming Amateur Championship and all the prominent players of the day began to register. And in late May, brimming with excitement, Sutherland, aged 44, brought his four young protégés south to East Lothian. In total eight members of Royal Dornoch Golf Club entered the field - only the R&A, with 12, fielded more. In addition to Sutherland and his quartet of young local players, the three other members were: John Low, Royal Dornoch's 1904 Silver Medallist registered from the R&A, CE Dick, Royal Dornoch's 1907 Carnegie Shield winner registered from Royal Liverpool, and Captain WA Henderson registered from the R&A. In fact, it was Dick, who had become quite keen on the Dornoch links and first noticed talent in the then 16-year-old Donald Grant and gifted him a Butchard driver and brassie. Remarkably, Grant later revealed he played those two clubs, and only five others, until 1914.<sup>10</sup>

Excitement was high upon arrival at Muirfield as the names entered in the tournament were essentially a *Who's Who* of the great amateur golfers of the day, many of whom had been to Dornoch or about whom Sutherland's protégés had read of in the press. These included Harry Colt (Sunningdale), Bernard Darwin (Woking), Horace Hutchinson (Royal North Devon), John Laidlay (R&A), John Low (R&A), Leslie Balfour Melville (R&A) and J Gordon Simpson (St Andrews University) who had won both the Royal Dornoch Silver Medal and the Carnegie Shield in 1905 and 1906. The press was touting the two Hoylake members who were increasingly dominating amateur play in Britain: John Ball Jnr, who had already won the tournament six times of his eventual eight and Harold Hilton who had two victories under his belt as well as three runner-up finishes. Finally, as if to raise the pressure further, a late entry was none other than Jerome D Travers, the reigning US Amateur Champion from the two previous years, and a 'formidable irons player and fine putter'.

Sutherland travelled to Muirfield early, as he was asked to serve as a referee at the eighth annual Amateur International match between England and Scotland traditionally played just before the Amateur.<sup>11</sup> He was pleased to see two regular Royal Dornoch men selected for the Scotland team: Dick and Simpson.<sup>12</sup> Scotland had won all but the 1903 match, and prevailed again in 1909 thanks to dominating play by Robert Maxwell over Ball, and wins by both Simpson and Dick.

The first round of the 1909 Amateur Championship at Muirfield was played on Monday, May 24 and the course had recently been extended with an improved system of bunkering which increased its difficulty severely. All four of Sutherland's young cadre as well as Dick received byes for the forenoon opening round. Sutherland, playing in the 16<sup>th</sup> pair, won a hard-fought match over WC Ross of Gables Golf Club, 2&1. Whilst in

7. *Northern Times*. April 15, 1909

8. *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. August 31, 1909

9. *Northern Times*. October 21, 1908

10. **Grant**, Donald. *Personal Memories of Royal Dornoch Golf Club 1900 - 1925*. Private. 1985

11. 'Golf Causerie' in *London Daily News*, January 1, 1910

12. *The Scotsman*, May 22, 1909



the 34<sup>th</sup> pairing, as if to motivate the young Dornoch players, Captain Henderson rose to the challenge against the two-time US Amateur Champion Travers, downing him, also 2&1.

Well-rested from their first-round byes but clearly edgy given their ominous draws Dick, the Grants, Henderson, Matheson, and Morrison joined Sutherland in the clubhouse to plot strategy. Little did they know that despite driving rain and strong winds, that afternoon would prove to be the greatest golfing day in the history of Royal Dornoch Golf Club.

In the afternoon's second round, Tommy Grant was playing in the sixth match against none other than John Ball Jnr, the reigning Amateur Champion who was rated the finest amateur player in Britain.<sup>13</sup> The 47-year-old boasted an unrivalled golfing pedigree – having learned the game at Open Championship venue Royal Liverpool Golf Club – and was known as an exceptionally determined and confident golfer from the start. He finished fifth in the 1878 Open at Prestwick at the age of 17. Five years later, and prior to winning any major tournaments other than at his home links of Royal Liverpool and Leasowe, he challenged 'any amateur golfer to a home and home match for £200', an exceptional sum at the time.<sup>14</sup> He finally won his first Amateur Championship in 1888 at Prestwick. Darwin, who was also a renowned golf writer as well as accomplished player, once wrote that John Ball Jnr was a steely and intensely private man who:

... had a vein of hostility and if he wanted a particular player's blood, he would fight his way through a tournament with the sole object of getting at him, not out of personal hostility but rather a desire to measure himself against a foe really worthy of him.<sup>15</sup>

By the time Tommy Grant faced him in 1909, Ball had won six Amateur Championships, most recently in 1907 at St Andrews. He was the first Englishman to win The Open Championship, at Prestwick in 1890, and the same year, he also won the Amateur Championship on his home links of Hoylake. He was the first player to win both championships in a single year, a feat only ever accomplished again by Bobby Jones in 1930. Ball had learned his game from a highly competitive father, John Ball Snr. who essentially ran Royal Liverpool and whose hotel, The Royal, served as the clubhouse before a formal one was built. Ball Snr was a particularly fierce foursomes player known across Britain. He also competed on the national stage, and in the 1887 Amateur Championship at Royal Liverpool, lost at the last hole in the semi-final round to Hutchinson, the eventual winner.

Grant was precisely half Ball's age; a baker's son born and raised in Dornoch with remarkable length off the tee reportedly of a uniquely strong grip, having lost his thumb due to a kitchen accident. On that May afternoon, he came ready to play, accustomed to pressure, having often been the lead-off man in important matches in Dornoch. The press described him as 'Tommy E Grant, a powerful young Dornoch player,

who came South for the first time with a big reputation'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps over-excited, he found himself two down after the fourth hole. However, a 15-foot putt on the fifth boosted his confidence and he repeated with a second lengthy putt on the next hole to draw level. Standing all square on the ninth, Grant hit a masterful drive into the wind while Ball's found the bunker to give his opponent the lead at the turn and set up a riveting contest coming home. After alternating wins on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and squaring the 13<sup>th</sup>, Ball repeatedly bunkered on the short 14<sup>th</sup> thus enabling Grant to stay one-up. They halved the 15<sup>th</sup>, and with nerves tensing, both players found trouble on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Ball won the hole and squared the match with a six over Grant's seven. As he approached the par-four 17<sup>th</sup>, the match was in the balance, yet Grant did not waiver and launched a beautiful second shot to within two feet, sinking the putt for an extraordinary birdie to take the lead. Stunned, Ball halved the 18<sup>th</sup> and Grant stood amazed having defeated the tournament's previous champion and clear favourite. Sutherland likely felt a slight sense of redemption, as it was Ball who knocked him out of his first Amateur in the third round of the 1895 Amateur at St Andrews.<sup>17</sup>

Virtually every paper in Britain covering the day's matches, began with Grant's surprising knockout of Ball. In fact, the surprise appeared so profound, his biographer from Royal Liverpool years later failed to even mention the 1909 Amateur when writing his account of Ball as the greatest amateur player in history.<sup>18</sup> For young Tommy Grant it would be the signature moment of his golfing career.

Perhaps infuriated by his second-round loss to Grant given his temperament, and true to Darwin's description, Ball angrily returned to the Amateur in 1910 with singular focus. From the opening round, he ran over every competitor he faced and in the final round destroyed young Collinson Carlton Aylmer (1884-1964) of Strathpeffer Golf Club by the largest margin ever recorded in the Championship, 10&9, and secured his seventh title. Ball won his eighth and final Amateur in 1912 and is considered by many to be the finest amateur golfer in history.

While Grant was waging battle with Ball, Matheson, in the 15<sup>th</sup> match of the day, was battling none other than Ball Snr, representing Leasowe Golf Club. Matheson prevailed 3&2. And in the 28<sup>th</sup> match, Morrison had drawn none other than fellow Royal Dornoch member John Low, the Chairman of the R&A's esteemed Rules Committee. Morrison was personally well acquainted with Low as he was the first prominent national golfer to visit Dornoch, winning the Opisdale Quaich in 1896 when Morrison was just 16-years old. Low had returned to Dornoch often, most notably in 1904 when he won the Silver Medal, and played against Morrison in the final of the Fraser Cup. He was also Captain of the 1904 Visitors squad in Sutherland's Northern County Trophy, the first time the Visitors were victorious. Low had watched Sutherland's young cadre of

13. 'Golf Causerie' January 9, 1909

14. *Dundee Advertiser* 26 October 1883

15. Darwin

16. *The Golfing Annual* 1909-10

17. Archives, The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews

18. **Behrend**, John. *John Ball of Hoylake*. Grant Books. 1989

19. *The Golfing Annual* 1909-10

players since their adolescence and gained great respect for Morrison when he and Sutherland had been bailed out by Alec Morrison and Walter Matheson in the first round of the 1904 Northern Counties Cup at Balgownie.

Morrison began unsteadily, losing four of the first six holes and was three-down at the turn. However, he then 'then found his form winning the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> and in fact, led by two at the 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>19</sup> Although he stumbled on the 17<sup>th</sup>, Morrison won the match on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The fourth member of Sutherland's young quartet, Donald Grant, teed off in the 18<sup>th</sup> match against Douglas Currie of Bruntsfield Golf Club. Despite being four down at the seventh, he recovered to square the match on the 17<sup>th</sup> yet sadly fell in a single play-off hole.

Clearly motivated by his three young protégés' astonishing victories, Sutherland took to the first tee that afternoon in the 52<sup>nd</sup> match against Colt, a good friend. They had first met as participants in the 1895 Amateur at St Andrews as well as via Low, as both served as founding members of the R&A Rules Committee. Despite having competed in 12 previous Amateur Championships in which his best finish was 32<sup>nd</sup>, Colt was no match for Sutherland who 'had held him well in hand almost from the start', winning 2&1.<sup>20</sup> *The Golfing Annual* would report the match 'capped a splendid day for the North countrymen.'<sup>21</sup> One can only imagine the surprise and excitement the Dornoch team felt that evening with all but Donald Grant, advancing to the third round.

The third round opened on Tuesday morning with bright and calm weather. Sadly, despite their best efforts, Morrison, Matheson and Tommy Grant would all struggle. In the third match of the day, a large crowd gathered hoping to see a close game between Tommy Grant and Muirfield's formidable Cecil K Hutchison. Grant won the first hole and should have followed suit at the second after a brilliant pitch but three-putted. His massive drive on the third found the green, but again his putting failed him. Hutchison won the fourth and sixth, and Grant again putted poorly on the former and was double bunkered on the latter. At this point, Hutchison took up his game and worked toward a close of 4&2. Hutchison would continue fine play ultimately falling to Maxwell in the final.

Next, in the eighth match, Matheson fought valiantly but was defeated on the first play-off hole by DAM Brown of Penang Golf Club. Interestingly, Brown was the dominant golfer in the emerging Asian golfing world, having been inaugural winner of the Warren Shield, the precursor to the Malaysian Amateur Open Championship, in 1894. He went on to win the tournament five times until 1908 when he returned to Britain. In the 14<sup>th</sup> match of the day, Morrison lost 4&2 to AC Paterson, the Durham County Amateur Champion from Wearside Golf Club. Meanwhile Henderson fell to Darwin on the 12<sup>th</sup> hole, and Dick defeated PW Leathart.

Despite witnessing his young Dornoch boys lose, it was the elder Sutherland who continued to prevail, first in the

third round, taking down the 'cocky' James L Jenkins of Royal Troon on the 19<sup>th</sup> hole. Jenkins would win the 1914 Amateur Championship at St George's and become a frequent Dornoch visitor in the coming years.

Sutherland had to go to the 19<sup>th</sup> hole before he disposed of Jenkins – another good performance on the part of the man who practically made Dornoch the popular resort it is now.<sup>22</sup>

Advancing to the fourth round, Sutherland began a hard-fought match with Royal Liverpool's Hilton, the venerable two-time Open Championship winner (1892 and 1897) and two-time Amateur winner (1900, 1901) and three-time Amateur runner-up (1891, 1892, and 1896). Sutherland brought a steely focus to the encounter, keenly aware of being beaten by Hilton in a practice round at Muirfield in 1897. Nevertheless, Hilton took a strong lead going out and was four-up at the turn. Then, bunkered at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, he lost both before prevailing at the 13<sup>th</sup> to go three-up with five to play. Sutherland responded by sinking a lengthy putt to win the 14<sup>th</sup> and Hilton's six on the 16<sup>th</sup> trimmed his lead to one. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, with pressure building, Sutherland embarrassingly topped his drive sending it all but 40 yards, then out of frustration hit his driver again beautifully to within four feet of the hole, securing par in two putts to Hilton's five, to draw level. Sutherland's tee shot on the final hole was sliced and found the rough. He then pulled his second shot across the fairway into the long grass on the left and took four to reach the green. Hilton meanwhile drove short carefully and looked certain to win the hole. However, he pulled his second shot into heavy rough, and both ended up with a six to halve the hole and force a play-off. The head-to-head ended quickly: Hilton pulled his drive badly into the wood, thus handing Sutherland victory and a place in the quarter finals.<sup>23</sup> Hilton would eventually win two more Amateurs (1911 and 1913) and one US Amateur (1911). Elsewhere in the fourth round, Dick avenged his young friend Donald Grant's loss against Currie by winning their encounter on the final hole.

Wednesday morning's fifth round brought brilliant sunshine with Sutherland facing 1905 Irish Open Champion and Leven Thistle Golf Club council member, Georgie Wilkie. All square at the turn, the Leven golfer, who was 'driving a great ball and approaching well, held the upper hand.'<sup>24</sup> Sutherland began to show signs of fatigue and Wilkie, maintaining a steady game, won the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, halved the 13<sup>th</sup>, won the 14<sup>th</sup>, and with a half at the 15<sup>th</sup>, won 4&3.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Dick fell to R Andrew of Prestwick St. Nicholas. Wilkie, however, fell in round six, defeated by Darwin who then succumbed in the semi-final to Tantallon Golf Club's Maxwell, who went on to beat Hutchison in the final.

Newspapers across Britain covered thoroughly what became famously known as Dornoch's 'Muirfield Invasion'. *The Scotsman* reported:

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22. *The Golfing Annual* 1909-10

23. *Golf Illustrated*. June 4, 1909

24. *Aberdeen Press & Journal*. May 27, 1909

25. *Ross shire Journal* May 28, 1909

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20. *The Golfing Annual* 1909-10

21. *Ibid*



No player brought greater credit to himself than the Dornoch artisan, Mr TE Grant, by his sensational defeat of Mr John Ball. And Dornoch was again to the front when Mr A Morrison defeated Mr JL Low and more prominently still when Mr HH Hilton, who started well but finished badly, was beaten by Mr John Sutherland.<sup>26</sup>

Closer to home the *Ross-Shire Journal* reported: (the) 'Dornoch players have done remarkably well in the Amateur Championship.' Yet the most eloquent summary of the tournament and Scotland's golfing triumphs that year, was the *Staffordshire Sentinel* that reported under a historic headline: *Revenge for Flodden*:

The rout of the English at Muirfield is kind of revenge for Flodden.<sup>27</sup> The Northerners have won all along the line. Perhaps it was the example of Miss Dorothy Campbell, who carried the Ladies Championship honour from Ireland to Scotland, that had the effect of inspiring her fellow countrymen to great deeds. In any case, the slaughter of the Sassenachs at Muirfield was almost one of extermination.<sup>28</sup>

After a triumphant return home, Sutherland wrote extensively on the tournament in his June 5<sup>th</sup> *Golf Causerie* article. Proudly he penned:

Foremost amongst the new names which this championship has brought out stands that of Thomas E Grant, the young artist and player from Royal Dornoch Club who accounted for the famous John Ball in the first round. Away from the final, his meeting between the veteran and the young Grant was by far the finest feature of the meeting, and all agreed that

the young man had a great future before him. Both his style and temperament have been most favourably commented on by the best critics, while his modesty in general demeanour at once made him a favourite with his first championship crowd.

Expounding on Grant further, Sutherland wrote:

Mr Gardon G Smith, the editor of *Golf Illustrated*, remarked to me that the young Grant's golf reminded him of Braid more than any other players he has ever seen.

And ever the circumspect, under-stated Scot with his *Golf Causerie* pen, Sutherland wrote obliquely of his own extraordinary accomplishments, stating:

Mr Hilton, who is playing beautiful golf, was freely spoken of as a likely winner until his career was unexpectedly cut short in the fourth round by a player much his inferior.<sup>29</sup>

### *The new clubhouse and the Dornoch School*

Dornoch's Amateur Championship performance kept emotions high as the Club and town readied for the grand opening celebration of its new clubhouse, over which Sutherland presided on Saturday July 3. Mr and Mrs Carnegie, who had led the funding effort, attended with their 12-year-old daughter, Margaret. Ryle, the Club Captain, opened the programme with a 'racy speech of welcome' to a large attendance. Mrs Carnegie was invited to open the doors with a 'pretty and silver key' which she obliged eloquently, wishing the new clubhouse every success.<sup>30</sup>

The celebration also included the official unveiling of a clock donated by Lord Brassey KCB, TD, JP, DL, a new club member. The clock was made by J Smith and Sons, Derby, 'according to the recommendations of Lord Grimthorpe, the world-wide scientific authority on turret clocks.'<sup>31</sup> The clock kept proper

26. *The Scotsman*. June 1, 1909

27. The Battle of Flodden near Branxton, Northumberland, fought on September 9, 1513, was the largest battle ever between England and Scotland. England prevailed, having lost approximately 1,500 men to Scotland's estimated catastrophic loss of more than 12,000.

28. *Staffordshire Sentinel*. June 2, 1909

29. 'Golf Causerie' June 5, 1909



Mr and Mrs Carnegie, centre, at the clubhouse opening, with Club Captain, Ryle and JH Taylor to their left. On their right, Tommy Grant and John Sutherland, with three Dornoch Academy schoolboys, including, to the front, Willie, Sutherland's only son  
Image courtesy of Andrew Paterson Studio, Inverness



time until 1973 when it was replaced by an electric one during renovations.<sup>32</sup>

The domed lead clocktower surmounted the centre of the clubhouse roof and was adorned with a weathervane of a golfing figure which Sutherland and Ryle decided should undoubtedly be JH Taylor, given his contributions to the Club and his fourth Open Championship victory four weeks earlier at Deal.<sup>33</sup> And finally, the grand opening celebration also included the unveiling of a portrait commissioned by Ryle of Taylor by the London artist, Richard Jack RA, to commemorate his contributions to the Club.<sup>34</sup>

As the Northern golf season progressed, thoughts returned to the accomplishments of Sutherland and his cadre of young men from Dornoch. Reporting focused on the Secretary's 11 Silver Medal victories, on the Club's six consecutive successes in the Northern Counties Cup, the increasing dominance of its annual tournament by Sutherland's protégés, and most recently their 1909 Amateur accomplishments. Across Britain, article after article referred to Grant's remarkable downing of 'the champion of champions', Ball, Morrison's victory over the R&A's Low, and Sutherland's triumph over Hilton as the most riveting matches of the competition.<sup>35</sup> The *Dundee Courier* began to refer to the 'The Dornoch School' of players. Yet Sutherland and his men knew there were two final tests in the golfing year, and they stood ready for combat. First, rumours began to swirl that Ball and Hilton were headed north in August for the Club's Annual Tournament to take stock of the Dornoch invaders' home links. And immediately thereafter 'The Dornoch School' was intent on mounting a successful defence of their six consecutive Northern Counties Cups at Royal Aberdeen.

### *Ball and Hilton's Revenge*

As registrations began to arrive for Royal Dornoch's Annual Tournament opening on Tuesday August 24, Ball and Hilton contacted Sutherland regarding travel logistics as neither had ever been to the Highlands. Ball, still privately smarting from his second-round defeat to Grant, decided to come north early and spend the whole of August practising on the Dornoch links. Hilton arrived mid-month.<sup>36</sup> On settling in Dornoch, both were surprised by the numbers of prominent English families spending the summer there, including Lady, Ernest and Helen Holderness; Lady, Reymond and Lily de Montmorency; Secretary and Mrs Spurling from Royal Blackheath; as well as the large Tindal Atkinson family from Sunningdale and Datchet.

Ball and Hilton were immediately taken by the magic and camaraderie of Dornoch. On the former's first morning on Tuesday August 10, Sutherland, Morrison and Matheson invited him to play in a Captain's Mixed Foursomes tournament. Over

the next two days, Ball, paired with Mrs Bamford, won the tournament by defeating Mr and Mrs McIntyre in the second round, the Holderness siblings in round three, Mr and Mrs Thomson in the fourth, and in a family final, none other than Mr Bamford and his daughter.<sup>37</sup>

On his arrival, Hilton noted a different, more agrarian sensibility and friendliness in Dornoch and wrote of his visit in his weekly golf column, *Golf and Golfer's* which was carried widely across Britain. Interestingly, given Ball's temperament and the surprise losses they had suffered at the hands of Dornoch men in the Amateur, Hilton wrote affectionately:

It was not in any spirit of revenge that the Royal Liverpool players made the journey north, but while the Englishmen got some of their own back, they have had further demonstrations of the wonderful power of these artisan golfers in Scotland.<sup>38</sup>

Observing prophetically and capturing the simple existence that prevailed in Dornoch, Hilton went on to say:

These Scottish tradesmen golfers should play well, they have the links, the surroundings are all that can be wanted, and in

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35. *Dundee Courier*. May 2, 1910

36. *Golf Illustrated*. Sept 3, 1909

37. *The Scotsman* August 14, 1909



*Oil painting of JH Taylor by Richard Jack RA*  
Courtesy of Royal Dornoch Golf Club

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30. *Highland News*. July 10, 1909

31. 'Golf Causerie'. February 26, 1910

32. Historylinks Museum exhibits #4410 and #6269

33. Taylor, John H. *Golf: My Life's Work*. Jonathan Cape. 1943

34. *Golf Illustrated*. July 16, 1909

a little village the tradesmen knows his customer, and knows when he has finished business for the day.

The following week, JH Taylor arrived as he had for the last five summer holidays to join Hilton and Ball for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tournament that opened on Tuesday August 24. The Duke and Duchess of Sutherland used the week for extensive entertaining at Dunrobin, hosting the Duke and Duchess of Portland from Berriedale, Lady Shaw of Dunfermline, Lady de la Warr, Lord Brassey, and Henry Neville Gladstone, son of the statesman. The Carnegies at Skibo also hosted a distinguished party of Americans led by Mr Carnegie's business partner and cousin's wife, Mrs George Lauder of Pittsburgh.

In part based on the press coverage of the Muirfield Invasion, the field of 106 players was a club record. And although Ball and Hilton enjoyed reconnecting with Sutherland and his young quartet of Matheson, Morrison, and the Grants, their mission was clear: revenge. Fortunately, the 'links had never been in such tremendous condition, and the greens uniformly in good trim' due to the new irrigation system.<sup>39</sup>

On the opening forenoon, Ball played just as Darwin's 'vein of hostility' characterisation would predict, shooting a stunning 73, beating by one, Sutherland's competition record. Ball's round was so dominant, the next closest competitor was six strokes behind. Had he been a member, he would have won the Silver Medal, but instead for the first time there was a tie between Tommy Grant and WP Tindal Atkinson (Sunningdale) both at 79. The play-off, with Ball observing prophetically, was completed on Friday with Grant prevailing.

Ball continued strong play in the afternoon with a 76, achieving the lowest aggregate score of 149. Hilton 'played all the game with his usual dash and precision, except when he got near the hole, there time and again, he dropped strokes in the most tantalising manner shooting 79 and 78 for 157, coming in 2<sup>nd</sup>'.<sup>40</sup> The next honours fell to young Ernest Holderness and local Donald Sutherland, tied at 158, Secretary Sutherland at 159, and Tommy Grant at 160.

On Wednesday, the 16 lowest opening day players vied for The Carnegie Shield. Given the Shield is an open competition, Ball and Hilton would have been eligible off +5 and +4 respectively, however they chose to officiate the competition with Taylor. Early favourites Holderness, and both Donald and Tommy Grant all fell.<sup>41</sup> In the final, Sutherland, still in command of his talents from Muirfield, played against beloved local favourite Reverend Thomas Mackay, Minister of Seedley Presbyterian Church and Old Manchester Golf Club member. Rev Thoms, as he was affectionately known, was a long-time Dornoch member, having grown up at nearby Gashagaich, Birichen. Donald Grant later reminisced admiringly:

Often when helping with the haymaking at Evelin farm, I waved my hand at Reverend Thoms as he cycled to Dornoch

to keep his golf engagement.<sup>42</sup>

Sutherland, having to give Reverend Thoms five strokes, fell behind on the first hole and never gained the lead, losing 3&2. Grant later wrote: 'I can remember no golfing victory on the Dornoch links more popular.'<sup>43</sup> Later in the afternoon Ball and Hilton held a fun bogey competition with locals despite a high wind. Hilton prevailed, scoring even bogey, with Ball second at one-over.<sup>44</sup> At the conclusion of the tournament, the Duchess of Portland presided over the extensive prizegiving in the new clubhouse.

By the tournament's end, Ball and Hilton had accomplished their goal of avenging their respective defeats at Muirfield but the entire visit had resonated deeply with them. Both were clearly taken by the warmth and friendliness they experienced. Afterward, Hilton composed a lengthy article published in golfing columns across Britain, writing:

I have been spending with Mr John Ball, and a few Royal Liverpool players, a very pleasant holiday at Dornoch, a beautiful little place in Sutherland Shire, which, like St Andrews, appears to depend almost wholly upon its existence on the golf links. There are many people, the course is busy all day long with visitors from all parts of the country, and they are all very cheerful and all very genial. Golf is the holiday recreation of the busy man, and there is no idleness in the game; it is one of strenuous intensity. Dornoch is too far away from the ordinary haunts of golfers to be spoiled by the crowd. It can never possibly suffer from the congestion of St. Andrews, and in early Spring and late Autumn the little Highland village is something of a golfer's paradise.'

He reflected further on Ball's performance and Sutherland's cadre, behind an echo of Darwin, writing:

At Dornoch Mr Ball has been making everyone else look very small indeed, and in the medal competition he returned the wonderful round of 73 and 76, the former score constituting a record for the green. The Dornoch players created the chief sensations at the amateur championship, especially the youthful baker, Grant.<sup>45</sup>

Even Hutchinson, now in the twilight of his career and resting down in Westward Ho! after the Amateur in Muirfield, caught wind of the sojourn by Ball, Hilton and Taylor north to Dornoch for the Annual Tournament. Writing complimentary words in his regular *Golf Notes* column, he said:

A wonderfully good lot of golfers seem to be finding their way to Dornoch these days. We hear of Taylor making it the place of his annual holiday. Then there is Mr. Sutherland, who went so well in this year's amateur championship, a constant resident. And Mr. John Ball and Mr. Hilton are there. It is singular that both these great players fell in that amateur championship to men of Dornoch. So perhaps, these men of Hoylake have gone North to try to get back the ashes of their lost reputations from the Scots. And they seem, by the reports, to be in the way of

38. *South Wales Daily*. August 28, 1909

39. *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, August 25, 1909

40. *Ibid*

41. *Aberdeen Press & Journal*. August 26, 1909

42. **Grant**. Personal Memories

43. *Manchester Evening News* August 27th, 1909

44. *The Scotsman*. August 26, 1909

45. *Western Morning News*. August 27, 1909



doing it.<sup>46</sup>

Sutherland and his cadre of local men remained honoured by the continuing accolades from their Muirfield performance as well as their play in the Annual Tournament, but they knew the 1909 golfing year was not complete until they secured another Northern Counties Cup. Having been stymied over the prior six consecutive Cups, the other Northern clubs were strategising for an upset. In fact, tournament founder and Secretary at Royal Aberdeen MM Duncan, having failed to win his tournament in 10 years, sought to maximise his advantage on his home links, fielding two teams. Secretary Sutherland simply made sure Tommy Grant, Walter Matheson, and Donald Grant were primed for the outing south.

Despite their opponents' best efforts, Dornoch prevailed for a seventh successive year and Royal Aberdeen President WR Macdonell took a more cordial approach than the Nairn Captain who, 12 months earlier, frustrated by Royal Dornoch's sixth successive victory, cancelled the prizegiving and simply handed the trophy to Sutherland at the completion of the matches. Instead, President Macdonell presented the Cup saying:

Dornoch's play combined extraordinary steadiness with extraordinary brilliance such as seldom seen among amateurs.

Further, he praised Sutherland and his young trio of players adding:

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46. *Daily Telegraph and Courier*. August 28, 1909

Besides covering themselves with glory, the Dornoch Club has done an immense service to golf in the North by fostering and maintaining the game at these annual tournaments and that in a large degree contributed to their success.<sup>47</sup>

### *The close of a remarkable year*

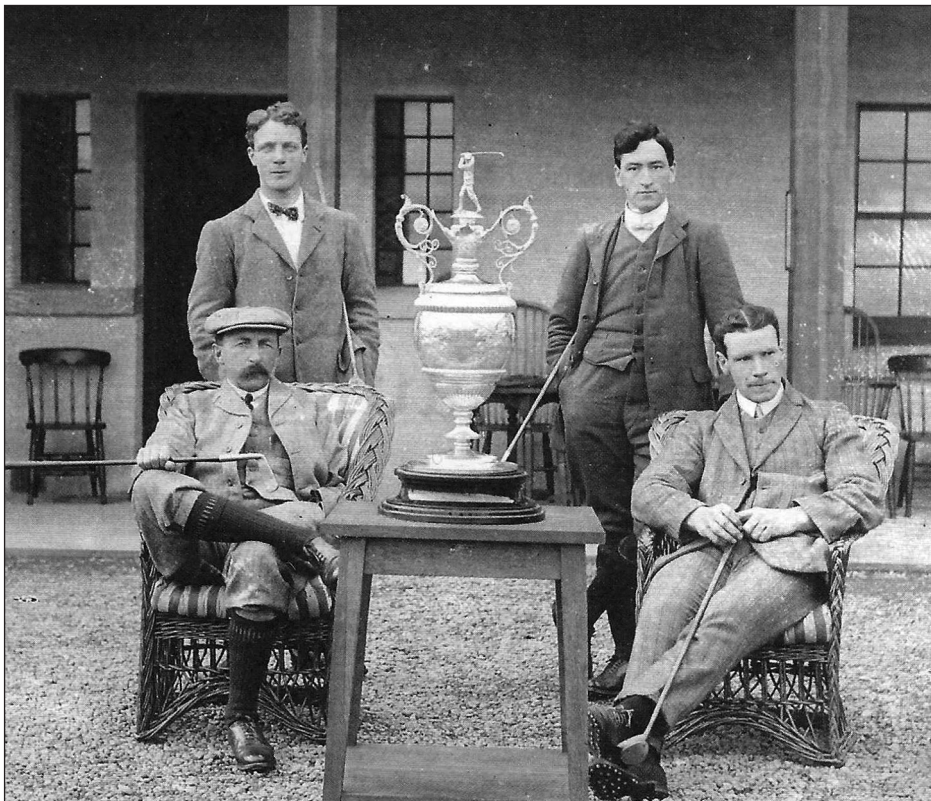
As the 1909 season fell to sunset, Sutherland was clearly satisfied with the progress his 'Vision of Prosperity' was bringing to the town and Club. Yet still unfulfilled in his mission, he knew his efforts were attracting great coverage in the national press which fuelled the continued momentum. One article cited a Panmure man and a frequent player at St Andrews who spent a holiday up north in Dornoch stating:

There is only one course in Scotland which can compare with the Sutherland green. John Sutherland is known by golfers throughout the country as a man of many talents, and he is supported by artisans of that class who are usually associated with St Andrews. Dornoch has fewer patrons than the southern links; its fame is spreading, and the player of substance is penetrating the Highland shelter of the Grants and the Morrisons.<sup>48</sup>

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47. *Northern Times*. September 9, 1909

48. *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. October 19, 1909



*The Dornoch School – victorious yet again in the Northern Counties Cup, 1911*  
Seated L to R: John Sutherland, Thomas Grant; standing L to R, Donald Grant, Walter Matheson  
Image courtesy History Links Museum



