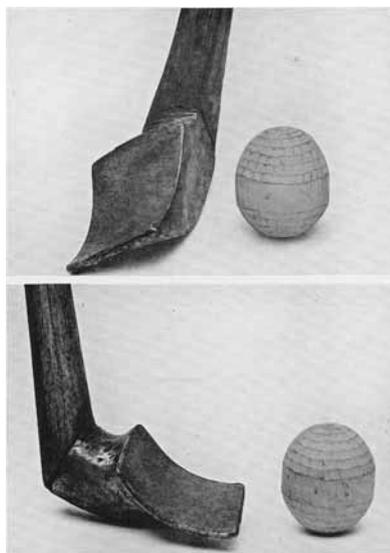


GOLF IN FRANCE

Written March 1938

The Origin of the Game

It is generally conceded that the game of golf was first played in France around Pau by Scottish officers of Wellington's army, because it has not been possible to establish a link between the Scottish game and the much older French game of "La chôle", which dates back to the twelfth century and is still popular in the north of France and in Belgium. Nevertheless the two games bear a striking resemblance to each other; the only fundamental difference is that in "La chôle" the ball must hit a steak instead of being holed. In "La chôle" a single club, an unpleasantly heavy one, is used to hit a solid wooden ball, only slightly larger than the modern golf ball. The club head is so shaped that by addressing the ball with the toe, one can loft it or extricate it from the worst lies, a necessary precaution as the game is played over rough country. The "holes" are about the same length as at golf. The swing used is identical (as will be seen by the photographs of a player who has never seen golf played). Sometimes as many as 400 players, mostly miners, foregather, and one is struck by the fact that 30 per cent. of them play left-handed, although they are not otherwise left-handed.



LA CHÔLE

The club used for hitting the ball at La Chôle, an old French game with some similarity to the game of golf. Upper picture shows how the club is used for long shots and, lower picture, how it is used to loft the ball or get it out of a bad lie. –

Photo and verbatim subtitle from the book 'Around Golf'

Beginners are told that they must keep their eye on the ball, and those who are not left-handed are warned against bending their left arm. Pierre Dupas, the president of Hardelot and Valenciennes Golf Clubs, and a keen golfer, has done much research work on the subject and discovered many interesting documents in northern cities, mostly edicts prohibiting the game in the neighbourhood of villages where it was a danger to the public ('St. Omer – 1270, Valenciennes – 1780), or damaging to the crops (Valenciennes – 1718, under penalty of six pounds).

In later years, however, it seems to have been unnecessary to resort to legislation to prevent the game of "La chôle" from spreading, and although the royal and ancient game made a slow start, Pau G.C. 1856 (forty-two years after the original game referred to above), Biarritz G.C. 1888, Cannes G.C. 1891, Compiègne G.C. 1896, and Deauville G.C. 1899, developments have been at a much faster pace since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Progress of the Game

Pierre Deschamps, who founded La Boulie in 1901, was the moving spirit of the game in the pre-War period.

The young Basque caddies around Biarritz who had been brought up on pelota took to the game like ducklings to water, and Pierre Deschamps was not long in realising that Arnaud Massy was the most promising of the bunch and just the man he needed to teach Parisians the game, so he appointed him professional to La Boulie, in those days the only Paris golf club. The climax came almost at once. Massy won the Open Championship in 1907 at Hoylake and the game of golf had taken a permanent grip of the French people. I do not think the lovers of the game here realise all they owe Massy, the sensation created in the golfing world by this first foreign triumph, the achievement of defeating the great masters Braid, Taylor and Vardon, who won sixteen of the twenty championships contested before the War. For years after Massy's victory, La Boulie, where all the championships were held, was visited by the leading amateurs and professionals, and on four occasions strong bids for the French open title were successfully challenged by Massy in 1906, 1907 and 1911 and by Jean Gassiat in 1912, and the famous triumvirate was always represented in the opposition. In 1912 Massy very nearly won the Open Championship again at Sandwich but after a tie he lost to Vardon on the

replay. French men and women were now beginning to take an interest in the game, and courses were being constructed near several seaside resorts and large cities, the clubs of Le Peck, later transformed to St. Germain, Chantilly, Fontainebleau, were founded, but very few amateurs had mastered the game sufficiently to compete in the championships, and when Baron François de Bellet in 1911 and his sister Pauline, now Mme. Roger de Vilmorin, in 1913, won the French amateur titles they were the only French representatives in a field of British and a few American competitors. The St. Cloud Country Club had not been opened a year when the War broke out and for five years practically all the courses were closed and the game of golf ceased to be played.

Post-War Golf

Although the game had been developing fairly rapidly prior to the War, it was not very old in years when it was brought to an utter standstill, and its revival was a slow process. Baron de Bellet and Massy, the best amateur and professional, had both been wounded. Pierre Deschamps died in 1923 and the presidency of the "Federation" was entrusted to the Duc de Mouchy, an Old Etonian, a good golfer and a thorough sportsman with a public school philosophy of games which has proven a great asset to French golf at a time when the tendency, the world over, has been towards the commercialisation of the games.

The first post-War events to place French golf once again in the international limelight were Mlle. Simone Thion de la Chaume's (now Mme. René Lacoste) win in the Ladies Championship at Newcastle, Co. Down, in 1927, followed the very next year by that of her future sister-in-law Manette le Blan (now Mme. Robert Thion de la Chaume) at Hunstanton. Both achievements contributed much to the popularity of ladies' golf in France, and in 1931 it became possible to institute an annual international match between the ladies of Great-Britain and France which has provided several closely-contested encounters and a drawn match in 1934 at Chantilly. Although the French ladies have not yet succeeded in defeating their very friendly rivals, they expect to put up a strong side in a year or two and are nursing a number of girls ranging from fifteen to seventeen years old who show great promise, one of them is my daughter Lally, who won the Girl's Championship at Stoke Poges in 1937.



Lally Vagliano (left), having her victory on the British Girls in 1937 –

By courtesy of Georges Jeanneau, 'Le Golf en France', 1999

Simone Thion de la Chaume had won the same event in 1924, her first of a remarkable series of successes, six native championships in a row, then forced abstention and later two more, and the cup is still, as I write, on her mantelpiece. In the French Ladies' Open Championship she put a stop to a long string of British and American victories and won the event four times, relayed on one occasion by Jeanine Gaveau who held the title in 1931.

French amateurs have no such crowns to boast about as have their fair companions, but in 1936 Michel Carlhian recovered the French Open Amateur Cup which has resided abroad ever since I had won it in 1925, and in 1937 Jacques Légglise made it secure for at least another year. In international matches Frenchmen have had a successful year on the Continent, defeating Belgium, Germany, Italy, Holland and Switzerland, but they have never yet proved a serious menace to the English side with whom an annual match was instituted in 1934.

Nor has a French professional succeeded in winning the Open Championship since the War. Marcel Dallemagne came the closest to doing so in 1936 when he tied for third place at Hoylake, only two strokes behind Padgham the winner. In the same year he won the French Open at St.

Germain after a tie with Henry Cotton, and successfully defended his title in the following year at Chantilly. Marcel Dallemagne and Auguste Boyer have made a family affair of the French Native Open Championship in the last eight years and honours have been evenly divided. Both these players have won the Belgian, Dutch, German, Italian and Swiss titles many times. Any survey of professional French golf in recent years would be incomplete if it did not include Aubrey Boomer, the well-known St. Cloud professional, who, although not strictly speaking a Frenchman, has spent the whole of his golfing life with us. Aubrey Boomer has won the French Open five times and in 1927 was second only to the great Bobby Jones in the British Open at St. Andrews.

I have laid stress on the achievements of the chosen few because their glory has well served the popularity of this relatively new game, but the great bulk of players have not the means of climbing to such heights. Some play the game for their health just as their fathers played the old game of "Mail", another close relation of "La chôle", almost as ancient and still existent in parts of the south, of which it was said, "De tous les jeux d'exercice, le Mail est le plus agréable, le moins gênant et le meilleur pour la santé. On peut en même temps jouer, causer et se promener en bonne compagnie. L'agitation qu'on se donne fait un merveilleux effet pour la transpiration des humeurs; et il n'y a point de rhumatisme ou d'autres maux semblables qu'on ne puisse prévenir par ce jeu ..." (Extract from the rules of "Le noble jeu de Mail de La ville de Montpellier", edited 1844) But still the great majority of both good and indifferent performers play the game for pleasure and that is as it should be.



André M. Vagliano, founder of the Association Européenne de Golf (abbreviation in English EAG..) and President of the French golf federation from 1941 till 1943 –

By courtesy of Georges Jeanneau, 'Le Golf en France', 1999

I have always fought the tendency for amateurs to take any game too seriously lest it lead them unconsciously to bitterness and ill feeling. During my too short stay at Oxford University, unfortunately curtailed by the War, I appreciated the spirit in which games were practised by public school and college men. Certainly the desire to improve, to excel, to conquer was always present, but so was the care not to become the slave of a pastime, and when in 1924 the late Arthur Croome invited me to bring over a side of ten to play a match at Rye against members of the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society, I jumped at the chance and made every effort to collect all the best players we had and we started the first of a long series of matches which have taken place ever since more than once a year in England or in France, and have left us all the most pleasant memories. It was only in the first match at Rye on 26th April 1924, and in the last one, to date, at Sandwich on 5th and 6th March 1938, that all our opponents were members of the "Society", but the spirit was always the same. When Arthur Croome died, leaving sincere and universal regrets in our small golfing world, Gerald Fairlie undertook to keep these friendly battles very much alive, relieved on occasions by John Morrison and Dale Bourn. I am pleased to think that these matches have done more than provide great games and much entertainment for those who have taken part in them, and that they have had an influence on the psychology of many of my countrymen and helped them to get the maximum of enjoyment out of this game we all love.

Full copy of the text from André M. Vagliano from 'Around Golf', edited by J.S.F. Morrison, first published in 1939 by Arthur Baker Limited, London