

# Scot's legacy put many on route to success in adopted homeland

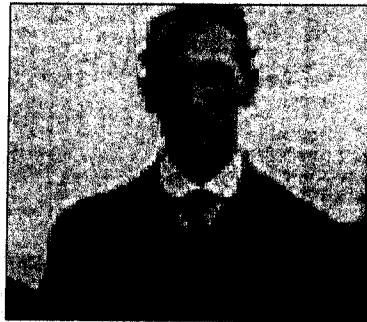
## GOLF

### JACK DAVIDSON

SEVERAL top Scottish golfers including Calum Fyfe, Jamie Savage, Sandy Scott, Craig Ross and others will take part in the Sanlam South African Amateur Championship from tomorrow at George Golf Club to try to claim the title won last year by fellow Scot Daniel Young.

Scottish connection with this event is strong with Michael Stewart and Brian Soutar having won in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Highly creditable though these achievements are, they do not stand comparison with the record of little-known expatriate Scot James 'Jimmy' AW Prentice. In the early 1900s he won it four times, and also won the South African Open, the first amateur to do so.

But Prentice's standing in South African golf does not rest on his playing success alone. Arguably he made a bigger and more enduring contribution through a provision in his will bequeathing money to develop the sport among that country's youth. He added that clause in November 1914, shortly before returning here to enlist for the First World War. Sadly, he was killed in action in Flanders in 1915 but his bequest paved the way for countless youngsters to play the game, a number of whom made it to the very top, such as Bobby Locke, Harold Henning, and Gary Player.



**James Prentice was the first amateur to win the South African Open**

Prentice was born a son of the manse in the Joppa district of Edinburgh in 1885 and attended George Watson's College where he excelled at rugby and was school golf champion in his final two years. At school he played regularly over the Braid Hills courses while after leaving school he played at the Portobello and Royal Musselburgh courses, as a member of both clubs.

He worked for the Norwich Union Insurance company in their office in George Street in Edinburgh. According to contemporary reports, in his late teens he was off a plus-five handicap and had played in an unofficial match for Scotland against Ireland.

In 1905 he emigrated to South Africa, initially basing himself in Port Elizabeth where he continued working in insurance and by 1910 had moved to Johannesburg where he joined the Commercial Assurance company. At

first he also played rugby, before his golfing career really took off. Between 1907 and 1913 he won the national Amateur Championship four times and was twice runner-up, achieving his first win in 1908 by nervelessly sinking a 20-foot putt on the last green.

In 1912 he did not enter, instead returning here in the summer to play. In the British Amateur he reached the last 16, losing his tie by one hole, but won a number of open competitions, including two in one week at Cruden Bay and Peterhead, defeating his brother Tom in the final in the latter.

In 1913, at Kimberley, he became the first amateur to win the South African Open with an excellent total for the time of 304, a feat that would not be repeated till 1935 by Bobby Locke. As the Amateur was held concurrently, that counted as his fourth success.

Despite being settled in South Africa, once war broke out he returned here where he joined the 3rd Dragoon Guards. Although regarded as potential officer material, he did not wish to delay his arrival at the front and entered the ranks. Soon he saw action in northern France and in early June 1915 was engaged in the battle at Hooge in the Ypres salient. Defending an observation post there on June 5 he was injured when a shell struck it. Although he was instructed to leave, he insisted on staying, stating: "While this is on I must be in it." He was further injured when another shell hit and died from his

wounds the next day in hospital. He is buried in Eastern Boulogne cemetery. A colleague described him as "A true-hearted friend and the soul of honour."

His bequest was aimed at encouraging youngsters to play in handicap competitions which he insisted were open to all youngsters throughout the country. He requested these 'Prentice Memorial' tournaments, as they became known, take place annually in South Africa on or about May 29, his birthday. His reasons for making such a provision in his will were two-fold. Firstly, because of the 'many kindnesses' shown to him, as a young golfer in that country, and, secondly, to give incentive to youngsters who 'had not had much in the past'. The first of these tournaments was held at Kimberley in 1921 and thereafter dozens were held throughout the country over many years. 'Prentice' club memberships followed, at reduced rates, to junior golfers.

Prentice, against a background of personal tragedy, left a wonderful legacy to South African golf, literally and figuratively, with countless youngsters benefitting from his generosity to take up the sport. That he should make such provision shortly before joining up for war in the knowledge of the high risk of imminent death, reflected the stature, selflessness and magnanimity of Jimmy Prentice and the golfing values so important to him. It was entirely fitting that when the South African Golf Hall of Fame was established in 2009, he was one of the first inductees.