

## Portrush man was first Irish Professional Champion

By Jo McGrattan



James Edmundson of Royal Portrush, first winner of the Irish Professional Championship in 1907.

The Irish Professional Championship Medal won by James Edmundson in 1907.

In 1907, at the age of only twenty-one, Jim Edmundson became the first-ever Irish Professional Golf Champion when he triumphed in the competition held at his home club of Royal Portrush.

A year later, Edmundson repeated his victory, this time at Portmarnock, and then continued to display his huge potential as a world-class golfer by taking the runner-up position in the competition in each of the following three years. Young Edmundson had been recognised as a rising star prior to his 1907 success, for that year he played on the famous Irish team that defeated a star-studded Scotland in the first-ever international team competition between professional golfers. He went on to finish 11<sup>th</sup> of 180 entrants in the Open Championship of 1908, held at Prestwick. The winner was James Braid of Scotland who went on to win the Open five times.



The Irish international golf team which defeated Scotland 13-4 in 1907, prior to the inaugural Irish Professional Championship. Jim Edmundson is third from right in the back row. Also on the team was Hugh McNeill of Royal Portrush (second from left, back row).



Jim Edmundson - like his brother John - had learned his golf at Portrush. He was born in June 1886 in the townland of Carnglass, some three miles outside the town, the younger son of James Edmundson and Mary Dunlop. Sadly, his father died in 1902 so he never knew of the golfing successes of his two talented sons. Both boys showed early promise and both eventually achieved professional status.



1<sup>st</sup> Green on the Old Dunluce Links at Metropole Corner c1905 photo courtesy of the John Moore Collection

From 1905 to 1908 Jim Edmundson was based at Royal Portrush as a teaching assistant. Subsequently, he served at Bangor Golf Club as “playing professional” before moving across the Irish Sea to Bromborough Golf Club in Cheshire in 1911, to take up the position of club professional. While at Bromborough, he instructed Gladys Ravenscroft, who won the British Women’s Amateur Championship in 1912 and the U.S. Women’s Amateur in 1913.

During the First World War, Jim Edmundson served in the Royal Artillery and saw action in France. Having survived the horrors of trench warfare on the Western Front, he returned to Bromborough in 1919, but in his absence someone else had taken his job! He could not find a suitable alternative position, but being a golf professional was the only career that he had ever wanted, so he was persuaded to go to the United States where brother John had already established himself at Llanerch Golf Club in Philadelphia. John told his brother that all one needed to be a success in the golf trade in America was to have an English, Irish or Scottish accent! And it is believed that on his U.S. immigration papers, John described himself as “a Professor of Golf”!





Arriving in Philadelphia in 1921, Jim Edmundson took up a position at North Hills Country Club where he soon established himself as a popular teaching professional. He remained there until 1930 when he moved to the Hi-Top Golf Club (later to be re-named Aronimink Golf Club). In 1923, Edmundson added the Pennsylvania Open to his growing collection of trophies. He was second in the Philadelphia Championship in 1926 as well as being a regular competitor - and winner - in many local and regional state tournaments. Throughout his life in the USA, Jim Edmundson took an active part in the affairs of the Philadelphia Section of the PGA. He was a founder member of that organisation, becoming its President in 1930. He died on 25 August 1950 in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.

One of his sons, Jim Junior, also became a PGA professional, but his other son, Jack, had no interest in the game! Both men lived in the Philadelphia area. Jack served in the 28<sup>th</sup> Artillery Division of the U.S. Army in World War Two and was stationed before D-Day in Northern Ireland, where he was able to visit family members and, it is believed, his father's birthplace.

The historic medals that were awarded to Jim Edmundson for winning those first two Irish Professional Championships remain in the care of his family.



Jack Edmundson, with his wife Callie and son Adam, visited Royal Portrush in 2014 and are pictured with Royal Portrush Golf Professional Gary McNeill.

*Genealogical note: Sarah Edmundson, the sister of Jim Edmundson, was the grandmother of Jo McGrattan (Dallas), the author of this article. Our thanks to Jo for this excellent Newsletter on a Portrush Champion Golfer. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2021*

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