



St Andrews

the home of golf

Ross Perrett

THE Open Championship returns this year to St Andrews, Scotland, which will provide an opportunity to see the world's best players try to negotiate and conquer one of the architectural wonders of the world – The Old Course.

Only two Australians have won The Open at St Andrews; **Peter Thomson** in 1955 and his great pal **Kel Nagle** in The Centenary Open in 1960. Nagle in his acceptance speech at his induction into Golf's World Hall of Fame thanked Thomson for helping him win The Open by showing him how to 'get

around' the Old Course. Thomson had figured it out and was happy to share his experience with his friend.

Appropriately Thomson was asked to write the foreword to an excellent piece of research by New Zealand Golf Architect, Scott Macpherson titled 'St Andrews – the Evolution of The Old Course'.

Thomson said: *"The Old Course on the St Andrews links is the rock on which the game of golf anchors itself. It was not the first piece of ground over which the game of golf was first played, but it was the place where the game as we know it now evolved and refined itself.*

In the beginning, four hundred years ago, it was a wild place on which to hit a small ball across country. The Old Course is the model and prototype for courses everywhere. All courses are to varying degrees copies of The Old. Not only have they accepted and followed the number of holes set, but also courses everywhere have sand bunkers in emulation of the links features, and a fair ratio of 'fair ground' to 'rough' areas to complete what has become accepted as a full featured playing arena. Yet the innumerable illogical ties of the St Andrews course have been ignored in other places."

Such are the changes in technology, in 1960 Kel Nagle was deliberately laying up short of the treacherous Road Hole with a 5-iron whereas Tiger Woods was attacking the flag with no more than 8-iron in 2005.

Macpherson had access to the minutes of meetings of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, who were the custodians of The Old Course and are the ruling body for all golf played outside of the United States. He has meticulously recorded the decisions that have impacted on this precious piece of turf and particularly in relation to the evolution of the game.

His research dispels the myth that The Old Course has remained unchanged over time and confirms that the hand of man has been ever present as the course adapts to the challenges of technology and the expectations of the modern game.

To put the course's evolution into perspective it is interesting to compare the course and scores achieved on The

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Old Course over time. The first Open at St Andrews was back in 1873, a 36-hole one day event won by a local professional with a score of 179.

He would have been using hickory shafted clubs and gutta-percha balls. The best round of the tournament was 88 and the winner's purse was £11. The first four-round Open at St Andrews was in 1895 over two days. The course was a par 76 and measured 6323 yards. The winner was JH Taylor with a score of 309 and he received a prize of £50. Minor changes were made to the course over the next 60 years and by the time Peter Thomson won in 1955 with a record total of 281, the course length had increased to a 6996 yards, the par reduced to 73 and the winner's cheque increased to £1000. Kel Nagle played a very similar course in 1960 and carded a four-round total of 278 to edge out Arnold Palmer and win £1250. By 2005 when The Open was last played at The Old Course, the course had stretched to 7268 yards and was a par-72. Tiger Woods won with a total of 274 and won a massive £720,000. For this year's Open the course has again been lengthened (new tee on hole 17 – The Road Hole) with the winner's cheque of £750,000. Such are the changes in technology, in 1960 Kel Nagle was deliberately laying up short of the treacherous Road Hole with a 5-iron whereas Tiger Woods was attacking the flag with no more than 8-iron in 2005.



Clockwise from left: The most recognised shot in golf. St Andrews in full tournament mode. 5-time Open champion Peter Thomson (inset) Kel Nagle

Any basic text on Golf Architecture will stipulate that at least 150 acres are required to produce a modern golf course that is challenging, fun to play and safe. The Old Course incredibly only takes up 92 acres yet it will again be the venue for arguably the world's most important golf event. This is testament to the subtle nuances and quirks that are unique to The Old Course. No

other course on the planet packs so many challenges into such a small arena.

Teeing off in front of the Royal and Ancient clubhouse is always exciting and at the same time intimidating despite one of the most generous opening fairways in golf. The deft positioning of the first green beyond the Swilcan Burn makes the second shot even more intimidating and

teaches an early lesson that anywhere on the green is better than a dropped shot in the burn. With 7 double greens of varying size and character, 112 fearsome revetted bunkers, penal gorse and broom, out of bounds flanking the shared fairways and the backdrop of the wonderful old town of St Andrews, no-one is ever bored on The Old Course. It is always a pleasure to play The Old

Course and strategy, patience and putting are the key to success.

No one is credited with designing The Old Course — which is only fair as successive generations have cared for and made minor changes to it without fanfare in the best interests of golf. Golf is much bigger than the individual and some modern course architects would do well to acknowledge that



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