

The first clubhouses in golf & its continental look-alikes

In ancient times, apart from the mail players, the colf, crosse and golf players did not have club-houses as golfers have today. Most of the time, the public houses in the towns or the taverns in the fields acted as such. People played all kinds of games in or near a café. The pubs also served as starting and finishing points for the 'long games'.

Below, you find the earliest known gathering places for various games, starting with colf in the 1540s, mail in 1637, golf in 1822, and crosse, which lacks fixed dates, presented in chronological order to enhance clarity.

Colf

The oldest depiction of such a clubhouse is in a book of hours, commonly referred to as the 'Golf Book'. It is a hand-written and hand-painted religious book, made by the Flemish artist Simon Bening in his workshop in Bruges, Flanders, most likely in the early 1540s. The book contains devotional texts for private prayer. It is famous for its lively depictions of sports and pastimes at the bottom of each folio on the left.

This illumination in a Book of Hours from the 1540s by the Fleming Simon Bening (1483-1561) could be the first depiction of a clubhouse near the green, in which case the 'publican' in the background looks at the colvers. Then, after the final strokes and putts, he'll invite them to settle their bets over a glass of beer or wine in the clubhouse. – British Library, London



The illuminations at the bottom of the rectos represent the specific tasks of the season, with a few exceptions, of which the September page with its stick and ball scene is the most interesting: four people are 'holing out' in a round of colf.

With colf, it is difficult to limit oneself to one example of a gathering place. During the Little Ice Age, which coincided with the 'Golden Age', many 'winter scenes' were painted and drawn.

Several scenes show the large and small tents and sometimes wooden huts where many people could buy refreshments and beverages. Publicans, confronted with losing much of their clientele, decided that when colvers didn't come to the tavern, they would come with their tavern to the colvers (and all the other people) on the ice.

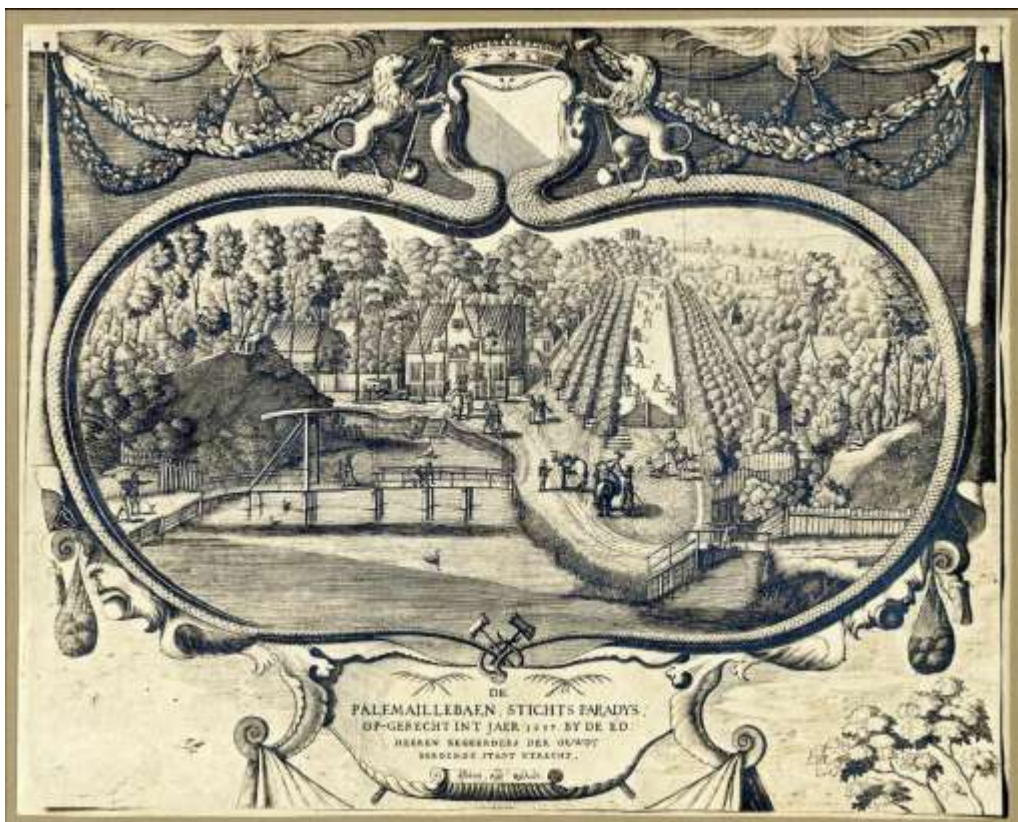


After some sledging, ice dancing, skating, strolling and last but not least, after a strenuous game of colf on the ice, people loved to have some hot drinks, some food and a chat in a heated tent. –

*Hendrick Avercamp, detail of 'Enjoying the Ice near a Town', 1620 –
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

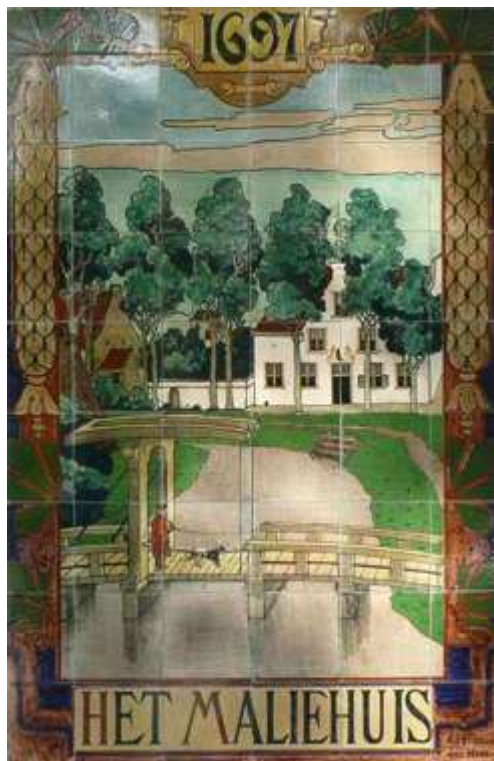
Mail

One of the most beautiful mail alleys in Europe was situated just outside the walls of Utrecht in the Netherlands. The council decided on 9 February 1637 on its construction.



The oldest picture of the alley in Utrecht, named the 'palemaillebaen'. On the right of the engraving, the mail court is visible, and on the left, one can see the Maliehuis (house) and the Maliebrug (bridge). – Copper engraving by Hendrik Winter, 1645 – Het Utrechts Archief, The Netherlands

The nearby inn, 'Het Gulden Vlies' (The Golden Fleece), was bought by the council to function as maliehuis; a 'malie meester' leased it, just like the course. He was responsible for the maintenance of the course and the garden, which meant that he had to look after the newly planted trees, cut the grass between the trees with a scythe, keep the weeds out, and collect litter on and around the alley. As malie meester, he also collected the green fees and the money for renting out the clubs and balls, stored and repaired the equipment, and collected the fines.



Last but not least, he was the innkeeper of the wine house where the players, after finishing a round, relaxed and had their drinks. The inn, situated outside the city walls, could sell drinks free of excise.

‘Het Maliehuis’ is still there. The first registered renovations date from 1862, the last ones from 1986. Today, a digital branding and programming agency has its office in this historical place.

Since 1897, this tile picture decorates the present Maliehuis at one end of the Maliebaan to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the change of name from tavern 'Het Gulden Vlies' into 'Het Maliehuis'. –

By courtesy of Do Smit

Golf

Nothing is forever; the same goes for the oldest golf pub in Musselburgh, Scotland. The pub was originally built as 'Forman's' in 1822, but didn't rise to fame until 20 years later when Marion Forman's husband died, and she decided to continue running the public house.

She changed its name to 'Mrs Forman's' and provided hospitality during the many open championships that took place over the years at the Old Course.

Source: Edinburgh Evening News, 4 February 2016

Neil Laird, from the Scottish Golf History website, had just finished his research that proved the building was the oldest golf pub in operation when he discovered it had closed down. If you would like to know the whole history of 'Mrs Forman's', visit Neil Laird's site; in 2016, he published his article about this famous pub:

<https://www.scottishgolfhistory.org/news/mrs-formans-is-no-more/>

In 2016, the world's oldest golf pub 'Mrs Forman's' closed to become a townhouse. – Edinburgh Evening News, 2016



Crosse

The game of crosse was one of the most popular outdoor games in the Mons region. Young people joined the pilgrimage by playing crosse towards the chapel in Havré near Mons (see the 'What's new' contribution of January 2022).

Playing crosse during the pilgrimage became so popular that the game became closely linked and inseparable from 17 January.

During the 17th century, the animation to participate in the pilgrimage to Havré diminished, though the crosseurs continued to celebrate St Anthony, for he had become their patron saint.

Also, the old 'crosse' pub in Havré has already been changed years ago into a house.

Until 1943, crosseurs gathered in 'La Longue Roie', this tavern bearing the name of an ancient knight of the St Anthony's Order, Raoul de Longherowe, and located quite close to St Anthony's chapel.

In the niche above the entrance, the present occupants placed a statue of St Anthony ... of Padua, the patron saint of lost things. If he can help find lost houlettes (balls), why not? –

Photo Geert Nijs, 17 January (!) 2003



The pubs in the hamlet were well-visited, and the crosseurs drank and ate to their heart's content, for during the year, they made their weekly savings to celebrate this beautiful day. The only pub whose name survived the centuries is 'La Longue Roïe', situated in the neighbourhood of the chapel.

When at sunset, the games finished, an end had come to an animated day of playing. The crosseurs went homewards, and in the light of resin torches, they swarmed the streets of Mons, yelling 'Vive Saint Antoine!' The last tavern the crosseurs entered was the 'Chez l'Borgne' (or 'l'Bagne') in the Rue (de) Basse.



The ancient relief, once placed at the window of the tavern Chez l'Borgne (or l'Bagne) in the Rue (de) Basse at Mons, can still be seen in one of the local museums. – By courtesy of Musée du Folklore et de la Vie montoise, Mons

Behind the window of this tavern, the publican placed a relief depicting St Anthony with two lit candles. In the pub, the crosseurs sang, during the meal, the centuries-old song again and again:

A Saint Antouaine

On va crocher

Avec une soule et ein macquet

Vive Saint Antouaine!

On the day of St Anthony

We are going to play crosse

With a ball and a club

Long live St Anthony!

Sources: Félix Hachez, 'Fêtes populaires à Mons' (1848); Léopold Devillers, 'La Chevalerie et le Prieuré de Saint-Antoine-en-Barbefosse' (1865) and Karl Petit, 'La Chevalerie et le Prieuré de Saint-Antoine-en-Barbefosse' (1943), Musée du Folklore et de la Vie montoise, Mons (2002)

In 1865, Devillers mentioned 'La Longue Roïe' in Havré as a gathering point. The last mention of the crosseurs meeting there dates from 1943.

'Chez l'Borgne/Bagne' in Mons is not traceable; *helas*, dates are missing. The Musée du Folklore et de la Vie montoise is temporarily closed (2022). Google Street View shows no ancient houses with an indication whatsoever.