

Bennett Lang:

Royal Montreal's

Second Golf

Professional



Donald J. Childs

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The cover photograph shows a long-nosed, scared-neck putter with a thorn head stamped B. Lang. It was made by Bennett Lang sometime in the late 1870s or early 1880s.

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Introduction

The Royal Montreal Golf Club's first golf professional, William F. Davis (1861-1902), left for Newport, Rhode Island, sometime after the end of the 1892 golf season. Off and on, he had served as the club's golf professional from the spring of 1881 to the fall of 1892. When not employed by the club, he had remained in Montreal working as North America's only club-maker.



Figure 1 William F. Davis (left) and A.W. Smith. *The Golfer*, vol 2 no 2 (December 1895), p. 51. The photograph was probably taken in October of 1892.

Davis left Montreal having brought golf to its height of popularity through a series of matches between the spring and fall of 1892 on the golf courses at Quebec and Montreal against Canada's top amateur golfer, Andrew Whyte Smith (1849-1901), each successive match being described as "the finest exhibition of golf ever witnessed in Canada," the final match in Montreal at the end of October being the best of all: "the golfers who witnessed the match could not find words to express their admiration" (*Gazette* [Montreal], 12 October 1892, p. 8; 31 October 1892, p. 5).

Replacing Davis would be no easy matter, and so there was a period of uncertainty regarding the next golf professional at Royal Montreal.

In March of 1893, the *Montreal Star* announced: "There are two new professional golf players to come from Great Britain to Canada. One is to play with the Ottawa Club, which intends to do great things this

year, and the other with the Royal Montreal Golf Club” (25 March 1893, p. 8). In fact, the Ottawa Golf Club’s golf professional, Alfred Ricketts, had already arrived in Ottawa almost a week before this item appeared in the Montreal newspaper. The Montreal golf professional in question, however, had not even been hired yet, let alone arrived in Canada, for we read at the end of April that “For a long time the club has cast about for a suitable man and at last Mr. Bennett Lang, of Scotland, was recommended to them as a man who knew his business and a first-class club-maker” (*Montreal Star*, 27 April 1893, p. 5).

Bennett Lang arrived in Montreal on 11 May 1893.

Early Life

Born in 1849, Bennett Lang (christened Michael Bennett Lang) was the first-born child of Michael Lang and Grace Bennett Patterson. His father Michael was a hairdresser, wigmaker, and perfumer operating out of an “elegant and commodious shop” at 52 George Street in Perth, a good location opposite the Royal George Hotel (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 24 February 1848, p. 1).

Michael Lang aimed to serve a prosperous middle-class clientele:

MICHAEL LANG,

Perfumer and Hairdresser, 52 George Street,

PERTH,

RESPECTFULLY invites inspection of his excellent assortment of LADIES’ ORNAMENTAL COMBS, HAIR BUSHES, TURKEY SPONGES, FANCY SOAPS, etc., selected personally in London from the principal Wholesale Houses. (Perthshire Advertiser, 25 December 1862, p. 1)

He always provided the latest thing in fashion and service, offering by the mid-1860s, for instance, “Camp’s patent rotary hairbrushing by machinery” (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 23 August 1866, p. 3).



Figure 2 52 George Street today. Google Maps.

The Lang family lived above the downtown shop opposite the big hotel, but Bennett had been born in Stirling, probably because his mother had returned to her parents’ home for the birth of her first child (as was traditional). The rest of the couple’s children were born in Perth, where parents Michael and Grace would spend the rest of their lives.

Bennett had six younger siblings. One brother, John, sixteen years younger than him, became a law clerk; sisters Marion and Elizabeth became saleswomen in their father’s shop. Sister Emily became a music teacher, and the second-born child, Robert, was also interested in music: he became a violinist who played at large dance events in Perth. Robert also became a hairdresser and perfumer, like his father, and so did Marion, who specialized as a “Ladies’ Hairdresser” (*Perth Advertiser*, 13 March 1912, p. 4). Remaining single, Marion lived in the family home at 52 George Street until she died

early in 1912. (Her oldest sister Margaret was living next door at 48 George Street when she died late in 1912.)

Although his younger sister Marion was sent to Sharp's Educational Institution, Bennett was sent to school at "Messrs. A & R. Duncan's English and Commercial Academy" on Stormont Street in Perth, where he was registered as "Michael B. Lang." At "the conclusion of the Session, ending 13th July 1858," he was awarded a "prize" in the "Third Division" of the "First Public Class" (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 22 July 1858, p. 1). The next year, he won the prize for second place among the boys in the "Second Writing Class" (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 7 July 1859, p. 5). (Bennett's sister Margaret was also sent to Duncan's English and Commercial Academy, and she also won prizes.)

After graduating from this Academy, Bennett Lang was apprenticed to a firm of mechanical engineers in Glasgow.

Golf Perchance

Bennett Lang played golf as a boy on the North Inch golf course in Perth, but a life in golf was not part of his plans in his late teens: he was living in Glasgow, training to become an engineer.



Figure 3 Old Tom Morris (1821-1908), on the left, and his son Young Tom Morris (1851-1875), circa 1873.

In the mid-nineteenth century, there was not even a golf course in Glasgow, let alone a golf club. But after having been dormant for 40 years, the Glasgow Golf Club was revived in 1870, and Lang later said that when living in Glasgow he had encountered Young Tom Morris playing golf on the revived club's new golf course.

By 1870, Young Tom (1851-1875) had won the Open Championship Belt three times in a row (1868-70), thereby acquiring the belt as his own property and establishing himself as the best golfer in the world. (He would also win the 1872 Open Championship, when the Claret Jug was awarded for the first time.)

Through this chance meeting with Young Tom, not only did Lang's interest in golf revive, but he also became friends with Scotland's precocious golf prodigy.

By 1871, however, Lang was back in Perth living with his parents. He was unemployed, but he described himself as an "engineer, finisher" (1871 Scotland Census).

At this point, according to a friend of Lang's named Peter Baxter, who interviewed him when writing *Golf in Perth and Perthshire* (Perth: Thomas Hunter, 1899), Lang's "intimacy with young Tom Morris" changed his life: it "led to Lang's going to St Andrews and learning golf club-making with old Tom" (p. 35).

Club-Making with Masters

Introduced to club-making by the legend Old Tom Morris (1821-1908), Lang then worked in the same town both for three-time Open champion Jamie Anderson (for whom he made the set of woods with which he won his third Open Championship in 1879) and for Robert Forgan.

Of Lang's work for the latter, the Reverend T.D. Miller observes the following in his essay a "Century of Golf in Perth": "Robert Forgan, who after the spread of the game employed as many as fifty workmen, accounted Ben Lang one of the best craftsmen he had ever employed" (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 12 August 1933, p. 15).



Figure 4 The club-making workshop of Robert Forgan, circa 1880.

When he was still a journeyman club-maker, Lang married dressmaker Agnes Rodgers in St Andrews in March of 1879. She died in May of 1880, however, just a couple of months after the couple had celebrated their first anniversary.

In the years that immediately followed, the widower Lang was employed in many famous

club-making workshops in other golf towns, such as that of Douglass McEwan & Son at Musselburgh, Open Champion Mungo Park at Alnmouth, and Open Champion Willie Fernie at Troon.

He had begun an itinerant lifestyle as a club-maker.

How had his wife's death affected Lang? Had Agnes died of complications from pregnancy or childbirth?

Concerning Lang's wandering from town to town, Miller says the following of his eventual appointment at Royal Montreal: "Still unsettled, he took a further flight to the New World" (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 12

August 1933, p. 15). Was Lang so emotionally “unsettled” by the sudden turn his life had taken that he could not physically and socially settle anywhere for long and needed to distract himself from his grief and anger by constantly changing jobs and changing locations? Was he condemned to an unsettled life of perpetual flight to a new world?

In the mid-1880s, Lang moved to England to work as greenkeeper and club-maker for the Worcester Golf Club.

From First to Worst in Worcestershire

Located on what was called the Malvern or Poolbrook Common, the golf course of the Worcester Golf Club was being expanded from nine holes to eighteen holes when Lang was hired. By 1888, it was regarded as “probably the best” eighteen-hole inland layout in England (*Golfing Annual 1888-89*, p. 250). One of its first greenkeepers, Lang may well have played a role in the laying out its new holes.



Figure 5 Left: the clubhouse of the Worcester Golf Club, early 1900s. Right: the view over the golf course from the clubhouse, late 1800s.

Early in 1887, however, Lang got into big trouble: “Bennett Lang was charged, on remand, with stabbing John Newell in Church Street on Saturday night [February 19th]. P.S. Drury said that Newell was still very weak and would not be able to attend court for several days. Prisoner was further remanded for a fortnight” (*Berrow’s Worcester Journal*, 26 February 1887, p. 2).



Figure 6 The Beauchamp Arms today, Worcester Road, Great Malvern, Worcestershire, England.

Lang had been out drinking at the Beauchamp Hotel with companions -- perhaps workers from the golf course – when he got into an argument with a former soldier named Newell, who was at the pub with his own friends. Testimony in Police Court indicated that as they drank, these two groups commenced “a general wrangle over foot racing and soldiering,” and that, eventually, Newell, “who had been a soldier, was showing his wounds, and soon after Lang either threatened that he would put a knife into Newell or asked him if he would like it to be put into him” (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 March 1887, p. 8). The

verbal wrangling continued as these men spilled into the street after closing time: so it was at the Beauchamp Hotel on certain nights.

Described in the newspapers as “a Scotchman” and a “golf maker,” Lang was held in jail for a month before a magistrate was able to interview Newell and commit Lang for trial on the charge of “stabbing John Newell ... with intent to do him bodily harm” (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 24 March 1887, p. 3; *Berrow Worcester Journal*, 19 March 1887, p. 3).

The trial occurred six weeks later:

Bennett Lang (39), club maker, was charged with maliciously wounding John Newell with intent to do him grievous bodily harm on the 19th February. Mr. Marshall Todd prosecuted; Mr. Wigam defended....

[Newell], a labourer living at Poolbrook, stated that on the night in question he was at the Beauchamp Arms with [Lang] and others. They left at eleven o'clock, closing time, and went down the Priory Road. There had been some words between witness [Newell] and prisoner [Lang] previously, and as [Newell] was about to pass [Lang] in the Priory Road, [Lang] came off the path and stabbed witness in the side.

[Newell] had had some drink but was sober. Asked if he was any the worse for what drink he had had, [Newell] answered that he was no worse. The Judge said the question of drinking was one of degree. At one of the Assizes recently, he heard a witness say he had had a “trifle,” which turned out to be 11 pints. (Laughter,)

In cross-examination, [Newell] denied that any blow passed between prisoner and himself before he was stabbed.

Charles Kite, [a companion of Lang's] who was called to corroborate, stated that [Newell] struck the first blow when he came up with [Lang] in the Priory Road. There was then a struggle between [Newell] and [Lang], and the [former] cried out that he was stabbed. Upon that, several other persons set upon [Lang] and took a knife from him. [Lang] had been smoking nailrod tobacco [usually very dark, hard-pressed tobacco made up in short rods or sticks], but witness could not say whether he had a knife in his hand when the row began....

Segal Coles [a companion of Newell's], labourer, Poolbrook, said he did not see any blow struck before Newell said he was stabbed. Newell might have struck [Lang] without witness seeing it.

Arthur Joseph Clarkson, [another of Newell's companions], labourer, Poolbrook, said he did not see [Newell] do anything before he said he was stabbed...

[Arresting officer] P.C. Parry [testified Lang] said, "He struck me, as you can see by my face." There was a mark on his face. [Lang also] said, "He slapped me before that in the public house. When he struck me in the road, I had a knife in my hand cutting some tobacco. I warned him that if he came again, I would let him have it. I did it in self-defence." [Parry] found some nailrod tobacco upon him.

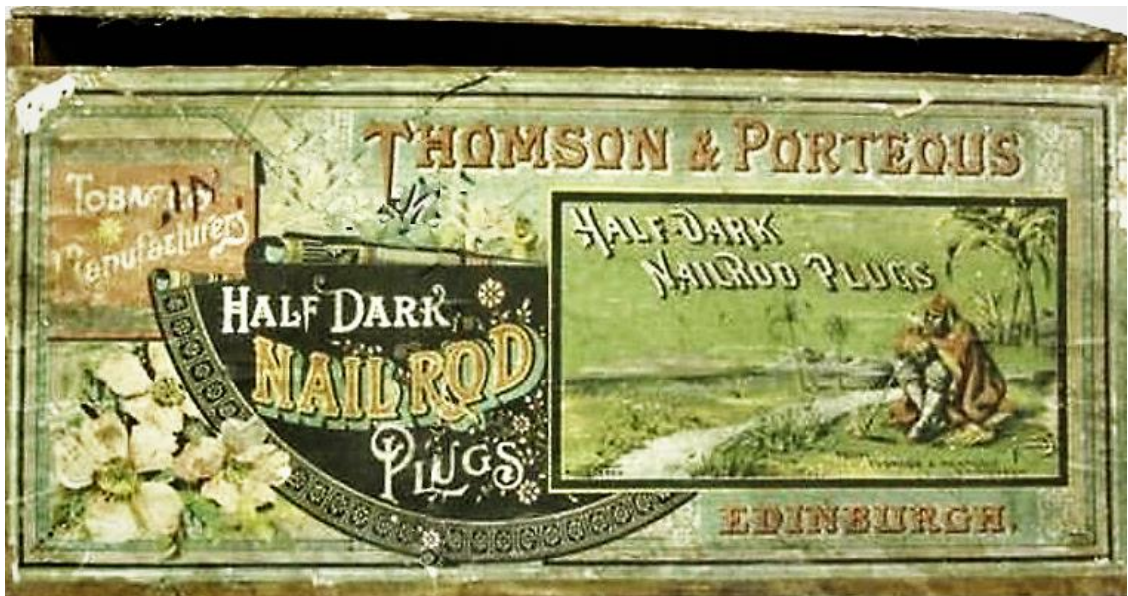


Figure 7 A 19th-century box in which plugs of nailrod tobacco were sold.

Mr. Wm Beauchamp Guy Tyrrell, surgeon, Malvern, described [Newell's] wounds. There was an incised wound an inch long and an inch deep on the left side of the abdomen. Considerable force would have been required to inflict it. [Newell] was in a dangerous state, and at [Tyrrell's] suggestion [Newell's] depositions were taken on the 23rd February. The wound was now healed. [Newell] had had drink when witness first saw him.

The witness Kite, re-called, said he did not see [Newell] strike [Lang] in the public-house. Newell had had the most drink, and next came [Lang]. [Kite] had had three or four pints. He had had "what did him good."

The jury found [Lang] guilty of unlawfully wounding. [Lang], who had been in prison for two months, was sentenced to four months' hard labour. (Berrow's Worcester Journal, 7 May 1887, p. 2)

So much for greenkeeping and club-making in England – at least for the time being.

Upon release from prison, and apparently no worse the wear for his term of hard labour, Lang returned to Scotland to serve as green superintendent in Perth, his old hometown. He also resumed club-making.

The Dalrymple Hammer

Lang remained in Perth for four years, but in 1892, according to Baxter, “a desire to see more of the world caused him to accept an engagement in Ireland with the County Down Club at Newcastle (now Royal County Down), where he acted as professional during the summer season” (p. 35). But in the fall of 1892, Lang accepted an invitation to work exclusively for Sir Walter Hamilton-Dalrymple (1854-1920), the owner of a large estate at North Berwick. The latter was not only the Lord of the Manor on which local golf courses were laid out, but also an enthusiastic devotee of the royal and ancient game and an increasingly well-known designer of patented golf clubs. (He also patented a tobacco pipe that absorbed nicotine before it entered the mouth and an automatic emergency braking system for trains.)



Figure 8 Walter Dalrymple and his sons on the 9-hole Rhodes Links (today the 18-hole Glen Golf Course) of North Berwick, for which Dalrymple granted the use of his land in 1894. The Golf Book of East Lothian, ed. John Kerr (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1896), p. 159.

Lang worked for Dalrymple but did his work in the shop of the most famous North Berwick club-maker: “According to the agreement, the work was done in the establishment of Jamie Hutchinson” (p. 35).



Figure 9 Circa 1893 photograph taken in front of the workshop of Nort Berwick club-maker James H. Hutchison (sometimes spelled Hutchinson). Hutchison sits in the middle; William Parker, on the left; caddie master George Thomson, on the right. Greenkeeper Tom Anderson stands left; starter James Crawford, right. The seven club-makers standing in a row behind Hutchison are not identified. One of them may well be Bennett Lang.

Lang was hired to make a two-sided club that was designed to function as both a putter and a cleek.



Figure 10 Dalrymple Hammer, 1892.

In the patent awarded in September of 1892, it was referred to as “The amble-faced or hammer-headed Golf club,” but it was often also called “The Duplex” (*Golf*, vol 5 no 105 [16 September 1892], p. 6). Dalrymple had patented other golf clubs, but the “hammer-headed club brought him into fame as a Golf patentee” (*Golf*, vol 9 no 226 [9 November 1894], p. 160). Lang built “the wonder” that “burst on the season” of 1892 (*Golf*, vol 5 no 124 (27 January 1893), p. 315).

To promote his new golf club, Dalrymple hit the road, so to speak: he travelled to the recently-built Muirfield golf course to show the club

to the professionals who were engaged in a tournament there: "Sir Walter was a prominent figure at Muirfield las week, hammer club in hand, industriously engaged in singing its merits" (*Golf* vol 5 no 108 [7 October 1892], p. 52).

The *Haddingtonshire Courier* mocked Dalrymple and his strange club:

*Scene – Front of Club-house; Friday, 5:30 P.M. (immediately after the close of play). Sir Walter approaches a group of St Andrews professionals, who look considerably down-hearted. "Bad day for the professionals," says Sir Walter to [Andrew] Kirkaldy. "Better luck next time, sir," quoth Andrew. "By the way," says Sir Walter, in his blandest tones, "seen my new club?" holding out the hammer. "Ca' that a club?" sneered Andrew; "I'd siner play with a tea-spin!" Kirkaldy turns on his heel in disgust, and Sir Walter retires amid general titter. (cited in *Golf* vol 5 no 108 [7 October 1892], p. 52)*

The editor of *Golf* observes more benignly that "It was not to be expected that professional golfers would take kindly to Sir Walter Dalrymple's new club. The feeling seems pretty general that the latest patent will not be adopted by first- or even second-rate golfers, although doubtless many will be inclined to give the new venture a trial, for the novelty, if for nothing else" (*Golf* vol 5 no 108 [7 October 1892], p. 52). Yet the editor ate his words, to a certain extent, when he observed in December that "R. Tait, the professional of the Sheffield and District Golf Club, in playing the seventh hole the other day, holed out in one, a distance of about 130 yards. He was playing with Sir W. Dalrymple's hammer-headed club" (*Golf*, vol 5 no 117 [9 December 1892], p. 203).

But mockery continued. An unidentified Member of Parliament wrote to *Golf* in December of 1892 to say that the sight of "the Dalrymple 'hammer'" in a Glasgow golf shop had set him off:

*I have just had a peep at the newest [patent] – a combined cleek and putter ... and various other novelties that are being hatched ... and I have positively warned the owner of the lot that I shall introduce and Act of Parliament next session ... to authorise the burning of every Golf invention of the past twenty years and the prohibition of every new thing in all time to come. I think such an Act absolutely necessary, unless the game of Golf is to be abolished, as it soon will be if the patent mania proceeds much further in its dire work. (*Golf*, vol 5 no 118 [16 December 1892], p. 218).*

Tried by many curious golfers, but opposed by most traditionalists, the Dalrymple club again became the subject for the editor of *Golf* In January of 1893, when, as the new year begand, he summed up the state

of play for the odd invention: “The Dalrymple ‘Hammer’ club was the comet of last season and has now disappeared from the firmament” (*Golf*, vol 5 no 124 (27 January 1893), p. 315). Demand for the club dropped off sharply: “a few copies remaining in Hutchison’s may be picked up by collectors of curiosities” (*Golf*, vol 5 no 124 (27 January 1893), p. 315).



Figure 11 Modified Dalrymple Hammer, circa 1894.
The name Hutchison is stamped in the India rubber.

Undeterred, Dalrymple soon set to work to refine his design – in 1894, the editor of *Golf* explained that “From what we hear regarding the nature of the patent club, it seems that a piece of India rubber ... is inserted in the face of the club ... and the spring of the India rubber ... gives the additional ‘go’ to the ball” (*Golf*, vol 9 no 226 [9 November 1894], p. 160).

Since Lang seems to have worked for Dalrymple until the spring of 1893, it is possible that he participated in the research and experimentation that would lead to the remodelling of the hammer club is not clear.

As early as the fall of 1892, Dalrymple had been awarded new patents for improvements in the designs of two of his previously patented golf clubs. The clubs in question are not identified in the issue of *Golf* that reports on the new

Dalrymple patents, but one of them might have been “The Hammer.”

In any event, Lang must have seen his club-making work for Dalrymple in Hutchison’s shop drop off significantly by the beginning of 1893. He may well have begun looking for a way out of his agreement with Dalrymple – and, given his abiding “desire to see more of the world,” maybe even a way out of Scotland again.

As fate would have it, it was at precisely this time that Royal Montreal began casting about for a replacement for Willie Davis. As Royal Montreal members made enquiries amongst their friends back in Scotland regarding available golf professionals, their emphasis on the club’s need for a master club-maker will have encouraged many of their contacts in “the Old Country” to think of Lang.

Sailing to Montreal

Sometime in the late winter and early spring of 1893, between the middle of March (when the newspapers first mentioned that an unnamed replacement for Willie Davis would arrive in Montreal later in the spring) and the end of April (when it was announced that a man named Bennett Lang was on his way across the Atlantic), Lang agreed to serve as the golf professional for the Royal Montreal Golf Club: he would perform the duties of greenkeeper, instructor, and club-maker.

Lang sailed from the port of Glasgow on 27 April 1893 on the S.S. Hibernian. He told the officials of the Allan Line, which operated the ship, that he was emigrating to Montreal and that his occupation was that of “mechanic.”



Figure 12 The S.S. Hibernian, sometime after its rebuild in 1885.

Carry 107 passengers and general cargo, the Hibernian arrived in Quebec City on the evening of May 9th. After landing some of its passengers and freight the next day, it sailed for Montreal at noon on May 10th, arriving at Customs in Montreal on May 11th.

Lang would live in Montreal from 1893 to 1895, at which point he returned to Scotland. Curiously, however, he served as the Royal Montreal golf professional for less than ten months, being replaced in the spring of 1894 by Tom Smith, a young golf professional from the Royal Norfolk Golf Club in England.

What happened?

An Instructive Experience in Montreal

Lang told Baxter that in Montreal “prosperity descended on him from all quarters”: he “built up a good business connection in Quebec and was sending golfing material to Vancouver Island and the States as fast as he could produce it”; “he wrought the Royal Montreal Golf Club up to a state of perfection in play” such that “they defeated Quebec twice in the annual matches on their own links, the first time they had ever been able to do so”; and “he kept up his ‘game’” in Canada, where he was “just coming to his best” and set “the record for Montreal, having reduced it from 80 to 72” (pp. 35-37).



Figure 13 Standing:
F. Stancliffe,
Official Golf Guide
1899, p. 312.

Lang was proud of his teaching in general, but he was particularly proud of the accomplishments of his mid-40s prodigy, Frederick Stancliffe. Lang boasted to Baxter that with this Royal Montreal member he had “proved that a golfer can be made out of a middle-aged gentleman” (p. 36).

Stancliffe took up the game at the age of forty-five in the very month that Lang arrived at the club. Initially granted the club’s maximum handicap allowance, Stancliffe received instruction from Lang and soon won competition after competition at the club, his handicap reduced after each victory until, such that, by the end of the year, playing as a scratch player, he won one of the club’s top prizes with a score of 80.

Thereafter, he regularly represented Royal Montreal in its matches with the Quebec Golf Club, and he regularly represented Quebec in the interprovincial matches between Ontario and Quebec. In 1894, he even entered the first amateur championship of the United States at Newport, Rhode Island, although he was

subsequently unable to play the event when it was scheduled that fall: his name had been “accepted and entered by the green committee of the Newport Club,” and when a fellow Royal Montreal entrant in the championship arrived in Newport and

explained that “Mr. Stancliffe was unable to take part in the competition,” “these gentlemen ... regretted Mr. Stancliffe’s inability to compete” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 24 September 1894, p. 6).

Via newspaper reporters and Baxter’s book, Lang was eager to inform Scottish golfers of the success of his teaching at Royal Montreal because his methods were thought by many to be somewhat unorthodox.

About a year after Lang's return to Scotland, a reporter for the *Dundee Courier* wrote that he had "gathered a few hints as to his methods of instruction," and he quoted Lang as follows:

A beginner should not be allowed to hit a ball till he has mastered the swing and is able to swing without thinking about it. Many men, although years in the game, are still plodding along in the initial stages on account of bad habits contracted during their first lessons.

The grip is of great importance in driving, and both hands should be firmly placed round the handle. The idea of keeping the right hand as a guide only during the swing is absurd. Let anyone try to swing with the left hand alone and he will see how much power is lost. (1 September 1896, p. 6)

He boasted to this writer about his success at instruction in Montreal: "Ben is the proud possessor of a valuable medal presented to him by a Canadian gentleman who, through Ben's successful coaching, was able to rise in one season from mediocrity to champion of the club" (*Dundee Courier*, 1 September 1896, p. 6). We recognize 45-year-old Stancliffe as the gentleman in question.

A few years later, Baxter was told the same story in greater detail: "In recognition of his success, and as a reward for the valuable 'coaching' received, ... Stancliffe, on the evening on which he won the Club Medal, presented Lang with a beautiful gold albert and medallion, of which he is justly proud" (p. 36). And Lang emphasized to Baxter that Stancliffe was not the only one grateful for his instruction: "The Royal Montreal players were extremely sorry to part with Lang and presented him with a club testimonial thanking him for his great services as a 'coach'" (pp. 35-36).

Most of what Lang told Baxter – about the course record he set, about the success of his star pupil, and about the appreciation expressed for his instruction – is confirmed by other contemporary sources, so I take Baxter's account of his friend's time in Montreal as generally accurate.

Illness in Montreal

Lang explained that he returned to Scotland from Montreal only because of ill health. In Montreal, Baxter observed, “Ben looked as if he had cast anchor for life. But, no! An unseen enemy descended upon him in the form of sciatica and laid him prostrate. The doctor declared that return to health depended upon him returning to Scotland” (p. 35).

It may well be that almost two years passed between Lang’s being laid low by sciatica, on the one hand, and his returning to Scotland, on the other, for Royal Montreal advertised for a new golf professional not at the end of the 1895 golf season, but rather at the beginning of the 1894 golf season – less than ten months after Lang got off the S.S. Hibernian in Montreal.

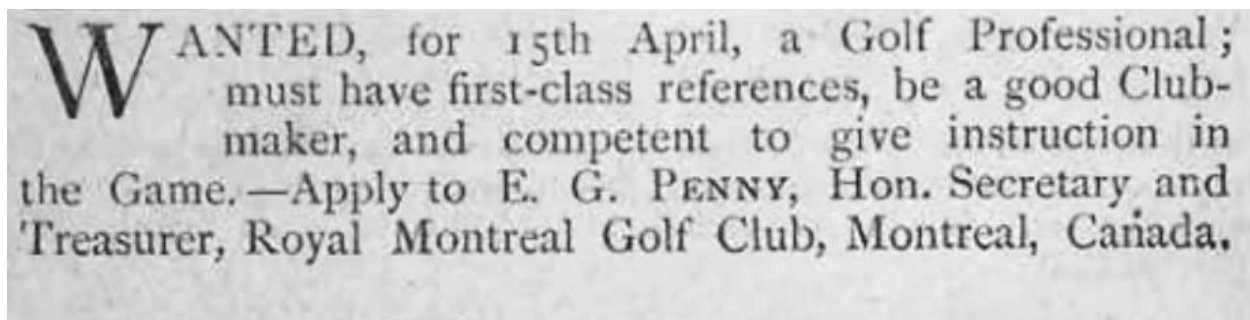


Figure 14 *Golf*, vol 7 no 182 (9 March 1894), p. 418.

Being laid prostrate by sciatica would have prevented Lang from attending to his greenkeeping duties. Neglect of its “green” (as a golf course was called in the nineteenth century) was not something that Royal Montreal was able or willing to tolerate, so I take the advertisement in question as an indication of when it had been determined by the club that Lang’s sciatica was incapacitating in regard to the physical labour required of him.

Lang’s physical limitations will have rubbed a sore spot at Royal Montreal. In the mid-1880s, Alexander Dennistoun (1821-1895), a club founder in 1873 and then the club Captain (as the president of a golf club was called in those days) had quarrelled with Willie Davis about a similar situation.

Davis’s contract (which was probably the model for Lang’s) indicated that he would be paid £1 per week and that “for teaching beginners his charge was to be a shilling, or twenty-five cents, a round of nine holes, one-third of which was to be returned to the club” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21). It also included the line, “I am to get all that I can earn for making and repairing clubs and balls,” and it specified the charges allowed: “2s 6d [2 shillings and six pence] for clubhead (60c); 2s for making shaft

(50c); putting new horn on, new lead, and splicing and gluing, 6 pence each; making up a ball, 4 pence” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21).

All went well until “Later it was considered that Davis was not doing sufficient work” as greenkeeper, and it emerged that there was reason to regret that the golf professional’s greenkeeping responsibilities had not been specified in the contract with the same sort of detail seen above regarding his responsibilities for club-making and instruction (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21).



Figure 15 Alexander Dennistoun, circa 1881.

Club-making and teaching were not the areas in which Davis’s work was regarded as “insufficient”; Dennistoun wrote to Davis to criticize his deficient keeping of the green: “It was supposed that as soon as the green was put into your care you would take some interest and pride in having it as perfect as possible.... One principal object we had in getting you here was that our new and rough green might be made as like the long-made green as can be done” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21).

Davis’s response to Dennistoun’s complaints had been to suggest that the club should hire a second “man for doing the manual work” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21).

Dennistoun balked at this suggestion, saying that the club could not afford to do so, and explaining in detail what the club wanted: “If you take every afternoon a wheelbarrow and spade or the small lawnmower, and take the green from hole to hole, removing all objectionable obstacles and cutting all the grass that can be cut, you would soon have the green in a very different state from what it is” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 22 October 1921, p. 21).

Davis was let go.

He remained in Montreal, however, and made and repaired golf clubs and golf balls in his shop at 1202 St James Street. He was the only club-maker in North America, so he continued his close connection

with the Royal Montreal golfers. In fact, “Davis was later re-engaged” by the club (*Gazette [Montreal]*, 22 October 1921, p. 21).

Was Davis lazy in the mid-1880s? Did he get over his laziness by the late 1880s and agree to do the spadework and mowing that he had once refused to do?

It turns out that Davis had become ill in the mid-1880s and feared that doing the manual labour specified by Dennistoun might kill him. As he later explained to the doctors of the Erie Medical and Surgical Association, physical activity caused in him a “pain at heart” that left him unable to “engage in outdoor games with success,” let alone dig with a spade or push a lawnmower (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 23 August 1887, p. 4). By the mid-1880s, he was both physically unwell and psychologically depressed: “I had been told by a well-known doctor of Montreal that I would probably not live three months, as I had an affection of the heart and felt very low-spirited” (*Gazette [Montreal]*, 22 October 1921, p. 21).



Figure 16 *Gazette [Montreal]*, 12 March 1887, p. 2.

In 1886, Davis consulted with “the physicians and surgeons of the Erie medical and surgical association of Buffalo, New York,” who claimed to have “the largest staff of medical and surgical experts of any institution in the world” and to “stand today at the very head of those engaged in the healing art,” especially “in the successful treatment of chronic diseases or deformities” (*British Whig [Kingston]*, 10 May 1887, p. 8). Doctors representing this association often hit the road and made five-day visits to cities in Ontario and Quebec to consult with potential patients. The advertisement claimed: “We cure diseases ... after other physicians have failed and pronounced them incurable”

(*British Whig*, 12 May 1887, p. 5). By the way: “Consultation and Examination Free” (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 5 February 1887, p. 5).

Davis received what he regarded as life-saving medical treatment from the Erie Medical and Surgical Association and so, after his recovery, he wrote to the association to express his gratitude:

I feel it a pleasure to address you these few lines to state the benefits received from your treatment last year. It was with little hope of success, as I had been told by a well-known doctor of Montreal that I would probably not live three months, as I had an affection of the heart I am pleased to say [that] after your treatment, I am myself again and can do my work without difficulty

I ... strongly recommend all fellow sufferers to try your treatment and feel confident of your ability to cure them. (Ottawa Daily Citizen, 23 August 1887, p. 4)

The Erie Medical and Surgical Association published this letter in newspaper advertisements and added a note: “Mr. Davis has won eight out of ten competitions at Golf since his medical treatment and recovery” (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 23 August 1887, p. 4).

When sometime after the end of the 1893 golf season Lang became incapable of fulfilling his greenkeeping duties (as well as the portion of his instruction duties that required him to play golf with members), one can see how Royal Montreal’s experience with Davis about eight years before led to the club’s immediate decision to replace Lang as its official golf professional.

And one can see why Lang, as the only club-maker in Canada (apart from the newly arrived Alfred Ricketts in Ottawa, who is not known to have made golf clubs), would have stayed on in Montreal and developed his golf equipment business. He had customers not just in Montreal, but also in Quebec City and Ontario, as well as in British Columbia and the United States.

Nonetheless, Lang left Montreal in 1895 and returned to Scotland, where we find him making golf clubs once again in St Andrews.

Back to the Old Country

Returning to St Andrews, Lang returned to his role as innovative swing instructor. Indeed, the *Dundee Courier* referred to him as “a professor of the Royal and Ancient game at St Andrews” (1 September 1896, p. 6).

But Lang’s first love was club-making. Yet having been away from St Andrews for so long, he had no clients when he came back to town at the end of 1895. Ironically, then, Lang’s first club-making work in St Andrews was for his old club: Royal Montreal.

As a club-maker, Lang had maintained a good relationship with the Royal Montreal Golf Club after being let go – just as Willie Davis had done. And so, although when he decided to return to Scotland it had been almost two years since he had officially served as the Royal Montreal golf professional, the club nonetheless presented him with a testimonial expressing gratitude for his service and “wishing him return of health in the ‘old country’” (pp. 35-36).

And so, Lang continued to make golf clubs for members of the Royal Montreal Golf Club: “For a year he sojourned in ‘the city old and grey’ [St Andrews], and, while not engaged rubbing his joints, acted informally for his old friends in Canada by sending out clubs. So much faith had they in him to send out only the best material that they allowed no less than 2 dollars fifty cents – 10 s 6d – for every club” (Baxter p 36).

London Town

After a year in St Andrews, the “desire to see more of the world” once again became irresistible, and Lang in 1896 accepted the offer of an appointment as “professional and green superintendent” at Royal Epping Forest Golf Club in Chingford, East London (Baxter 36). He was proud of the responsible position he had achieved, boasting to Baxter that he had “six men under him” (p. 36).



Figure 17 Royal Epping Forest Club, Chingford, in the early 1900s.

The club announced: “The professional is in attendance daily. His charge is two shillings and sixpence per round of eighteen holes, and three shillings a lesson for beginners, and members must also pay his caddie” (*Golfing Annual 1896-97*, p. 388).

Lang seemed to be on easy street: at Royal Epping he received three shillings for accompanying beginners for eighteen holes,

whereas for accompanying beginners around the nine-hole course at Royal Montreal, Willie Davis had received only one shilling!

But after about a year at Epping Forest, Lang again returned to Scotland, establishing a club-making shop in Perth in the fall of 1897 (Baxter p. 36).

Perth Again, and Finally

Within a month of setting up a club-making shop in Perth, Lang had a brush with the law. He was soon in court again, but this incident was nothing like the one in Worcester ten years before:

A Golf Clubmaker and His Gas

At the Police Court yesterday – Bailie Halley on the bench – Bennet Lang, golf clubmaker, was charged with having, on becoming sub-tenant of premises at 9 North Port, on 17th November, ... used gas up till 17th December of 800 cubic feet by connecting the meter with the gas pipe without notifying the Gas Commissioners. He pleaded not guilty William Watt, the former tenant, deponed to having the meter examined and the gas cut off before Lang entered.

Richard Buchan, meter inspector, deponed to taking the index as well as locking off the gas at 9 North Port.... Ferguson Stewart, a collector, [went] to 9 North Port on the 17th December Mr. Lang was in, and the gas was burning. Witness asked Lang how he succeeded in getting gas, and he replied he did it himself by taking out the cock and removing the white lead. Witness examined the index and found that 800 feet had been consumed since Lang entered the shop. Witness also examined the stop cock and found it quite open. Lang began to swear....



Figure 18 The remaining buildings on North Port Street today, dating from the late 1400s and early 1600s, are 15 - 23 North Port. The location of Bennett Lang's long-ago demolished shop is marked with an orange arrow.

For the defence, Robert Lang, Scott Street, said he remembered going to his brother's shop in North Port in November. He saw the gas burning. Lang told him he had turned on the gas [and] he expected the gas man round.

The Bailie said he could not but believe that Lang knew perfectly well what he was doing when he committed this irregular action. It was an act which could not benefit him because he was bound to pay for the gas consumed from the day on which he entered the shop. It was his duty to have sent word to the Gas Commissioners, and he (the Bailie) could not understand why he had not done so.

He was bound to find Lang guilty, but as this was the first case of the kind that had come before the court, he did not want to make the punishment severe, although an example must be made. It was clear that there had been no attempt to defraud.

He thought that the ends of justice would be met by his imposing a fine of 2s 6 d, with the alternative of 24 hours' imprisonment. (Perthshire Advertiser, 23 February 1898, p. 5)

It is not indicated whether Lang chose to spend 24 hours in jail or to pay the fine of 2s 6d, which was the charge at Royal Montreal for a new clubhead and the charge at Royal Epping Forest Golf Club for the golf professional to accompany a member for eighteen holes.

After this "irregular" start in Perth, Lang quickly resumed his role in local golf community as a celebrated club-maker.

Lang's experience as an engineer in Glasgow had stood him in good stead in his club-making work: he invented new tools for club-making and he invented a machine for scoring the naturally smooth gutta-percha golf balls (dimples had not been invented yet, but it was known that a scuffed and scratched gutta-percha ball flew further and more predictably than a smooth one, so balls had been marked up by hand).

Robert Forgan had been astonished by Lang's mechanical know-how when it came to the matter of picking locks:

[Forgan] spoke highly of his [Lang's] ingenuity as a locksmith. Forgan had a box-room [that is, a locker-room for golfers], the divisions of which were let out to students and others at so much a month, each case having its own key retained by the player who used it. But [Forgan] occasionally wished to look through the boxes to find if any happened to be vacant, and spoke

to Lang about it. Lang asked him for one of the keys and with a file he so manipulated it that it became a master-key, capable of opening any one of the numerous boxes. (Perth Advertiser, 12 August 1933, p. 15)

Miller wryly observes that Lang's lock-picking skills were "a useful but in some ways a dangerous qualification" (*Perth Advertiser*, 12 August 1933, p. 15).

But Lang would not take something from others without permission, right?

Lang was particularly adept at copying other maker's golf clubs – a service greatly appreciated by golfers who wanted to replace a treasured old club that had worn out with an exact copy. Baxter says that when he visited Lang in 1899, he "was busy copying an old Philp baffy [a wooden club with the loft of today's 5-wood] for a well-known Perth gentleman" (p. 37).

Was there any "irregularity" in this copying of old golf clubs?

Peter Georgiady says that Lang's "integrity would not allow him to create a forgery of an old Philp, although it was known he produced many a copy of old Hugh Philp heads" (cited "Antique Golf Clubs from Scotland," <https://www.antiquegolfscotland.com/antiquegolf/maker.php3?makerid=1272>). Yet the editor of the website "Antique Golf Clubs from Scotland" writes that it was related to him that Lang "made many very fine wooden putters and some even had his name on them rather than Philp's" (<https://www.antiquegolfscotland.com/antiquegolf/maker.php3?makerid=1272>).

Copying of other makers' designs (or was it forging?), picking locks, "irregularly" accessing the gas supply, assaulting someone with intent to do grievous bodily harm

One can see why the editor of "Antique Golf Clubs from Scotland" suspects that Bennett Lang was "a bit of a lad." In fact, he is sceptical that it was sciatica that brought Lang back to Scotland from Montreal: "I suspect some scandal brought his time at Montreal to an end."

Golfing Again

The golf professional at Royal Epping Forest Golf Club was required to be in attendance daily and, on demand, to accompany members for eighteen holes of golf. Was this job requirement the reason that Lang did not last more than a year at Epping Forest?

After all, Baxter says that when Lang came back to Scotland from Montreal, he had time to make golf clubs only “while not engaged rubbing his joints” (p. 36). Lang’s sciatica still seems to have been disabling in 1896, the year he went down to Epping Forest.

How had sciatica affected Lang’s ability to play golf?

Baxter assured readers who knew Lang mainly as a club-maker that “Ben has ever enjoyed the green” and has “kept up his ‘game’” wherever “he has officiated either as maker, professional, or green superintendent”: “At St Andrews, Mussleburgh, Dunbar, Alnmouth, Troon, Newcastle, North Berwick, and at Epping Forest, Lang was always able to show a ‘card’ that bore testimony to his excellence as a player. A long driver, a beautiful wrist player, and true on the green fitly describes Lang’s all-around excellence” (pp. 37-38).

And, of course, as reported in *Golf*, at the Royal Montreal Golf Club, “Bennet Lang, the club’s late professional, holds the record of the links with 72” (vol 9 no 228 [23 November 1894], p. 205).

It seems that Lang was determined to play golf whenever he was physically able to do so. Although a doctor in Montreal had apparently told Lang that his sciatica meant that he would have to give up his job as Royal Montreal’s golf professional and flee Canada’s harsh winter, back at Perth as of the fall of 1897, “He rather disproved the assertion of not being able to live through the winter”: he joined the Perth Artisans Golf Club (an association of working-class golfers playing over the North Inch course where Lang had first wielded a club in the 1860s).

Baxter played golf with Lang at this time: “His ‘enemy,’ sciatica, prevents him appearing on the North Inch more frequently than he does, but on a dry day he can warm the best of our ‘cracks,’ and there is no more genial companion in a foursome” (p. 38).

Lang even scratched the itch to return to competitive golf. In the spring of 1899, he represented the Artisans Golf Club in a competition against the Caledonian Club of Glasgow in a match at Glasgow’s Alexandra Park (*Dundee Courier*, 3 April 1899, p. 3). Supporters of the Artisans Golf Club exhorted them

to advance their strongest team and their best effort: “Mr. Alex Reid, an ex-captain of the Artisans, has kindly presented two dozen golf balls, and the conditions of the gift are that these be divided amongst the Artisans players who defeat their opponents in this match” (*Dundee Courier*, 3 April 1899, p. 3).



Figure 19 Members of the Perth Artisans Golf Club, along with their caddies, circa 1899. Lang may be in this photograph.

One hopes that the artisans ex-captain purchased the golf balls in question from Lang, and that Lang won one of them.

The End

At the beginning of May in 1913, almost twenty years to the day after he took up his duties at the Royal Montreal Golf Club, Bennett Lang suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and was hospitalized in the Perth County and City Infirmary.



Figure 20 Perth County and City Infirmary, circa 1913.

Aged sixty-four, he died on May 4th.

Lang's return to Perth in 1897 having been "hailed by his old friends with gladness," he operated out of the same shop at 9 North Port from the fall of 1897 to the spring of 1913 (Baxter p. 36).

According to his old friend Baxter, because "the 'host' can tell a good story," "Ben's shop was soon uncomfortably crowded at night" (pp. 36-37). This was especially the case during the cold winter nights – when, as we know, the gas was flowing as freely as the stories.

Lang had been happy to reside in the city where many of his siblings lived and worked. Although Elizabeth and Emily had married and moved to the nearby town of Scone, Margaret and Marion still lived side-by-side on George Street – only about 300 yards from their oldest brother's shop on North Port. Just a year younger than Bennett, brother Robert called upon him at this shop and conversed with him about family news, local life, and national politics (he was a member of the "Primrose League," a British association for the promotion of conservative principles in politics).

Robert survived Bennett by six years, and may have inherited his brother's golf clubs, for when Robert's estate was auctioned off in 1919, among the items advertised by the auctioneers were two items of note, the one most precious to Bennett, the other most precious to Robert: "Golf Clubs, Old Violins" (*Perthshire Advertiser*, 30 July 1919, p. 4).

Robert valued his violins – in fact, in Perth’s Small Debt Court in 1891, he successfully sued a man who had smashed his violin with his fist at a dance, winning 30 shillings and court expenses – but clearly his “Old Violins” would not have brought a high bid at auction in 1919 (*Dundee Courier*, 2 May 1891, p. 5). And neither would Lang’s golf clubs have commanded a high price at that auction.

Today, few of Lang’s clubs survive, but when they come up for auction, they now fetch hundreds of dollars – if not thousands.

Postscript

We know that in 1887 Bennett Lang was convicted by a jury of his peers of maliciously wounding a man with intent to do him grievous bodily harm. This would not be the first or the last time that a son of Michael Lang and Grace Paterson would be involved in physically harming a human being.

Robert Lang was charged with sexual assault in 1881:

ALLEGED GROSS OUTRAGE ON A MARRIED WOMAN

At the Police Court yesterday morning, John Chalmers, engine-cleaner, Union Street; Thomas Robert Stewart, joiner, Long Causeway; and Robert Lang, hairdresser, High Street, were placed at the bar on a charge of assault....

The prisoners were ... brought before Bailie McKenzie, when superintendent Welsh intimated that, as a result of his investigations, he felt justified in asking for a remit of the accused on the charge of rape and assault, and the prisoners were accordingly handed over to the Sheriff, before whom today they will emit judicial declarations on these charges.

So far as can be learned, it seems that the alleged outrage occurred in Glasgow Road about 2:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the victim of the alleged outrage being a married woman. Her husband was present at the time, but it is averred that he was prevented from rendering assistance to his wife by being held down by the throat by one of the accused while the crime was being perpetrated by his companions. (Dundee Courier, 15 July 1881, p. 2)

I find no subsequent reporting about this matter in the newspapers of the day.

Almost three decades later, John Lang, living with sixty-year-old brother Bennett at 9 North Port in 1909, seems to have attempted to kill himself:

THE RAZOR IN NORTH PORT

Alleged Attempted Suicide

John Lang (40), a clerk, was taken to Perth Infirmary today suffering from a wound in his throat. Lang resides with his brother at 9 North Port, and it is supposed that he attempted to injure himself with a razor. The wound was slight, however, and after being dressed at the Infirmary, he was dismissed. (Perthshire Advertiser, 2 January 1909, p. 3)

Was there something common in the nature and experience of the three sons that Michael Lang and Grace Paterson had that made these violent acts possible?

This is an interesting question, but a sad one, in the complicated story of Royal Montreal's second golf professional, Bennett Lang.