

Curling – the Roaring Game

The sound of a heavy stone moving across ice gives rise to curling being known as the roaring game. Curling is a game of skill and tradition that has been played in Scotland for many centuries. The spirit of the game is important, with good sportsmanship essential whether playing in competitions or just friendly games for fun.

Patrick Shaw, a past President of the Partick Bowling Club, came along at short notice to tell us about the game. Played between two teams of four, each player slides two stones down the rink towards the “house”, a target area painted on the ice. By giving the stones some rotation as they are slid, they can be made to curl as they move down the rink, similar to the movement of biased bowls on grass. The stones themselves have developed over the years – there was a picture of an irregular one with a handhold inscribed 1511 – and are now made of polished granite fitted with a handle. Brushes, now with synthetic fabric rather than bristles, are swept in front of the stones enable them to travel further as required. Sticks, or cues, are available to help wheelchair users and those with less mobility. The stones are kept at the rinks as they are heavy and need to be at ice temperature.

The game developed on lochs and ponds in the winter when the climate was cooler. Clubs were formed in the eighteenth century and in the 1830s national rules were drawn up with the formation of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (RCCC). Queen Victoria was a fan. The game spread to other countries particularly Canada. As well as natural ponds, shallow depressions were dug as rinks; these could be easily flooded and conveniently located next to clubhouses.

The Partick Curling Club was formed in 1842,, later moving to a clubhouse and adjoining rinks in Victoria Park. Patrick showed several historic photos from the Club (see pdf of accompanying presentation slides).

The first indoor game on artificially produced ice was on a rink in Manchester, but costs were high and Scots preferred the outdoors. In time a few indoor rinks were built in and around Glasgow and used by curlers as well as skaters. The quality of the indoor ice surface is far superior to that of outdoor ice, so much so that the ice is “pebbled” with a water spray to make it less slippery. Now it is very rare for games to be played outdoors in Scotland; milder winters mean little ice. The Partick Curling Club plays at the rink at Howwood south of the Clyde following closure of the rink at Braehead.

Curling is an Olympic sport and Scotland is leading contender, but Patrick’s main message was that it is a good sport to take up, even in retirement, for fun and friendship.

Stephen Rodgers