

Golf balls fetch thousands at auction

Five rare golf balls dating to the 1840s, found at Dundas Castle have sold for £31,620 at auction.

The “featherie” balls were found stored together in a small bag under floorboards in the castle and later kept in a private collection.

They were each stamped “Dundas of Dundas”, after their owner James Dundas, who was a member of The Gentlemen Golfers of Edinburgh, one of the world’s oldest golf clubs, founded in 1744.

The feather-filled balls went under the hammer for the first time in Bonhams’ Winter Home & Interiors sale in Edinburgh, where they attracted bids from golf collectors all over the world.

The top lots included two rare balls stamped by 19th century golf ball maker John Ramsay, which made £10,240 and £8320.

Another, featuring the highly sought after “Allan” stamp of 19th century golfing legend Allan Robertson, fetched £6148.

Hamish Wilson, Senior Valuer, Bonhams Edinburgh, described the historic objects as “the most important collection of feather golf balls to go on the market in the last 20 years”.

He said: “These golf balls all related to James Dundas, who lived at Dundas Castle. They were removed from under the floorboards, where they’d been stored for safekeeping, around 30 years ago.

“It was a remarkable find and even more extraordinary that they could all be traced to one player.

“The link to James Dundas was critical. James Dundas is recorded as a member of The Gentleman Golfers of Edinburgh – later known as the Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers.

“He is recorded as being a regular player in medal competitions between 1830 and 1847, both at Leith and Musselburgh.

“To have his stamp on these feather golf balls allows you to build a real picture around them.

“We are very happy with the results, which were well over the estimates. We had interest from collectors around the world, including Europe and America as well as the UK.”

Born in Dalmeny, near Edinburgh, in 1793, James Dundas, 26th Chief of Dundas, was Vice-Lord-Lieutenant and Justice of the Peace for Linlithgowshire.

Records kept at the National Library of Scotland show Dundas played golf regularly from 1830-47 at Leith Links and Musselburgh, where the Honorable Company moved in 1836.

The feather-filled balls marked an important phase in the development of the game. Around 1848 the featherie began to be replaced by the gutty ball made of gutta-percha gum.

Three of the golf calls featured the stamp of “J Ramsay” while one had no maker’s mark.

The fifth featured the highly sought after “Allan” stamp of top golfer Robertson, the world’s first professional golfer who also ran an equipment-making business in St Andrews, Fife.

Robertson, who made featherie golf balls, hired the great Tom Morris as his young apprentice from 1835. He sacked Morris in 1851 after he caught him playing with a new-style gutty ball.



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