New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12278

Comment: *President Trump's Scottish connections*

'Aberdeenshire business owner wins presidential election' — thus *The Buchan Observer* Wednesday 9 November 2016, the Peterhead weekly. Morag Kuc, the editor, is quoted as follows: 'Obviously with the Trump International Golf Course on our doorstep we had to do something and, being the local paper, we always try our best to find the local angle – hence the headline'. (Kuc is the Polish surname of her husband, which should be pronounced 'koots': the editor herself is a native of Peterhead.)

Balgownie, Murcar, Cruden Bay, are legendary links golf courses stretching from the city of Aberdeen up the North Sea coast, interrupted now with Trump International at Balmedie, just beyond Murcar, and by all accounts a beautiful course, as the owner says.

Donald John Trump is half Scottish. His roots, however, are not in Aberdeenshire. His maternal origins could not be more remote, culturally as well as geographically. His mother, Mary Anne MacLeod (1912-2000), the youngest of ten, was born in a crofter-fisherman's household at Tong, a township (population 570 at 2001 census) just north of Stornoway, on the island of Lewis. Buchan folk, who are farmers and fishermen also, though on a larger scale, speak a dialect of Scottish English, unintelligible in the Gaelic- speaking Outer Hebrides, and vice versa. In 1930, Mary emigrated to New York, intending to work as a domestic servant. All but one of her siblings moved to North America. In 1936 she married Fred Trump: the previous year she is listed as living in the house. Born in the Bronx to German immigrants, Fred was by then already a successful real-estate developer, though it was by building and selling homes to American servicemen near their camps during World War II that he became seriously rich. Mary Anne revisited Tong quite often, speaking Gaelic with family and friends. On one occasion she took Donald with her, when he was three or four years old. In 2008 he stopped off, and was pictured with cousins, en route to Aberdeenshire.

The golf course at Cruden Bay was commissioned in 1894 by the Great North of Scotland Railway Company, opening in 1899 together with the immensely grand Cruden Bay Hotel. The idea was for affluent golfers to come north by the sleeper from London for a healthy break on the Aberdeenshire coast. It was never very successful, in the inter-War years. In 1932 passenger rail services all the way were suspended. In 1940 the hotel was requisitioned by the Gordon

© 2017 Provincial Council of the English Province of the Order of Preachers

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12278 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Highlanders, vacated in such a state that it never reopened, and sold for demolition in 1947. It remains a great golf course, which, with the gales and the haar drifting in from the North Sea, can be tough to play. Like Murcar and Balgownie, Cruden Bay has overseas members but the great majority live within easy driving distance.

In 2008, against heavy opposition from local people and the environment agencies, which was over-ruled by the Holyrood government headed by Alex Salmond, Donald Trump won planning approval to build across rare legally protected coastal dunes, on the grounds that it would be an investment of national importance, employing 1,200 people. Balmedie, an attractive village, inhabited largely by people who commute to work in Aberdeen or Peterhead, would be swamped (population 1,653 at 2001 census). The project was to build a 450-room five-star hotel with spa and conference centre, two 18-hole golf courses, a golf academy, stables (horses for non-golfing ladies), shops (rare whiskies, tweeds etc), and a sprawling housing development of 36 'golf villas', 950 holiday homes, and accommodation for 400 staff. This was to cost between £750m and £1bn. However, the recession meant that only one golf course has been laid out so far, while the early 19th century mansion on the property has been converted into a 19-bedroom 'boutique' hotel.

In December 2015 Mr Trump sought to prevent a wind farm being built in the sea within sight of the golf course, but the Supreme Court in Edinburgh dismissed the case. An increasingly ludicrous exchange with the First Minister culminated in the Trump Organization's spokesman advising that Mr Salmond 'should go back to doing what he does best: unveiling pompous portraits of himself that pander to his already over-inflated ego'.

In 2016, Mr Trump's revised plan to build 2,750 new homes and holiday flats was rejected by Holyrood officials on the grounds that he must stick to the original concept as approved, with the addition that he should build a primary school, community facilities and a roundabout, as well as ensuring hundreds of the homes would be 'affordable' – plus 'robust' environmental checks. It's hard to make out which party is the more serious — Holyrood or the Trump Organization. And no easier to guess what light these Scottish connections shed (if any) on the likely course of Mr Trump's Presidency of the United States.

Fergus Kerr OP

© 2017 Provincial Council of the English Province of the Order of Preachers
https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12278 Published online by Cambridge University Press