



Why gold for a hole with a blind teeshot? Long p:4 11 on Royal County Down's Championship course is one of the best of its type: plenty of room to drive into and excellent design through the green.

1970 (scene of Michael Bonallack's record-breaking third successive victory and fifth such title overall) and 1999 (won by Graeme Storm).

Although some might say the character of the whole place is a little old-fashioned, with the Steel and Ebert changes and a new wing to the clubhouse this is now an outdated sentiment – though not quite as out of date, perhaps, as the 4 guineas Old Tom Morris was paid for his design.

Much has been written about the course itself, which comprises two loops of 9 (both emanating from the clubhouse, framed by the Slieve Donard hotel and the mountains of Mourne beyond), including the general observation that the back 9 comes as a disappointment after the dramatic proportions of the front (frighteningly wild in the wind). We disagree: the second 9 represents no less a quality in golf design – it may be less spectacular, but here, more than just about anywhere, your golf (and emotions) will be tested until the final putt.

ANNESLEY

Butchart/Steel & Ebert c1900/1995 £

Selected holes

	y	p
4	399	4
8	338	4
12	144	3
15	364	4

Total 4708 66

shot leaving a short iron to a wonderful greensite, set in a hill with gorse all around and a small, sloping putting surface. Medium p:4 15 can require two drivers into the wind! The course has six p:3s, of which the best is the 12th.



The attractive 12th is the best p:3 on the Annesley course.

THE ROYAL DUBLIN

Campbell/Colt/M Hawtree 1919/1920/2006 €€€

H: M 28, L 36

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🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1 for Dublin; L just after end of M1 onto Collins Ave (R103, becomes Collins Ave East); after 2.5km, L onto Howth Rd (R105); after about 0.5km R into Sybil Hill Rd (becomes Vernon Ave); after about 1km L onto Seafield Rd East; after 0.5km R onto Clontarf (i.e. coast) Rd; immediately L across wooden bridge to club, on L.

	m	p		m	p
1	367	4	10	422	4
2	445	5	11	500	5
3	373	4	12	184	3
4	163	3	13	423	4
5	446	4	14	513	5
6	543	5	15	415	4
7	196	3	16	278	4
8	375	4	17	402	4
9	159	3	18	449	4
	3067	35		3586	37
				6653	72

An out-and-back relatively flat links, with most holes running parallel to the shore, with some notable exceptions, especially right-angle dogleg 18 (quaintly named 'the Garden'). Hawtree's remodelling is just complete – a significant improvement.

The twin towers seen here behind Royal Dublin's medium p:3 4th are a surprisingly endearing feature of the course: they always keep their distance, reminding you that you are at play, not work.





ROYAL PORTRUSH

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🚗 ✈ Belfast Int: A57 to M2 (J5); west on M2 for Londonderry; exit J1, whence R onto A26 to Ballymoney bypass, then R onto B62 through Ballybogy to coast (9 miles), where L onto A2 to Portrush; main clubhouse on R before town; Valley course starts 400yds beyond on R near ladies' clubhouse.



Only required at Dunluce Course 

DUNLUCE ★★ ★

Colt 1933 & 1947 £££

H: M 24, L 36

	y	p		y	p
1	392	4	10	478	5
2	505	5	11	170	3
3	155	3	12	392	4
4	457	4	13	372	4
5	411	4	14	210	3
6	189	3	15	365	4
7	431	4	16	442	4
8	384	4	17	548	5
9	475	5	18	469	4
	3399	36		3446	36
				6845	72

Large-scale links up, over and through duneland, with views to the Skerries rocks as dramatic as some of the folds in the land, which render a very natural feel. Out-and-back routing, with mid-round holes turning on themselves through waves of sandhills. Well-bunkered, moderately sized testing greens. A premium on driving for position (few holes are straight). Wind!

The Dunluce is the only golf course in Ireland to have hosted the Open Championship (1951, won by Max Faulkner) – a great distinction, if tinged by the disappointment that it has never returned. The troubled days of the

194 **Accommodation:** Brown Trout, Bushmills Inn

The view direct from tee to green at downhill golden p:4 5, a wonderfully natural hole, which feels as if it has been there for centuries. Don't try to cut off too much of the corner.

20th century seem now to be a thing of the past, but significant improvements in the local infrastructure would also be required. Let us hope that one day it does return to Ireland, if not Portrush.

Both courses here meet every golfing challenge on a site that would be most golf-course designers' dream, with a massive playground of dunes on different levels: on the upper Dunluce



Calamity Corner is the name of Dunluce's famously demanding p:3 14th, but hopefully not for you . . .



Looking up the fairway of golden longish p:4 7.

links with dramatic views to the surf breaking over the Skerries (a rocky offshore reef) and along the Antrim coast towards the nearby Giant's Causeway; in the lower Valley course yielding shelter from the stiff breezes. Although there have been minimal changes to Colt's design,

A fabulous vista of the Skerries rocks unfolds as you come over the brow and look down at the testingly raised green of golden medium p:4 13.





Gold at Valley's short p:5 10 for the wonderful use of natural features: a double roller coaster, there are so many ways through huge waves of land to the shelter of the green – you choose the degree of risk and reward.

neither course is how Colt had originally intended. The 1st and 18th holes of Colt's original Dunluce were lost as a result of the sale of land across the road beyond what is now the 17th green.

In 1946 the club bought a hotel on the site of today's modern clubhouse, changed the start and renumbered the holes. Dunluce's current 18th was the original 2nd and today's 1st the original 3rd hole. Colt returned and inserted

two new holes, now played as the 8th and 9th. While the overall result is one of the highest quality, an understanding of these changes does explain why the course ends with two holes on lower, flatter ground that seem



The view from the tee at simply, but most effectively, bunkered medium short p:4 5.

VALLEY ★★

Colt 1933 & 1946 ££

	Y	P		Y	P
1	349	4	10	496	5
2	385	4	11	140	3
3	141	3	12	465	4
4	534	5	13	486	5
5	336	4	14	421	4
6	237	3	15	165	3
7	453	4	16	391	4
8	409	4	17	384	4
9	320	4	18	192	3
	3164	35		3140	35
				6304	70

Understated and underestimated links set on ground below the Dunluce in the lee of massive dunes (consequently often requiring careful wind judgement). Both loops of 9 cross an open area of seemingly flat links ground, whose greens and subtle eccentricities are as testing as the larger undulations elsewhere. Risk-and-reward character runs right to the card-wrecker 18th.

slightly out of character with the rest. This would have been much less the case with the original layout, but none of this affects our overall rating: the two new 1946 holes are as superb as the rest.

If, as you should, you come to Portrush, it is essential to play both courses. Rare is it for any club to have two of such quality. It would not take much adjustment for the Valley course also to receive our ★★★ rating. This course runs over lower ground, including the large open plain known as the War Hollow, where the folklore is that the Chief of Dunluce fought the King of Norway. This hollow contains no less than 7 holes and is best visible overall from Dunluce's 14th tee, whence it looks flat. Get down there, and in detail it is very much not. It is the clever way that this often wonderfully minimalist course uses the ground here (only about 20 bunkers were needed for the whole layout) that renders much of its ★★ charm, and (on your off-day) occasionally chilling brilliance. The other 11 holes run over more obviously undulating ground, but all are protected from the sea winds by massive dunes – rendering it the locals' choice, particularly on the wilder days of the winter.

Both courses have been the scene of many other events – from Amateur and Ladies Championships to Seniors Opens, via countless more or less domestic tournaments.



The first of the holes across the War Hollow, medium p:5 4 wins gold for its completely natural features, all so well used and often very subtly so.

Closing with a lengthy p:3 cross a chasm at least as effective as any water hazard, Valley goes out with a bang – a big bang, hopefully not a big score!



ST ANNE'S



DIY/Hackett/Connaughton 1921/unknown/2003 €€

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🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1 for Dublin; L just after end of M1 onto Collins Ave (R103, becomes Collins Ave East); after 2.5km, L onto Howth Rd (R105); after about 1km, R into All Saints Rd; R at end into Watermill Rd; after 400m cross James Larkin Rd onto Causeway Rd; club on L after 0.5km.

Compact links next to *The Royal Dublin* with holes running parallel to each other between fairly low dunes, which has benefitted from recent upgrading. The best holes are the two running across the general line play: right-to-left dogleg medium p:4 2 and bunkered p:3 3 over water.

ST HELEN'S BAY



Walton 1993 €

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🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1/M50 south, becomes M11/N11, to Wexford; thence N25 for Rosslare Harbour, 1km before which, in Kilrane, 2nd R (at new school) for St Helen's Bay; follow signs to club, on sea at end of road.

Clubhouse above beach with widespread sea views serves 27 holes running inland on relatively flat and bland former farmland, with occasional water, but the course springs to life on a spectacular cliff top at 16–18 of the main 18.

The 16th tee only hints at the drama to come at St Helen's Bay's closing two holes: 17 (below) is a downhill p:3 to a green partially hidden by mounding; 18 also runs above the waves.

Selected holes

	y	p
2	368	4
3	187	3
7	472	4
10	173	3
13	489	5
14	396	4
15	390	4
17	186	3
18	402	4
Total	6626	71

Selected holes

	y	p
3	209	3
16	405	4
17	210	3
18	266	4
Total	6641	72



Late winter tree shadows stripe the green at Seafield's p:4 3rd, seen from behind.

ST MARGARET'S



Ruddy & Craddock 1992 €€

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🚗 ✈ Dublin: R132 north for Swords; I at 1st (Cloghran) rbt onto Naul Rd; after 2km straight over rbt, round to right at the next junction and follow road for 4km to club, just north of St Margaret's village.

Compact mounded layout sculpted out of what appears to have been former farmland, conveniently close to (but not in the flightpath of) Dublin airport. Many speak highly of p:5 8, with water all down the right waiting to bathe your second shot (if you dare) to the green – on grounds of difficulty, we agree! p:4 18 is also challenging: your round could finish in the water rather than the hole... This course is highly regarded by some notable professionals, having staged the Irish PGA, Irish Senior Open and Ladies Irish Open championships.

SEAFIELD



McEvoy 2002 €€

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🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1/M50 south (becomes M11/N11) past Arklow for Gorey; 10km after Arklow, L for Ballymoney; after 5km signs to club on L.

A promising start and a couple of holes near the cliff top are overshadowed by the poor definition at many other holes on a site with some good sea views and potential for much more. Excellent clubhouse. If you wish to evaluate McEvoy's design talents, also go to *Coollattin*, nearby.

Accommodation: *St Helen's Bay:* St Helen's Bay; *Seafield:* Marfield House Hotel

