▲ In south west Scotland, on the Galloway coast, **Kirkcudbright Bowling Club** is to be found, as at Ayr, in the very heart of the town.

On one side stands the parish church, on the other the Town Hall.

Formed in 1855, Kirkcudbright was at the forefront of efforts by Scottish bowlers to organise competitions and generate public interest in the game. But whereas the Eglinton Trophy was limited to Ayrshire and Glasgow, the Kirkcudbright committee went further. As announced on a poster issued for its second tournament in 1864 (*right*) – the first was in 1861 – theirs was to be 'Open to Great Britain and Ireland'. Another poster stated '...such an opportunity of witnessing Britain's Greatest Bowlers has never occurred'.

Indeed it had not (other than perhaps in 1861). No earlier international events are known.

How many non-Scots there were amongst the 292 entrants is hard to say, but certainly some were from Ireland and England. Reporting on the event in his *Manual of Bowling*, published shortly afterwards, William Mitchell described hearing 'Cockney dialects', while a bowler named Woods is known to have travelled from Preston.

Clearly for the fishing port of Kirkcudbright, the tournament was an opportunity. A poster, now on display in the modern bowls club and aimed at visitors from Cumberland, advertised day trips on a paddle steamer, first from Maryport, then Whitehaven, both across the Solway Firth. Tickets cost 2s 6d but were free for bands of musicians not exceeding twelve in number. Such bands were offered free admission to the green.

Entry to the competition was also priced at 2s 6d.

Of particular interest are the competition 'bye-laws', showing as they do how the 'Scotch game' was already well defined. For example, each player was to use four biased bowls, 'the circumference of which shall not exceed 16¼ inches'.

Games were '21 up' with a minimum length for a mark of 20 yards. Also, five games were to be played at a time, suggesting that the green was divided into rinks.

Note that the prizes were not cash but objects of a specific value. Thus the winner, William Currie of Troon, took home 'a silver tea service of the value of £50'.

This form of award, common in Victorian sport, ensured that winners avoided the stain of being classed as a professional.

Speaking after the event, Provost Cavan called it 'the most brilliant

affair that has ever taken place in the history of bowling'.

Certainly it was a pioneering example of what was to become standard fare in the bowling world, combining match play with music, excursions and a holiday spirit.

But this was not the only form of competition. A few weeks later, in September 1864, another tournament took place on the

Ribble-side green of Mr Poole in Preston, Lancashire. This, however, was a handicap match 'open to all England' but not beyond. (Amongst the entrants was J Woods, possibly the same Woods who competed at Kirkcudbright.) Another difference was that, as was commonplace in the north of England, the prizes were in cash. J Dewhurst, the winner, took home £8.

◀ Another club in Galloway to have its green in a prominent location is **Garlieston**. Here, the village was laid out formally by the Earl of Galloway in the mid 18th century, but with no provision for a green. So when **Garlieston Bowling Club** formed in 1867, rather than go to the outskirts where a square green would have been possible, it settled on a narrow strip of turf on the waterfront, gifted by the Earl.

This means that, unusually, the Garlieston green is split into two halves, one of three rinks, the other of two. Unconventional for sure, but then look out over the bay and who would wish it otherwise?

Also prominently positioned is **Wigtown Bowling Club** (*left*) eight miles up the coast. Formed in 1830 and seen here in 2012, the green forms part of an elongated town square dominated at its east end by the County Buildings, a French Gothic edifice of the 1860s that originally housed the sheriff court, local library and assembly rooms. Nowadays Wigtown is best known for secondhand bookshops, several of which also face the square. Public gardens lie to the rear of the bowls clubhouse, capped at their west end by a market cross, erected in 1816.

To complete this perfect picture of Georgian town planning are ornate iron railings and lampholders on the north side of the green.

Alloa Bowling Club, the oldest of six clubs in this famous brewing town in Clackmannanshire – a town of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants – has been at its green on Coningsby Place since forming in 1845. Before then, an earlier green, created some time before 1811, lay in the town centre, behind the Tontine Hotel (now Ochil House) on Marshill.

In addition to its famous smokies Arbroath has four clubs. Arbroath Bowling Club is the oldest, with a pair of windswept greens looking out over the North Sea and the Bell Rock lighthouse, as depicted on the club's crest (*left*). Also depicted is Arbroath Abbey, the ruins of which overlook another pair of greens, belonging to Abbey BC, formed in 1878.