

THE **GOLF LIFE**

# EXHILARATING **SCOTLAND**

TOUR OF COUNTRY'S GOLF COURSES ALWAYS  
LEAVES A TRUE LINKS GOLFER FULFILLED



GETTY IMAGES/DAVID CANNON







By **Martin Kaufmann**

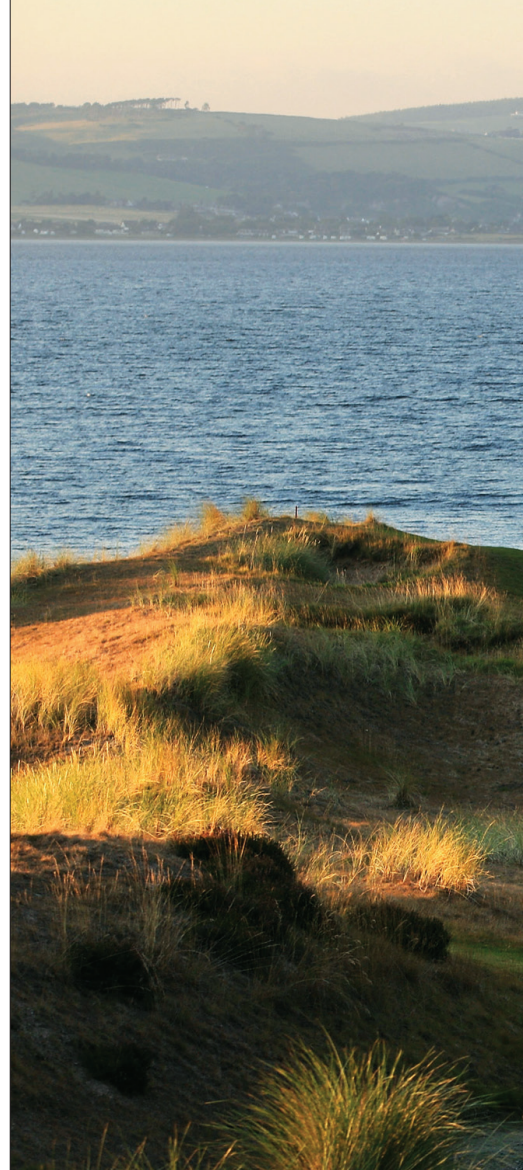
**W**e were six days into an 11-day tour of Scotland when we arrived at Royal Dornoch Golf Club.

Dornoch, Scotland

“We” would be the North American Golf Tour Operators Alliance, which graciously had consented to have a golf journalist join its party for a sweeping tour of Scotland. This had all begun with a silly question from Graham Spears, an Atlanta tour operator and NAGTOA officer: “Would you like to go to Scotland?”

As I recall, “Yes!” blurted from my mouth before Spears got to “-land.” My boss agreed after I earnestly informed him that we could justify the cost because it would be a great learning experience to spend 11 days in golf’s biggest international tourist destination with a dozen seasoned tour operators. (I’m not sure if he bought any of that. I haven’t dismissed the possibility that he simply wanted to get rid of me for a couple of weeks.)

So on a crisp, sun-splashed spring morning, we made the lovely hourlong drive north from the Culloden House in Inverness, up the A9, along the Moray Firth, past the Dalmore and Glenmorangie distilleries, then finally across Cambuscurrie Bay to Dornoch.



It was the midpoint of a trip that already had taken us from Glasgow down to Turnberry on the Ayrshire Coast, then along the A83 – Paul McCartney’s aptly named “Long and Winding Road” – to Machrihanish in the far southwest, then due north 250 miles to Dornoch. And I was with a group that was comfortable burning both ends of the candle. I needed a second wind, and Dornoch provided it.

The best description I’ve heard of what defines a great golf course came from American designer Jim Engh, who spent several years early in his career living and working in the British Isles. Engh said he wanted to build and play on courses that “ignited his endorphins” and got his “synapses crackling like firecrackers.”

I knew what he meant; I’ve had that golfer’s high at places such as Royal





Castle Stuart



Royal Aberdeen

GETTY IMAGES/DAVID CANNON

County Down and Tralee. But nowhere have I felt it more strongly than at Royal Dornoch. On the fifth hole, a short par 4 to a diagonal green, I wrote one word in my notepad: “Wow!” The good vibe never ebbed. Even after a couple of glitches in the middle of the back nine,

I wrote these words in my notes: “I feel exhilarated, alive, energized. My mind feels more alert, clearer. My bag feels light on my back despite being stuffed with rain gear and extra balls.”

I wanted to walk directly from the 18th green to the first tee and do it

all over again. I wasn’t alone. Later, Spears told me simply, “I was sad when I walked off 18.”



What was appealing about Engh’s observation is that it wasn’t site-specific, so to speak. He didn’t confine it to, say, the setting of Turnberry or the history of the Old Course. It didn’t have anything to do with a Redan hole or a drivable par 4 or even a specific

architect or design style. Engh was more interested in the personal, visceral reaction that a golf course – even one with little pedigree – can stir in the human mind and soul.

That is, in part, what tour operators are selling.

**Scotland, P34 >>>**



## <<< Scotland, P33

One of the lessons from NAGTOA's scouting trip was that the Highlands – from Dornoch down to Inverness and east through Nairn – and Aberdeenshire, on the northeast coast, have become attractive alternatives to St. Andrews, which understandably is the default destination for most golfers visiting Scotland.

It's easy to imagine the more intrepid travelers spending four days in Aberdeen, where they have easy access to Royal Aberdeen, Cruden Bay, Trump International and perhaps Murcar Links.

Cruden Bay might win the eye-candy trophy. We were able only to scout it, not play it. But Cruden Bay sucks you in from the moment you arrive, walk through the clubhouse to the windows that provide a panoramic view of the course and North Sea. I had been forewarned that I would have no defense for Cruden Bay's charms, and they proved considerable even without sticking a tee into the ground.

There's a similar sensibility just down the coast at Royal Aberdeen. The coded lock on the front door of the clubhouse doesn't exactly scream, "C'mon in!" But the club quickly grows on a first-time visitor. The members don't take themselves too seriously – and I don't attribute that observation solely to the naked member who paraded past our group, including two ladies, when the locker-room door flew open at an inopportune time. In the private dining room, there is a reprint of a grace said by Sir Fraser Noble at the Bicentenary Dinner, dated "12th July 1980." Among other blessings for which Noble paid thanks are "the gifts of food and drink which . . . put twenty yards on our drive and in our dreams banish forever the horrid twitch and dreaded shank."

Royal Aberdeen approached Dornoch heights in my mind. It has the wild, tumbling look of a great old course, with the nips and tucks of a more polished layout. The land's history also is readily evident. If you walk up on the dunes by the third tee – an unforgettable par 3 with a green set in a natural amphitheater – and look down on the beach, you'll still see the barricades that were built to ward off sea invasions during World War II.

German air raids still did considerable damage to the city, but Aberdeen has enjoyed a renaissance in recent decades. Overhead, as we played Royal Aberdeen, there was the regular thrum of helicopters flying to rigs located just offshore from Scotland's oil capital. The only blight on the landscape is a wind turbine that sits next to the 14th tee, placed there through some bureaucratic slight of hand that took Royal



1. Western Gailes
2. Turnberry
3. Machrihanish
4. Royal Dornoch
5. Castle Stuart
6. Nairn
7. Cruden Bay
8. Trump International
9. Royal Aberdeen

Aberdeen by surprise. If you look backward from the tee on the par-3 17th, you'll see an oil derrick and a wind turbine – the former a sign of Aberdeen's prosperous present and future, the latter little more than a futile gesture. Whatever one might think of Donald Trump, his fierce criticism of efforts to build a wind farm off Aberdeen's coast is on point.

So, too, is his newest course, Trump International (natch. . .) Golf Links, located just to the north of Royal Aberdeen. We had been warned beforehand that we should expect to lose gobs of balls at Trump Links, but that wasn't a concern. The landing areas are expansive. Heck, the whole

place is expansive. The soaring dunes that frame each hole create canyon-like sensations. (The Donald didn't help his cause with local opponents when he rechristened the Menie Dunes the – you guessed it – Great Dunes of Scotland. Apparently *Greatest Dunes of Scotland* already was taken. That bit of marketing overreach needlessly inflamed local foes but also sapped the course of some of its

historical charm.)

With Aberdeen's oil wealth has come greatly improved accommodations. The Marcliffe Hotel & Spa is one of the tour operators' go-to spots, while Malmaison, located across town, is an uber-chic boutique hotel (even the toilets are fabulous!) that could comfortably play with the best establishments in Manhattan. It caters to the city's oil industry during the week but offers very attractive weekend rates. Meldrum House, located 20 miles northwest of Aberdeen, combines the relaxing pastoral setting of a manor home with sophisticated design flourishes and oh-so-attentive service.



Like Aberdeenshire, Inverness is a destination unto itself. It is home to Castle Stuart, Dornoch is easily within reach and Nairn is a short drive to the east.

Nairn has a rich history, much of which is chronicled in the club's museum room, which I toured with my playing partner, Alister Asher, a former club champion.

Asher grew up in Nairn and operates a thriving family bakery business, having just opened his 14th store. At first blush, you know he'll be good fun – stocky, Popeye forearms, crew cut, goatee. He had spent the previous night and much of the early morning celebrating a friend's 50th birthday, but arrived early on a Sunday morning with his game and wit intact.

Scotland, P36 >>>





No. 1 Royal County Down



No. 16 Rye

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# Golfweek's Best:

## GB&I Classic Courses (before 1960)

No. (2013) Course	Location	Opened	Architect(s)	Avg. rating
1. (1) Royal County Down.....	Newcastle, Northern Ireland	1889	Old Tom Morris	9.02
2. (2) St. Andrews (Old Course).....	St. Andrews, Scotland	1800	Unknown	8.88
3. (4) Royal Dornoch.....	Dornoch, Scotland	1877	Old Tom Morris, John Sutherland, George Duncan	8.67
4. (3) Royal Portrush (Dunluce).....	Portrush, Northern Ireland	1888	Harry S. Colt	8.54
5. (5) Muirfield.....	Gullane, Scotland	1892	Old Tom Morris	8.54
6. (8) Royal St. George's.....	Sandwich, England	1887	Laidlaw Purves	8.33
7. (6) Sunningdale (Old).....	Sunningdale, England	1900	Harry S. Colt, Willie Park Jr.	8.33
8. (7) Ballybunion (Old).....	Ballybunion, Ireland	1893	Tom Simpson, P. Murphy	8.30
9. (9) Royal Birkdale.....	Southport, England	1889	George Lowe, F.G. Hawtree, J.H. Taylor	8.28
10. (10) Turnberry (Ailsa).....	Turnberry, Scotland	1949	Mackenzie Ross	8.18
11. (14) Lahinch.....	Lahinch, Ireland	1892	Old Tom Morris	7.92
12. (12) Carnoustie (Championship).....	Carnoustie, Scotland	1839	Old Tom Morris, Allan Robertson, James Braid	7.90
13. (16) Royal Porthcawl.....	Porthcawl, Wales	1891	Charles Gibson	7.81
14. (15) North Berwick (West Links).....	North Berwick, Scotland	1832	David Strath	7.81
15. (11) Woodhall Spa (Hotchkiss).....	Woodhall Spa, England	1896	S.V. Hotchkiss	7.81
16. (17) Rye.....	Rye, England	1894	Harry S. Colt	7.76
17. (13) Ganton.....	Scarborough, England	1893	Harry S. Colt, James Braid, Tom Dunn, Harry Vardon	7.73
18. (19) Sunningdale (New).....	Sunningdale, England	1922	Harry S. Colt	7.70
19. (20) Cruden Bay.....	Cruden Bay, Scotland	1899	Tom Simpson	7.68
20. (18) Swinley Forest.....	Ascot, England	1909	Harry S. Colt	7.66
21. (24) Walton Heath (Old).....	Walton on the Hill, England	1903	Herbert Fowler	7.59
22. (22) Royal Lytham & St. Annes.....	Lytham, England	1886	Herbert Fowler, George Lowe	7.56
23. (23) St. George's Hill.....	Weybridge, England	1912	Harry S. Colt	7.53
24. (21) Royal Troon (Championship).....	Troon, Scotland	1878	Willie Fernie	7.52
25. (25) Portmarnock (Old).....	Portmarnock, Ireland	1894	George Ross, W.C. Pickeman	7.51
26. (26) Royal Aberdeen.....	Aberdeen, Scotland	1800	James Braid, Tom Simpson	7.39
27. (27) Royal West Norfolk.....	Brancaaster, England	1892	Holcombe Ingleby	7.36
28. (30) Alwoodley.....	Leeds, England	1907	Alister MacKenzie	7.32
29. (29) Royal Liverpool (Hoylake).....	Hoylake, England	1869	Old Tom Morris, Robert Chambers	7.28
30. (36) Royal Cinque Ports.....	Deal, England	1892	James Braid	7.26
31. (28) Machrihanish.....	Campbeltown, Scotland	1876	Old Tom Morris	7.25
32. (37) Western Gailes.....	Troon, Scotland	1897	Fred Morris	7.22
33. (32) Wallasey.....	Wallasey, England	1891	Donald Steel, Old Tom Morris, James Braid, F.G. Hawtree, J.H. Taylor	7.20
34. (41) Notts (Hollinwell).....	Kirkby in Ashfield, England	1887	Willie Park Jr.	7.11
35. (38) Gleneagles (King's).....	Auchterarder, Scotland	1919	James Braid	7.06
36. (33) Wentworth (West).....	Virginia Water, England	1924	Harry S. Colt	7.04
37. (39) Prestwick.....	Prestwick, Scotland	1851	Old Tom Morris	6.96
38. (40) County Louth (Baltray).....	Baltray, Ireland	1892	Tom Simpson	6.93
39. (43) Wentworth (East).....	Virginia Water, England	1924	Harry S. Colt	6.92
40. (49) Saunton (East).....	Braunton, England	1919	Herbert Fowler	6.85
41. (NR) Woking*.....	Woking, England	1893	Tom Dunn	6.82
42. (47) Nairn.....	Nairn, Scotland	1887	Old Tom Morris, James Braid, Tom Simpson	6.81
43. (46) St. Enodoc.....	Wadebridge, England	1890	James Braid	6.80
44. (31) Royal North Devon (Westward Ho!).....	Bideford, England	1864	Herbert Fowler, Old Tom Morris	6.79
45. (35) Hankley Common.....	Farnham, England	1921	Harry S. Colt, James Braid	6.76
46. (45) Pennard.....	Swansea, Wales	1896	James Braid	6.74
47. (34) Nefyn & District.....	Pwllheli, Wales	1907	James Braid	6.73
48. (42) Portstewart (The Strand).....	Portstewart, Northern Ireland	1908	A.G. Gow, Des Giffin	6.72
49. (48) The Island.....	Donabate, Ireland	1890	Fred Hawtree, Eddie Hackett	6.71
50. (44) St. Andrews (New).....	St. Andrews, Scotland	1895	Old Tom Morris	6.69

\*-new to list; NR-not ranked



## <<< Scotland, P34

Seven of Nairn's first nine holes played into the wind. When a playing partner and I pumped our drives onto the beach on No. 5, Asher shared with us that one club official usually requests low-tide tee times. And he told me of a bar in town where those short on pounds can pay in golf balls.

We needed such good humor the day before to weather the 30-plus-mph winds that buffeted Castle Stuart, home to the Scottish Open and a must-play despite being open only since 2009.

Castle Stuart's staging is impressive; it's easy to see why it comfortably gets mentioned in the same discussions with century-old links. It got my attention right from the start with the first three holes playing directly into a stiff southerly wind along the Moray Firth. Three of the par 5s played directly into that wind, so there's little let-up.

The turf at Castle Stuart isn't classic linksland, but even taking into account the downwind holes, it played fast. A 7-iron that landed well short of the surface on No. 7 nevertheless went rocketing across the long green into the gulch beyond, and a hybrid raced up the steep hill and onto the green on the par-5 12th.



While the Highlands and Aberdeenshire are gaining traction with golf tourists, the Ayrshire Coast remains the natural alternative to St. Andrews. The coastline south of Glasgow has its own Murderers' Row lineup, including Turnberry, Troon, Western Gailes and Prestwick, among others.

Our touchdown round, shortly after arriving in Glasgow, was at Western Gailes. The gauge in the clubhouse told us what to expect: unrelenting 40-mph winds, with a gust up to 62. "Now we know why it's called Gailes," Spears said. *Bah dum bump.*

When we told two members how great the course looked on the first tee, one said, "You might not feel that way when you get to 5." At that point, the course turned back into the southwest wind for nine consecutive holes. Post-round, a member told us he had never seen such brutal winds there. When we asked him what club he hit on No. 7, the great par 3 called Sea, he looked at us as if we were daft. Driver, of course. Why were we visitors trying to get there with irons and hybrids?

As for Turnberry, let's face it: The resort just *looks* fabulous. From the hotel on the bluff overlooking the Firth of Clyde to the long staircase leading to two seaside links and

an impressive teaching academy, it has a timeless star quality. Recent renovations have made the hotel lighter and airier, and more improvements seem imminent. Trump recently added the iconic resort to his portfolio, and he is certain to put his imprint on it.



Machrihanish Golf Club doesn't have many of those assets; it's isolated, doesn't have the tournament résumé and is not well-funded. Still, it holds a special place in my heart.

Machrihanish is the most remote of the four regions we visited, a three-hour drive southwest down the Kintyre Peninsula from Glasgow. It's so remote, in fact, that some of the tour operators thought it would attract more visitors if it were marketed in conjunction with Northern Ireland, roughly 12 miles away by boat, than with other Scottish courses. The nearest town, Campbeltown, is five miles away. It was once a thriving port city with 34 whisky distilleries, but the spirits business has dried up, with the notable exception of Springbank.

Given its geography, Machrihanish faces perpetually stacked odds. And yet it has three undeniable assets. First, Machrihanish Golf Club, originally fashioned by Old Tom Morris, is a magical experience. I've visited it twice and been utterly charmed on each occasion. The first hole, which wraps around the coast, is one of the game's greatest openers. Sure, the 18th is lackluster, but by that time, you'll probably be so smitten that you'll barely notice.

Second, there's now a creditable second course with the addition of Machrihanish Dunes, a David McLay Kidd creation that opened four years ago. A veritable monsoon prevented us from playing it, so I can't speak to the reviews, not all of which have been glowing. But its presence is hugely important for the area, making two- or three-day visits viable.

And third, Massachusetts-based

Southworth Development did a bang-up job renovating The Ugdale Hotel across the street from the clubhouse and The Royal Hotel on the Campbeltown waterfront. The tour operators left knowing that the occasional customers who visit Machrihanish can expect Four Star-quality accommodations.

The visits to Machrihanish and the other regions only verified that the Scottish golf "product" – the quality and number of courses and accommodations – never has been better.



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No. 1 Trump International



No. 14 St. Andrews (Castle)

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# Golfweek's Best:

## GB&I Modern Courses (1960 and later)

No. (2013) Course	Location	Opened	Architect(s)	Avg. rating
1. (1) Trump International Golf Links-Scotland.....	Aberdeen, Scotland	2012	Martin Hawtree	7.98
2. (2) Kingsbarns.....	St. Andrews, Scotland	1999	Kyle Phillips	7.95
3. (3) Castle Stuart .....	Inverness, Scotland	2009	Gil Hanse, Mark Parsinen	7.80
4. (4) Loch Lomond.....	Luss, Scotland	1994	Jay Morrish, Tom Weiskopf	7.56
5. (5) Waterville.....	Waterville, Ireland	1973	Eddie Hackett	7.51
6. (7) Renaissance Club at Archerfield.....	Dirleton, Scotland	2008	Tom Doak	7.42
7. (8) Old Head of Kinsale.....	Kinsale, Ireland	1997	Eddie Hackett, Joe Carr, Ron Kirby, Paddy Merrigan, Liam Higgins	7.30
8. (6) The European Club .....	Brittas Bay, Ireland	1992	Pat Ruddy	7.21
9. (14) Tralee .....	Tralee, Ireland	1984	Arnold Palmer	7.05
10. (11) Rowallan Castle .....	Kilmaurs, Scotland	2010	Colin Montgomerie	7.00
11. (9) Carne.....	Belmullet, Ireland	1995	Eddie Hackett	6.94
12. (10) Enniscrone.....	Enniscrone, Ireland	1973	Eddie Hackett	6.88
13. (15) Doonbeg.....	Doonbeg, Ireland	2001	Greg Norman	6.84
14. (25) St. Andrews (Castle).....	St. Andrews, Scotland	2008	David McLay Kidd	6.82
15. (13) Carton House (Montgomerie).....	Maynooth, Ireland	2003	Colin Montgomerie, European Golf Design	6.79
16. (NR) Killeen Castle* .....	Dunsany, Ireland	2008	Jack Nicklaus	6.77
17. (12) Lough Erne.....	Enniskillen, Northern Ireland	2009	Nick Faldo	6.70
18. (18) Hillside.....	Southport, England	1967	Fred Hawtree	6.56
19. (40) Queenwood .....	Ottershaw, England	2001	David McLay Kidd	6.53
20. (17) Ballyliffin (Glashedy) .....	Ballyliffin, Ireland	1995	Pat Ruddy, Tom Craddock	6.51
21. (20) Woburn (Dukes) .....	Woburn, England	1976	Charles Lawrie	6.50
22. (16) Rosapenna (Sandy Hills).....	Rosapenna, Ireland	2003	Pat Ruddy	6.48
23. (32) The Wisley (Garden & Mill).....	Ripley, England	1991	Robert Trent Jones Jr.	6.45
24. (21) The Grove .....	Chandler's Cross, England	2003	Kyle Phillips	6.42
25. (23) The Carrick .....	Arden, Scotland	2007	Doug Carrick	6.33
26. (24) Celtic Manor (Twenty Ten) .....	Newport, Wales	2009	Ross McMurray	6.32
27. (22) Carnegie Links at Skibo .....	Dornoch, Scotland	1994	Donald Steel	6.28
28. (26) Fairmont St. Andrews (Torrance) .....	St. Andrews, Scotland	2001	Sam Torrance	6.16
29. (27) Bearwood Lakes .....	Wokingham, England	1996	Martin Hawtree	6.08
30. (29) The Duke's St. Andrews.....	St. Andrews, Scotland	1995	Tim Liddy, Peter Thomson	6.03
31. (28) Druids Glen.....	Newtownmountkennedy, Ireland	1995	Pat Ruddy, Tom Craddock	6.02
32. (33) Dundonald Links.....	Gailes, Scotland	2003	Kyle Phillips	6.02
33. (30) Turnberry (Kintyre).....	Turnberry, Scotland	2001	Donald Steel	6.01
34. (31) The K Club (Smurfit).....	Straffan, Ireland	1990	Arnold Palmer, Ed Seay	6.00
35. (35) Fota Island .....	Fota Island, Ireland	1993	Christy O'Connor Jr., Jeff Howes, Peter McEvoy	5.98
36. (41) Machrihanish Dunes.....	Campbeltown, Scotland	2009	David McLay Kidd	5.96
37. (36) Donegal.....	Murvag, Ireland	1973	Pat Ruddy, Eddie Hackett	5.95
38. (34) Crail (Craighead) .....	Crail, Scotland	1998	Gil Hanse	5.90
39. (37) Fairmont St. Andrews (Kittocks).....	St. Andrews, Scotland	2001	Bruce Devlin, Gary Stephenson	5.84
40. (42) Adare Manor.....	Adare, Ireland	1995	Robert Trent Jones Sr.	5.82
41. (19) Woburn (Marquess) .....	Woburn, England	1997	Clive Clark, Peter Alliss, Alex Hay, Alex McMurray	5.75
42. (47) Gleneagles (PGA Centenary) .....	Auchterarder, Scotland	1993	Jack Nicklaus	5.61
43. (39) The K Club (Palmer) .....	Straffan, Ireland	1991	Arnold Palmer	5.59
44. (45) Forest of Arden.....	Meriden, England	1970	Donald Steel	5.58
45. (46) Connemara .....	Clifden, Ireland	1973	Eddie Hackett	5.54
46. (43) Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links .....	Portmarnock, Ireland	1995	Jim Engh, Bernhard Langer	5.52
47. (44) Ballybunion (Cashen) .....	Ballybunion, Ireland	1982	Robert Trent Jones Sr.	5.52
48. (48) Carton House (O'Meara).....	Maynooth, Ireland	2002	Mark O'Meara, European Golf Design	5.50
49. (38) Chart Hills.....	Biddenden, England	1993	Steve Smyers, Nick Faldo	5.50
50. (50) The Belfry (Brabazon) .....	Wisham, England	1977	Dave Thomas	5.36

\*-new to list; NR-not ranked