

Carr, Joseph (Joe) Benedict

by Terry Clavin

Carr, Joseph (Joe) Benedict (1922–2004), amateur golfer and businessman, was born 18 February 1922 in his grandmother's house in Inchicore, Dublin, the fifth of seven children of George Waters and his wife Mary ('Missie') (née McDonough). His parents were in financial difficulties, and, ten days after his birth, Joe was adopted informally by his mother's childless sister Kathleen (who had recently suffered a miscarriage) and her husband James Carr. During childhood, Joe became aware of his true parentage, but never spoke of it to his adoptive parents and had little contact with his biological parents, having one brief and rather strained encounter as an adult with his natural father. He was so disturbed by having to apply for his first passport in 1949 in the name of Joseph Waters that he changed his surname to Carr by deed poll soon after.

Success in golf and business Despite these insecurities, he appreciated that his adoption enabled him to lead a fulfilling life. He grew up and began playing golf on Portmarnock golf course where his adoptive father worked and lived as the course steward. Though he was in practice given free rein of the course, there was no question of his becoming a Portmarnock member, as only the cream of Dublin society was admitted; he joined the nearby Sutton golf club instead in 1932. As a schoolboy he created a stir at both juvenile level (reaching the semi-final of the 1939 British boys championship) and adult level (reaching the semi-final of the Irish Close Championship in 1940); he was a scratch golfer aged 17. He attended O'Connell's CBS in Dublin's inner city, excelling at sports and being a zealous recruiter for the Pioneer Total Abstinence Society.

Following James Carr's death in 1939, Joe and Kathleen Carr moved to Inchicore where they subsisted with difficulty on her pension and on Joe's pay as an apprentice from 1940 in Todd Burns, a department store on Mary Street. In 1941, he won the inaugural East of Ireland championship, his first important tournament victory, but World War II stalled his progress as all international golf tournaments and many Irish ones were suspended for its duration. This gave him the opportunity to become an accomplished snooker player. In 1946, he and his supervisor (and friend) at Todd Burns, Freddie McDonnell, established their own wholesale clothing company, Carr and McDonnell Ltd, on Lower Abbey Street, which grew into one of the biggest clothes manufacturers in the country, employing 550 people at its peak. Carr married Dorothy (Dor) Hogan in 1948. They lived at Suncroft, conveniently abutting Sutton golf course.

Carr's selection for and performances in the 1947 Walker Cup heralded his arrival on the international golf stage. In the 1950s and early 1960s he was recognised as the leading amateur golfer in Britain and Ireland. He won forty major amateur

titles between 1941 and 1969, comprising twelve West of Ireland championships, twelve East of Ireland championships, three South of Ireland championships, four Irish Amateur Opens, six Irish Amateur Close Championships and three (British) Amateur Championships. In 1955, he and his regular foursomes partner, Harry Bradshaw (qv), won the important Gleneagles Pro#Am in Scotland despite carrying an apparently insupportable handicap of plus two. At international level, he played a record 157 matches for Ireland (1947–69), and played for the Britain and Ireland team in the Eisenhower Cup in 1958 and in 1960. He was also selected for eleven successive Walker Cup teams from 1947 to 1967, captaining Britain and Ireland in the 1965 and 1967 Walker Cups (in 1965 as non#playing captain).

Approach to golf: a singular swing A tall, willowy man, he was a powerful striker of the ball, possessing great strength in his forearms and spade#like hands. His swing was unorthodox with his left arm thrust out in front, the right hand gripped well under the shaft, a three#quarter backswing and a rapid scything downswing that caused him to lurch forward into the shot and culminated in a truncated follow through. This improvised slash yielded low chasing hook shots, propelling the ball prodigious distances, thus making him the longest hitter in Europe (professional or amateur); his advantage in terms of length was most marked with his short and medium irons. Wild off the tee, he was a superb recovery player, bludgeoning his way powerfully out of the rough. He was at his best approaching the green, being an unerringly accurate pitcher and chipper, and skilled at escaping from bunkers. This delicate touch also made him a useful approach putter capable of holing out from an improbable range.

His weakness was his short putts, particularly those in the three#to#six foot category, and he could three#putt from remarkably close to the hole; this flaw alone separated him from the top professional golfers. Initially he putted in a very jerky and wristy fashion before developing a more orthodox, arm#only action, which led to an improvement, but he suffered from trying to coax short putts into the hole, thereby failing to apply the requisite firmness. He experimented constantly with different putters, and even putted for two extended periods with a 3#iron.

Carr was dissuaded from turning professional, first by the stipulation precluding golfers from claiming prize money for five years after relinquishing their amateur status, and later by his success in business. As a result, and to his regret, he lacked the leisure to hone fully his technique. In amateur terms, however, he fulfilled his potential, benefiting from McDonnell's willingness to shoulder most of the burden of running their business. Beginning every morning by hitting some 400 balls on the Sutton driving range, he would spend an extended lunch break practising at the Royal Dublin club before finishing work in the mid afternoon and heading back to the Sutton course for another two and a half hours. At night he would turn on the two floodlights he installed on the roof of his house, which enabled him to work on his chipping and putting on a nearby green. He was ahead of his time in his belief in fitness, and from the mid 1950s trained regularly with the Shamrock Rovers soccer

team. A teetotaler into his 40s, his sole indulgence was his compulsive smoking, often accounting for sixty cigarettes a day.

His perfectionism led him to decide in 1953 that he must change his swing (despite his winning the Open Amateur championship that year). A change was necessary if he was to achieve greater consistency and it would enable him to forestall a premature end to his career which might arise from the strains his reliance on power was placing on his body. In consultation with John Jacobs, one of the first golf coaching gurus, he developed a smoother, fuller, more upright action, modelled on the power fade used by Ben Hogan. It took some years to perfect this change during which his form deteriorated, but by 1958 he was hitting fade shots more consistently straight (and almost as far) as he had been hooking. His hard work and willingness both to adapt his technique and to temper his cavalier instincts by playing more strategically contributed to his longevity as a top-class amateur and allowed him to produce the best golf of his career in 1958–61.

He revelled in match play golf, which provided an ideal outlet for his aggressive style and love of psychological warfare. Competitors could be subjected to dismissive commentaries on their performance, reminders of his greater experience and achievements, and slow play designed to disrupt their rhythm. When accurate, his long drives immediately pressurised his opponent; his recoveries from inaccurate ones were equally discomfiting. This was exemplified during a crucial phase of the 1958 Amateur Championship final at St Andrews when he reached the twelfth green with a mammoth 360-yard drive and holed the twenty-foot putt for an eagle and a win. At the next hole, a remarkable shot from a bad lie in a fairway bunker enabled him to snatch an unlikely half. By such unexpected and telling thrusts, he demoralised and unnerved his adversaries. A formidable bridge and poker player, he believed that golf, especially match play golf, was akin to gambling, requiring a flair for taking calculated risks and bluffing opponents.

Triumphs and frustrations These strengths were demonstrated most memorably at the Amateur Championship, the holy grail for British and Irish amateur golfers, in which Carr had a formidable record, reaching seven semi-finals and four finals, and winning in 1953, 1958 and 1960. His greatest moment was his victory in the 1953 final over the American Harvie Ward, considered the best amateur in the world. Performing fitfully, Carr had been fortunate to reach the final and was the rank outsider but inspired putting and a flawless last nine holes enabled him to win on the final green.

He was less suited to stroke play golf where one bad hole could wreak irreparable damage but nonetheless he held amateur records on eighteen different courses in Britain and Ireland. In the qualifying rounds for the 1959 (British) Open Championship at the Gullane No. 1 course, his 64 bettered the professional course record by three strokes. He excelled at St Andrews, breaking the amateur record

for the new course in qualifying for the 1955 Open and that of the old course twice during the 1960 Open, shooting a 68 in qualifying followed by a 67 in the third round.

A long-held, but never achieved ambition was to defeat the professionals in a major stroke play tournament. At the 1959 Dunlop Masters held at Portmarnock he led an elite field of British and Irish professionals by four strokes going into the final day having broken 70 in each of the first three rounds, only to be undone by a closing 66 by Christy O'Connor senior. Leading amateur in the 1956 and 1958 Open Championships, he was joint leader early in the final round of the 1960 Open before being halted by a weather delay and subsiding to finish eighth. He won the 1967 South of Ireland professional championship against a field of Irish professionals, but asserted that O'Connor would have bettered his score had he competed.

The great disappointment of his career was his failure to distinguish himself in the great team events. His first three Walker Cups went well but thereafter he won rarely and his Walker Cup record was five wins, fourteen losses and one half. In part this was due to the unsuitability of his game to US courses (which placed a premium on accurate drives and solid putting) and to his being usually placed at the top of the team order, which guaranteed that he would face the best American player; but it is clear that the burden of being the senior player on the Britain and Ireland team rested heavily on his shoulders. Prior to the 1961 Walker Cup, the selectors infuriated him by requesting unsuccessfully that he voluntarily quit the team.

The nadir was the 1958 Eisenhower Cup (a stroke play event), which Great Britain and Ireland should have won but lost by one shot due to Carr's failure to break 80 in any of the four rounds. His most frustrating experience came as captain in the 1965 Walker Cup where Great Britain and Ireland amassed a seemingly insuperable lead before being held to a draw. Despite this being the first time that Great Britain and Ireland had avoided defeat in the Walker Cup since 1938, Carr's captaincy came in for criticism. He had more luck as captain in the Eisenhower Cup leading Britain and Ireland to victory in the 1965 competition. Playing for Ireland he won the European championships in 1965 and 1967, and the Home Internationals outright in 1950 and 1955.

The gentleman amateur His swashbuckling and erratic play made him a compelling figure and always attracted large galleries. Previously golf had been regarded in Ireland as the preserve of well-to-do middle-aged men, but Carr's fame both transcended and popularised the game, paving the way for the golf boom of the 1960s. Instantly recognisable in his trademark white cap with green tassels, he cut an incongruously glamorous presence at Irish golf events, arriving in an expensive sports car and carrying himself with a confident swagger. On the course golfers tend to be withdrawn and self-absorbed, but Carr was unfailingly good-humoured and willing to exchange pleasantries with spectators, even if playing poorly. Off course he mixed amiably with his fellow competitors.

From an early age, he learned to use golf as a means of befriending the wealthy and of benefiting financially from these relationships, at first by beating them in golf and poker-related wagers, later by forming business connections. His sporting exploits contributed handsomely to the success of his clothing business, which was accordingly renamed the House of Carr. As the company's salesman he travelled all over the country capitalising on contacts made in the clubhouse; the prospect of a round of golf with Carr was often sufficient to secure purchase orders from customers. His wife instilled into him the importance of relating appealingly to people, advising him on how to carry himself in public. From the early 1950s he had a yearly income of £100,000 but spent virtually all of it, being a generous supporter of charities as well as a liberal host.

British spectators, weary of American dominance, adopted Carr as their standard bearer in the Amateur Championship, while in America his leavening of courtly Old World charm with a dash of Irish roguery proved even more appealing. Golf purists in Britain and America lauded him for preserving the game's dying amateur tradition. Foremost among these was Bob Jones, the most celebrated amateur in golf history, who repeatedly invited him to play in the US Masters at Augusta National before Carr accepted in 1967, becoming the first Irishman to participate in that event. He competed for three successive years, making the cut in 1967 and in 1968.

Later life By 1970, his golf career was winding down and he focused his attention on his business of which he soon became sole proprietor after his partnership with McDonnell ended acrimoniously. In response to the end of protectionism, which had sheltered established Irish clothes manufacturers, he sought to develop an export market in the UK. Although turnover increased, profits shrank from the pressure exerted by low-cost imports from the Far East. Further to his business difficulties, he endured a heart attack in December 1973 (which persuaded him to quit smoking) and the death in tragic circumstances of his wife in 1976. His gradual relinquishing of the running of the business to his son Jody from the mid 1970s enabled him to serve as captain of the Irish golf team (1979–82) and as a selector for the Britain and Ireland teams in the Eisenhower and Walker cups (1978–86).

In 1984, he resumed work as chief executive of House of Carr as part of a state-sponsored rescue package for the ailing firm. Controversially, AIB wrote off an unsecured loan to the company of £800,000, much to the fury of the bank's shareholders who suspected that it had received preferential treatment because Carr was an AIB director. He could not, however, reverse the company's decline and it went into receivership in April 1989, leaving him to face retirement with £50,000 in cash, settling in reduced, though hardly penurious, circumstances in his Howth residence, having sold Suncroft in 1982 to raise funds for his business.

Shaken by the failure of his business, his morale was restored when he became the first Irishman to be made captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews for 1991–2. He spent a busy year travelling the world, giving speeches

at golf functions. He also lent his name to a golf tourism company established by his son Marty in 1990. Carr Golf thrived thanks to the cachet that still clung to the Carr name, particularly among golf aficionados in America, and later diversified into building, developing and managing courses. During 1990–97, he was a consultant on the designing of the Old Head of Kinsale golf course. In retirement, he remarried and enjoyed landscape painting, without, by his own admission, acquiring any great facility for it.

He died on 3 June 2004 at the Mater hospital in Dublin. In 2007 he became the first Irish golfer to be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame. With his first wife he had six children – five sons and a daughter. His sons inherited in varying degrees his aptitude for golf and business. One of them, Roddy, was a member of the victorious 1971 Britain and Ireland Walker Cup side before turning professional and later moving into golf management, numbering Seve Ballesteros among his clients.

Ir. Times, 22 Aug. 1946; 15 Jan. 1947; 12 Oct. 1953; 21 Dec. 1954; 13 Sept., 7 Oct. 1955; 11 June 1957; 7, 9, 10 June 1958; 21 Sept., 3 Nov. 1959; 30 May, 6 Oct. 1960; 4, 22 May 1961, 7 Nov. 1961; 24 July 1962; 21 May, 24 Sept., 12 Nov. 1963; 12 Oct. 1964; 13 Sept. 1965; 25 Feb., 16 June, 17 Aug. 1966; 15 Feb. 1967; 8 June 1968; 10 Jan., 15 July, 6 Aug. 1969; 17 Aug. 1970; 20 Dec. 1978; 16 Dec. 1981; 10 July 1984; 17 Sept. 1986; 11 Nov. 1995; 13 May 1997; 18 Aug. 1998; 19 Feb. 2000; 18 Oct. 2005; *Ir. Independent*, 10, 12, 16, 19 May 1947; 1 Sept. 1949; 5 Sept. 1953; 25 Feb., 8 July, 25 Oct. 1955; 23 Apr., 10 Sept. 1957; 10 June 1958; 11 Apr. 1959; 22 June 1961; 21 Dec. 1967; 18 June 1969; 8 Sept. 1970; 6 Oct. 1973; 17 Dec. 1976; 28 May 1985; 2 Sept. 1991; 22 Jan. 1992; 10 July 1993; 16 Aug., 20 Dec. 1999; *Sunday Independent*, 8 May 1949; 6 Sept. 1953; 9 Feb. 1958; 17 July 1960; 2 June 1963; 28 June 1964; 30 July 1967; 9 Dec. 1973; 10 Nov. 2002; *ITWW; Business and Finance*, 17 July 1975; John Redmond, *Christy O'Connor* (1985), 7, 81, 114; David Guiney, *100 years of golf at Sutton* (1990); William Menton, *The Golfing Union of Ireland* (1991); John Redmond, *The book of Irish golf* (1997); Ivan Morris, *Only golf spoken here* (2001), 195–7; *Golf Journal*, Jan.–Feb. 1999; Dermot Gilleece, *Breaking 80* (2002); *Times*, 15 June 2004