

Golf Society of Australia

1839: The First Evidence of Golf in Australia

Presentation by Michael Sheret

Sunday 5 February 2023, 9.30 am

Thomson Room at the Australian Golf Centre
(opposite Royal Melbourne Golf Course)

Despite several myths to the contrary, golf was first played in Australia on Saturday 25th May 1839. It was played at Grose Farm, a part of Sydney now occupied by the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the University of Sydney and Victoria Park. The evidence for this event is in the diaries of Alexander Brodie Spark. They are held by the State Library of New South Wales.

Spark was a wealthy entrepreneur and respected member of colonial society. As a reliable witness to events in Sydney in the early 19th century, his diaries are an important historical document. The information on golf contained in the diaries first came to the attention of golf historians in a magazine article published in November 1992. Unfortunately, the author did not reference his sources. It was not until 2014 that it was realised that he had used a book about the diaries and had not gone to the primary source. Consequently, some conclusions were in error and three important questions were left unanswered. What triggered the start of golf at Grose Farm? Why did that phase of golf have such a short life? What was the connection to Royal Blackheath Golf Club in London?

The research attempted to answer these questions using primary sources. Spark's Sydney and London diaries; Spark's correspondence; archived minutes and betting books at Royal Blackheath; Derbyshire UK archives; UK Shipping records; UK census records; the wills of Captain & Mrs Ferrier; Trove & British newspapers.



Alexander Brodie Spark

25th May 1839, diary extract

A photograph of a handwritten diary entry in cursive script. The text reads: "from before me in their charitable zeal. - Capt. Ferrier & Mep. Geo. Adams Wilson commenced operations at Grose Farm on behalf of the Golf Club. - M. Home & M. Smith called".

from before me in their charitable zeal. - Capt. Ferrier &
Mep. Geo. Adams Wilson commenced operations at Grose
Farm on behalf of the Golf Club. - M. Home & M. Smith called