



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

Patron: P.W Thomson, AO, CBE.

Report from Golf Historians meeting Bendigo Golf Club Monday June 27th 2016

The society's second Golf Historians forum for the year was held at Bendigo Golf Club Monday June 27th.

A group of 30 attended, made up of Melbourne GSA members, Bendigo GC members and a couple from the recently merged nearby Eaglehawk Golf Club.

Welcome

President of the Golf Society of Australia (GSA) Geoff Vincent welcomed all to the meeting and gave a brief insight in to the role of the Golf Society, outlining its primary objectives.

Convenor Kim Hastie opened the meeting and indicated there would be a couple of extra speakers on the program. The following is a summary of the presentations.

An overview of Bendigo Golf Clubs early years

The meetings first speaker was Peter Williams who declared up front as the "dobbed in" Historian for this meeting. Peter wrote a history for the 100 year Centenary celebrations and it was used in calendar in that year. He gave a timeline of significant dates supplemented with a few slides.

Officially launched August 21st 1901, though golf had been played unofficially in the district for some year on a few well known private family properties. One group decided to have six hole layout on the land surrounding the local pub the Turf Tavern, owned by Ben Roper. Players from other courses came to the Epsom layout.

The club was successful in the early year's attracting a solid core of players.

In 1909 ran its first annual tournament which saw over 600 entries but to be properly recognized the club needed to expand to 18 holes.

Some land was leased from the Racecourse Trustees. Local golf enthusiast Dr Hedley Ham and Roper constructed the first 18 hole layout.

The layout involved crossing public thoroughfares and it became a source of irritation to the members so things had to change.

In 1914 freehold land 76 acres (current site) was purchased included a residence for a cost of 1224 pounds. The house was renovated to a clubhouse and officially opened in June 1914.

The future was bright but WW1 intervened and the course was required by the armed forces. This impacted the clubs finances and its ability to host tournaments.

Post war years saw membership expansion, an interesting fact was the imbalances between the male and female members running a third male to two thirds female.

1923 Committee voted to restrict the Associates to 100. It is recorded that the heeled shoe the ladies wore was damaging the fairways.



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

1963 Grass greens were constructed to replace the sand scrapes and watering system installed.

Clubhouse changes have been a constant theme throughout the clubs history and reflect the clubs fluctuating fortunes.

In 1925 the members voted for a new clubhouse at cost of 1100 pounds it was built behind the existing building. This popular feature on the course was destroyed by fire 1977 and so this was the start of the clubs ongoing financial problems.

In 1976 “the current clubhouse “ opened but functioned only a bar as had a good view of the course but with loss of the old clubhouse levees were needed help to finance the improvement of this building and this impacted membership numbers.

The club endured difficult times with membership decline, various weather events and years of drought. The 1990’s saw progress with membership up and debt under control.

Peter closed his talk, as felt it was good time to bring in the Eaglehawk GC story.

An insight into the Eaglehawk Golf Club

Our second speaker was Bill Ashman from Eaglehawk Golf Club. A long serving Treasurer, Committee member and Life Member. In his opening words he proudly stated since the clubs inception men and women were accepted as equal members there were no Associates.

Bill produced a number of folders containing the clubs history, various records, Minutes of Meetings, Cash records and photos albums.

Bill went through quite a comprehensive timeline highlighting a few significant events in the club history.

1929 92 acres were purchased at a cost of \$600. Play commenced in 1930. Original length was 5338 yards (4879 metres)

A clubhouse was constructed in 1935 for a cost of \$247.

In 1947 the club hosted an exhibition match between Professionals Ossie Pickworth and Martin Smith and Amateurs Bill Gluth and Bobby Brown. With galleries of up to 750 watching. The Amateurs won.

A horse was used to pull the gang mower and in 1954 a Ferguson tractor was purchased.

1957 Saw the installation of an extensive watering system. Dams were enlarged.

1968 A spray irrigation system was installed improving tees and approaches.

1977- 1981 The course was converted to grass greens at a cost of \$53,562

Bill continued to outline many of the clubs ongoing improvements to the course, clubhouse facilities and machinery purchases and the significant cost of these projects.



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

1986 Sandra McCaw Australian and International Champion joined Eaglehawk and conducted clinics for the ladies. 1991 record membership of 823.

1998 Extra land was purchased and a Master Plan for future re design and development was prepared by Ross Watson and Assoc. of Queensland.

2003 Fairways converted to Legends couch grass.

Over a 10 year period the club saw increasing financial difficulties with declining membership, a drought in 2006 and the ever increasing water costs. It was predicted that if the club did not attract new members the club would not survive.

Committee decisions saw a one off water levy introduced, administrative roles performed on a voluntary basis, calls for voluntary member donations and a Membership fee increase but with the critically low member numbers the club could not go on.

2013 Proposals to merge came from three neighbouring clubs Bendigo, Neanger Park and Belvoir Park. At a general meeting members voted and Bendigo got a majority vote of 66 %.

The last games of golf were played in November 2013 and wake on Nov 16th to remember the many happy 84 years.

Steering committees have been established to complete the merge. The clubs are now awaiting the sale of the Eaglehawk GC land.

In the last part of his presentation Bill gave us humorous anecdotes about the many personalities at the club and their contributions to the Eaglehawk history.

Bill's lifelong contribution and love of his club was very evident. Unfortunately time did not permit us to hear all that he had to offer.

Ann Howe... a past member of Bendigo and Victoria Golf Clubs and now Bendigo local, presented us with a very entertaining slide show and commentary.

The slides were taken mainly during her successful representative years and showed the changes to Women's fashion. Other players to feature with Ann were Jane Lock, Louise Briers and Sandra McCaw. Some other slides showed great examples of the fabulous headwear they wore in those days.

She told us of one of her worst moments in golf, fearing suspension from the club when censured by the Manager of Victoria GC for changing her shoes in the carpark.

It was mentioned that prior to the meeting Anne provided the Convenor with very her impressive CV. Anne was not keen for it to be discussed but it could not go unsaid the successful playing career Anne had both at District and Representative level

Some highlights include: Bendigo Sports Star Hall of Fame, Bendigo District Champion and Champion of Champions. Multiple winner of the Victorian Scratch Foursomes. Victorian Team member and captaining the team in 1985 Ann also brought along a bag of hickories for viewing and assessment.



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

A visit by Bobby Locke to Bendigo Golf Club.

Len Prior long-time member and multiple Club Champion told us a little about the great South African player Bobby Locke and his visits to Bendigo Golf Club.

Bobby's great playing career is well documented. Len reminded us of a few of his greatest achievements such as four time British Open Champion. Won the South African Open nine times and won 11 tournaments in the USA between 1947 -1949.

Bobby turned professional in 1938 winning the Irish, New Zealand and South African Opens. Played an exhibition match at Bendigo in 1938.

Played again at Bendigo in 1952 with Steve Wallace and Erroll Whitchurch. Bobby was the current British Open Champion. There was a wonderful photo on display capturing the day.

Member contributions Next we had short stories from long-time members Victor Cahill a Life member, Past Captain and President and Ruth Smith Life member and Past Ladies Captain and President.

Victor and Ruth have made significant contributions to the club and gave us some of their personal reminisces. If time permitted Victor a 75 year member no doubt could have continued to give us many entertaining tales. Ruth the Club's Historian was instrumental in bringing most of the memorabilia on display at the meeting.

Himmerman and Kirk golf stick makers in 1920's

Paul Burgess Past GSA Committee and Historians Convener gave talk about two Scottish men John Himmerman and John Kirk who came to Australia in the 1920's to start cleek club production.

He presented a slide show and it was obvious to the group Paul had done a lot of research on these two men and he was able to confirm a lot of detail about the establishment of their club forging business here in Melbourne.

Interestingly they were brothers in law marrying the Cunningham sisters in 1904. John had been coal miner and worked in Tom Stewart's golf club factory in St Andrews. John Kirk a blacksmith and also worked in the factory. They migrated to Australia in 1922-23

1922 The magazine "Golf" in July and Dec 1922 featured articles about the establishment of a new factory in Mordialloc to manufacture iron golf clubs. Kirk would forge the clubs and Himmerman would finish the process

Their work was carried out at the rear of premises at 25 Railway Street (Later Collocott St) Mordialloc.

Paul has visited the property and spoken with a neighbour who was able to verify the name of the property as St Andrews. Due to subdivision there are no visible signs of its former manufacturing activities.



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

In 1923 Sydney newspapers reported the partnership trade mark had been registered. Officially accepted and advertised in November 30, 1923 listed as 36468 Golf Iron Heads Label device incorporating a cross and the words

“St Andrews Trade Mark - “Himmerman and Kirk, Mordialloc, Victoria “

Paul also indicated the research is not over and he feels there still more to be learnt about these men and their enterprise. It appears Himmerman remained in Australia and Kirk returned to St Andrews presumably for his family. Why did the partnership break up and cease business in the mid-thirties is still a question to be answered.

Show and Tell

In this popular segment Cliff George GSA committee member gave us an update on the society's collection and Curator activities for 2016, the following is a summary. The GA Collection has been moved to safe, secure and more economical storage in South Melb.

The exhibition of golf Memorabilia at Moonah Links that was removed in 2015, due to a change of ownership, and was reinstalled in June 2016.

The National Sports Museum at the MCG is expected to get an upgrade before Christmas 2016.

Hickory Golf is now an official GSA activity, with 9hole events affectionately called **“Hickory Heroes “being** played each month. Cliff noted that recently GSA Members won the annual Al Howard Trophy for the second time in thirteen years.

Cliff closed his talk discussing the importance and identification of old clubs and informed that GSA Historians Forums like this one help to service to Host clubs, assist members with the task identification of collectables items. He welcomed anyone contact him.

He provided a club as an example a Spalding Crest Niblick, from 1900/1905. This club covered in rust and neglected for many years, when restored was found to be beautiful example, from the Spalding works at Dysart if Fyfe and very collectable. An interesting feature of this club was the weight of its head at 335gms. Several other clubs from his personal collection were passed around.

Cliff also informed the meeting about the available copies of the recently reprinted Dan Soutar's *“The Australian Golfer “* it was well received and several copies were sold.

The members produced a wonderful display of photos, scrapbooks and trophies which created much interest and discussion.

Closure and vote of thanks to the Bendigo Golf Club

Geoff Vincent closed meeting and thanked the speakers and the club for hosting the day.

In his closing comments he stressed the importance re the ongoing preservation and storage of a clubs archives and memorabilia. With the significant development in modern IT methods, all clubs must be mindful to and plan to move in this direction to ensure their clubs history is safely preserved for the generations to come.

Next Meeting: Royal Melbourne GC Monday October 10th