

GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Historians Report from Riversdale Golf Club October 23rd 2017

Our final forum for the year was at Riversdale Golf Club. President Graeme Ryan welcomed 30 members and guests, opened the meeting with an update on some of the Society's recent activities and outlined the Society's aim to develop a National Golf Society.

The most recent progress has been to develop a stronger relationship with the Australian Golf Heritage Society (AGHS) in NSW.

Ken Watson, the RGC President also welcomed us and opened his talk with some historical dates. The 125th anniversary of Riversdale took place on 8 October this year and, over that time, the club has been at three different locations.

1892 - 1908 Mont Albert - Surrey Hills GC,

1908 - 1927 Camberwell - Riversdale GC

1927 - Mt Waverley (St Johns Wood) - Riversdale GC

On Sunday 1 October they celebrated 90 years at the St Johns Wood course.

His talk continued about the well-known Murdoch family and their connection with the club. We are all quite familiar with this very prominent and successful family but many of us didn't know about their talents as golfers.

He outlined the family's early connection and contributions beginning with Patrick J Murdoch, a Presbyterian minister. By early 1903, his three children Frank, Keith and Helen had joined. Frank Murdoch was considered perhaps the club's greatest ever amateur golfer.

Ken highlighted a few of his successes, in 1904 age 17 he won the Club Championship at Surrey Hills, then winning five more times at the Camberwell links from 1909 to 1913. He also won three Riversdale Cups in 1907, 1910 and 1914. Ken gave us a real insight into Frank, but also talked about the careers and golfing talents of a number of other family members as well.

Ken showed a few slides, one of interest was a photo featuring four members who had achieved the distinction of playing golf at all three locations.

His closing comment "the Murdoch family are an important part of the Riversdale Golf Club history, a family dedicated to the one Club, producing great champions and pennant representatives, and influential in ensuring that the Club survived those tough early years to present us with the fabulous Club that we have today".

John Boundy, Life Member & Chair History Book Committee, gave us insight into the history of the club at the current St Johns Wood location.

Established in 1892, as the Surrey Hills Golf Club, playing golf in paddocks near Mont Albert railway station.

In 1908, the Club moved to leased land in East Camberwell, located near Riversdale Road and this gave the Club its new and continuing name.

In 1924 seeking a permanent home to meet the needs of its growing membership, the Club purchased the now current land, 160 acres on which to construct a first-class championship course. This was a

property with history, as from 1869 to 1884 it was the country retreat of Sir Redmond Barry and his family. (Sir Redmond was the judge who sentenced Ned Kelly to hang)

The original course at St Johns Wood was laid out by member architect CJ Bidstrup to plans drawn up by Professional Jock Young.

The former manager of the estate for forty years, James Brewer was engaged to oversee the course construction. Many members were involved in the buying and planting of trees.

The existing home was renovated as required to a very comfortable clubhouse with panoramic views. On 1 October 1927, the new course was officially opened.

The club takes on considerable debt and member concerns, such as quality of soil, hilly terrain and the lack of public transport. This saw members resign and move to other clubs.

After the loss of land due to the new railway, noted course architect Alex Russell was commissioned to undertake a redesign. He laid out the new 18 hole course which was opened to high praise in March 1930.

In 1976, the first fairway watering system was installed and in 1988, agreement was reached with Glen Iris Tennis and Recreation Club to lease surplus land fronting High Street Road to construct a 'tennis complex'.

The rental on the 25 year lease was paid in advance, providing funds for various club projects. The lease was recently renewed for a further 25 years.

Over the period 1987-1994, all fairways converted to Santa Ana couch.

In 1994, all bunkers on the course were converted to 'pot style' under the watchful eye of Peter Thomson.

Over a ten-year period, all greens were rebuilt and the project was completed in 2006.

In 2001, the Club received approval from authorities to construct a series of lakes along the Damper Creek. Water storage was increased to 35 megalitres, sufficient to provide six weeks summer irrigation. The lakes created have added much beauty and extra challenge to the course with several greens being relocated, to bring the water into play.

To improve efficient use of water reserves, the irrigation system was replaced in 2015.

2007 the clubhouse no longer met expected standards, members expressed a strong desire to retain its current location with its views,

Concept plans were drawn up by Architect and member, John Zourkas. Major extensions commenced in 2009

John's closing comments, "the course has stood the test of time with its Alex Russell layout largely unchanged from the time of its construction in 1930".

Ian Rowell, Vice -President and Chair of Riversdale Heritage Committee, spoke predominantly about first 20 years of the Riversdale Cup and ran through some very notable early winners such as the Anderson brothers, Harry Howden, Louis Whyte, Ivo Whitten, Ben Lempriere and Frank Murdoch who won three times.

In 1896 a competition was first proposed by Harry Culliton, one of the clubs early great golfers and administrators.

It was originally known as The Surrey Hills Open and the clubs invited to compete were Royal Melbourne and Geelong. 86 players competed in the first event, so it was deemed a success to be continued in 1897.

Nearly all the good players in the state were competing and so this created an additional tournament to the National and State titles.

Five events are competed for: Ladies Handicap, Mixed Doubles, Men's Doubles, Championship, Men's Handicap.

In 1913, there was a record entry of 485 contestants, a far cry from the 86 who contested the first tournament.

The Riversdale Cup has provided great competition for 121 years and is still viewed as a major amateur event in this country and retains a high world ranking.

John Boundy returned to the lectern to talk about the club's publication of its 125 year history book. The club celebrated its 125 year history 10 days earlier and the book "*Riversdale 125*" was launched then.

He gave quite a detailed account of the process taken, starting with the selection of the author.

John Arnold, author of the previous two histories (1977 and 1992) agreed to do it again. John played a pivotal role in the research and the selection the chapters to be covered in this "Fifth Quarter "

An added benefit of John's appointment was his good working relationship with a book designer and printer. Other aspects outlined as important were:

- Well-kept chronology and records by the club archivist was a valuable resource.
- Format and size of the book. Produced in landscape to enhance the photography. Photographic input obtained from the members.
- Text review, selected trusted members to critically review the text.
- Developing accurate appendices was an enormous task.
- Members were invited to subscribe to the publication which significantly helped to underwrite the cost.

John finished by recognising the four years of detailed work done by a dedicated committee.

At the close of his talk, the club Captain Ron Mathieson made a presentation of the book to President Graeme Ryan.

Ross Davis, from Metropolitan Golf Club, brought along his collection of golf ball-markers. The collection is predominately from International courses but contained some significant Australian markers. Ross spoke of his most treasured pieces such as 75 markers from the widely recognised top 100 courses in the world and markers from the 10 oldest clubs in the world.

Cliff George brought to the meeting a wonderful piece of silverware, a trophy once known as the "Victorian Golf Cup".

Cliff wrote an article about this trophy in the previous issue of The Long Game, August #61

This beautiful trophy has an interesting history and it was displayed alongside the Riversdale Cup.

Moiria Drew provided for display a collection of programs from the events discussed.

Grant McKay, GSA member and confessed keen collector, brought in a few clubs to show us.

John Snell, former Riversdale member and Club champion, shared some of his happy and humorous memories from his time at the club.

President Graeme closed the meeting, thanked the speakers for their interesting, enjoyable talks and finally the club and the staff for their generous hospitality.