

Historians Forum - Commonwealth Golf Club - Monday 3 May 2021

The first Forum for the year was held at The Commonwealth Golf Club which, unfortunately for them, celebrated their Centenary in 2020. In recognition of this achievement the Club released a history titled 'The First 100 Years'. The author, Charles Happell, was our guest speaker and provided thirty members and guests with an engrossing presentation of what he describes as the 'colourful and vibrant' history of the Club.

Aided by an unpublished document, written by noted historian Joseph Johnson, Happell delved into the characters and circumstances that make Commonwealth a unique Club. This uniqueness is perhaps best illustrated by the rejection of the overtures of one of the great 'Golden Age' architects Dr. Alister MacKenzie. The succinct note from the Club to MacKenzie declining his services is one for the ages.

That Commonwealth could reject such overtures and yet still boast a golf course of undoubted quality is without question due to the efforts of one man, Charles Lane. Lane was the dominant force in the Club and in 1926 he went on a self-funded six-month study tour where he spent time in the US with Walter Travis and in the UK with Harry Colt. No doubt he returned brimming with ideas and thus it is no surprise that the Club rejected the services of MacKenzie.

This was but one of the engrossing stories in the book that Charles spoke about. Further chapters that were touched upon dealt with other important figures such as Bill Edgar, Harry Williams, Eric Routley, Sloan Morpeth, Louise Briers, Rick Wines, Jarrod Lyle, Marc Leishman and others too many to mention.

Charles' book is a worthy addition to the annals of Australian golfing histories and Commonwealth should be justifiably proud of it. Thank you to both Charles and the Heritage Committee of The Commonwealth Golf Club, led by its Chair Ian Pearce, for making their contribution to the first forum of the year such an interesting and insightful event.

Charles gave some insight into how such a book is produced, particularly in researching and verifying a club's history, collating the photos, member stories and the importance of proof reading. He complimented his talk with a power point slide show.

Charles willingly took questions from the floor and his responses were assisted by members Virginia Gorrell, Ian Pearce, and Stephen Spargo.

The second speaker on the program was Paul Burgess, Woodlands GC member, long time GSA member and a regular contributor to forums. Paul gave an interesting talk about a misplaced trophy and how it found its way back to Woodlands Golf Club.

The following extracts are from Paul's talk ...

A couple of years ago a stranger arrived at the club to donate a baseless trophy in the form of an elegant silver cup inscribed Woodlands Golf Club City of Mordialloc

Coronation Cup Won by S.L-Anderson 12-5-1937

Presented by Cr Edwards Mayor

Exactly how he acquired it is unknown and regrettably his name and details were not recorded at the time.

It was decided to have a new base fitted and a local trophy maker was given the order to fit a new one so it could be displayed at the club.

Somehow the order was overlooked and forgotten about until recently when the cup was again returned to the club, but still without a base or stand.

The trophy has now been remounted courtesy of Mike Smith, a member with wood making skills who crafted a new base.

The earliest mention of the Coronation found to date in Victorian golfing circles was when Royal Melbourne Golf Club applied on the 8th of October 1936, to the Victorian Golf Association for two Coronation Medals.

Then in February 1937 the VGA asked its affiliated clubs to celebrate the coronation of King George VI suggesting they conduct special events on 8th May which was the Saturday preceding the Coronation scheduled for Wednesday, 12th May in London, England

It is worth noting no mention of medals has been found in newspaper golfing results reports.

Apparently not all clubs agreed to go along with the V.G.A. suggestion, though from the results in a Melbourne newspaper "The Herald" many metropolitan and country clubs did hold special Coronation Day competitions.

Commonwealth Golf Club responded positively to the V.G.A. declaring Coronation Day would be there opening day for the season and hosted a mid-week Open Scratch Event on Wednesday 12 May 1937.

Woodlands Golf Club responded even more patriotically by conducting a bogey handicap event for members with the prize being the "Coronation Cup". It was the only trophy so named like that and records show Mr S. L. Anderson, off a handicap of 2, won it with a score of 3 up.

Mr Anderson joined the club as a junior two years previously and was obviously a handy golfer as in the same year, club champion

Paul brought the trophy along for us to see and in a nice gesture , to acknowledge the reference made to Commonwealth GC and their Coronation event, he presented Ian Pearce with a framed account of the early beginnings of the Coronation Cup.

Historians Convener

Tony Rule

Honorary Secretary

Kim Hastie