

GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA.

GOLF CLUB HISTORIANS' MEETING.

Report of the meeting held at Albert Park Golf course on 25th October 2010.

Attendance - See attached sheet.

1. The Chairman, Ian Rennick opened the meeting, and welcomed all present.

The Chairman stated that this meeting was being held during the Victorian History Week, and to celebrate the occasion it was decided to hold the meeting at Albert Park, the oldest course in Melbourne. Golf started at Albert Park in 1891. Golf was played in Melbourne earlier than that on several sites such as Batman Hill/ Docklands, the Bluff at Elwood, parkland near the MCG and at Emerald Hill, but play at each site had not continued for any length of time. The speakers at the meeting will give details of research they have conducted establishing the start of golf in Victoria.

2. The first speaker, Ben Corfee from Parks Victoria, who is the Manager of the Grand Prix and Majors Events at Albert Park. Ben stated that Albert Park was 225 hectares in size, and was proclaimed a park in 1864. It originally was swamp land, and was first used to graze cattle, then as a tip, and is now Melbourne's main recreational area attracting 47 different sporting clubs. All the clubs are growing and want to expand, but with finite space, they all have to be contained. Managing the Park is difficult as it has six million visitors a year, and holds sixty major events annually. The one constant area through all of this is the golf course that has been here since 1891. When the Grand Prix started in 1996, the roads were realigned causing many changes, particularly to the golf course. Maintaining the lake has always been difficult with the variation of the water level, and the control of the weeds. This has changed as the water level is now constant, and fresh water is captured from the roads from the eastern side. The water is filtered before it goes into the lake. The capacity of the lake is now 780 mega-litres and it is the largest water tank in Melbourne. It is now possible to use the water from the lake to irrigate the entire park, except the golf course, but steps are now being taken to include the course.

3. Peter Flockart is the Manager of Albert Park Management Pty. Ltd., who lease the golf course area from Parks Victoria. When they took over the lease in 1995 they agreed to renovate and maintain the course, as well as build a driving range on the eastern side of the

lake. Their income is the green fees, and they pay a yearly lease fee to Parks Victoria, and all outgoing expenses associated with the course. Peter stated that they have to endure a five week period during the Grand Prix when the course is closed, and this happens in the best golfing time of the year. When the Grand Prix started in 1996 the alteration to Aughtie Drive resulted in a redesign of the course. Due to the ground lost on the east side, they were allowed to extend on to land at the northern end, where the Harry Trott oval was. This allowed three extra holes to be built. Unlike most golf courses, there is no security fencing. Albert Park is open on three sides and there is nothing to stop people wandering on to the course, to walk their dogs or ride bicycles. Another problem is that balls can be hit on to the roads, but there have been few complaints. Peter related that as the course is built on top of an old tip, people come onto the course digging holes looking for old bottles. This usually happens at night, and causes a mess that has to be cleaned up the following day.

In 1998 The Victorian PGA Championship was held at Albert Park, and the initial reservation was that the course would be too easy for the long hitting golf professionals. Because of the tightness of the course the scores were reasonable, and the players and officials were delighted with the event. The tournament continued for another two years. The condition of the course was excellent, and due to the good press and the publicity, many corporate events have been held.

The course caters for fifty thousand rounds of golf a year, despite it being closed for five weeks in the best golfing weather.

4. Dr John Green is a member of Royal Melbourne Golf Club's History and Archive committee, and has taken a keen interest in how his club started, and the relationship between it and Albert Park. John quoted from the minutes of the Melbourne Golf Club (Royal Melbourne) dated 10th June 1891 which stated:- *"Mr Bruce reported that he and Mr Playfair had called on the Trustees of Albert Park and had gained permission to play on that ground"*.

This is the first mention of golf and Albert Park in the Club Minutes.

The minutes on the 29th June 1891 stated:-

"The Chairman called upon Mr Bruce who made a report as to what had been done by the Committee appointed to draft rules and select ground. He referred to the ground secured at Albert Park and at Gascoigne Estate near Caulfield Railway Station, and intimated that a Club House had been rented in Caulfield."

The Caulfield course was open for play on 4th July 1891. This was on rented land which was gradually being developed for housing and by 1898 the decision was made to move. When considering the location both Albert Park and Sandringham were mentioned as possible future sites, but freehold land was obtained at Sandringham and it was chosen.

The tie between the two clubs can be measured by the people who were members of both Clubs. Messrs. J. M. Bruce, J. M. Gillespie, Stewart, Catto and Dr. O'Hara. All of these were leading business people in Melbourne, and a number lived close to Albert Park.

All of this proves that golf was played at Albert Park in 1891, and further evidence assumes that the course has been kept open ever since.

5 Colin White has studied the history of Keysborough Golf Club, and traces his club back to Albert Park in 1899. Mr. J. M. Gillespie is mentioned as the Club founder, and in the history of Keysborough it is stated:-

"The Founder of our Club, Mr J M Gillespie, together with a small band of enthusiastic golfers, met frequently during the years 1895 to 1897, to play over a few improvised holes at Albert Park, on the part of that area known as the 'Old Albert Park Golf Links .'

"Mr Gillespie called a meeting to discuss the feasibility of establishing a golf club at Albert Park. The exact date or venue of the meeting is not known, but information points to 1899 as being the year." In the Social page on the Sydney Morning Herald dated 5th December 1896 the following article appeared:-

"A new golf club was opened in the Albert Park Melbourne, by Lord Brassey last Tuesday in the presence of a large and fashionable gathering including the Hon. Mrs Freeman Thomas, Lord Richard Neville, Lady Clarke and Mr and Mrs J M Bruce and many others"

This confirms that golf continued at Albert Park after Royal Melbourne left in 1891. Albert Park Golf Club continued at Albert Park until 1946/7, when the Victorian Government decided that a Private Club should not have exclusive rights over public land. A decision was made to buy land and after a search land at Keysborough was selected. The Club retained its Albert Park name until 1957, when the members voted to change it to Keysborough. The land at Keysborough was described as 220 acres of swamp, but extensive work of mounding, and the creation of lakes, has created a first class course. The lakes hold 110 mega-litres of water, enough for six months watering in the summer. Many of the old Albert Park traditions have been retained, and competitions with their former public course rivals like Brighton Golf Club (now Southern Golf Club) continue. It is interesting to note that that before the Victorian PGA Championship came to Albert Park, it was held at Keysborough for eight years.

6. Don Read the Captain of Albert Park Golf Club said, that when the course went public in 1948, only 20 players remained at Albert Park. A new Club was started, but struggled to survive as competitions were hard to organise. This was because the members could not book times, but had to enter through a ball race. Club championships were held, and are displayed with other event winners in the Lago Restaurant. This continued for 35 years, and it was only in 1995 when Peter Flockart and his company took over managing the course, that group bookings were arranged and regular competitions were held.

The course has had many changes over the years, and they have not all been recorded. By studying maps, it is thought that the present 8th and the 11th holes are the only ones that have remained the same. The course in 1891 was on 50 acres, and was 6 holes with greens 12 yards square. When the South Melbourne Council filled in the tip it was extended to 9 holes. In 1931 the club acquired a further 30 acres and the course was extended to 18 holes. Prior to 1936, play on Saturdays had to finish by 2.30pm, as part of the course was used for hockey, lacrosse and cricket. Another worry to the golfers was that in mushroom season people would flock to the course and dig for them, leaving holes, and disrupting play.

The largest alteration was in 1996, when the Grand Prix forced changes, and three new holes were added at the northern end of the course. After the new managers started in 1995 the condition of the course has greatly improved, thanks to the greenkeeper Geoff Keast. The Club is hoping that the irrigation system can be connected to the lake, which will improve the course through summer. The fairways have not been watered for eight years.

The Club does suffer during the Grand Prix because members have to play at other courses. There is also a lot of rubbish to be collected including many rubber ear pieces.

7. Viv Daniels spoke about the Lakeside Ladies Golf Club. She explained that the club started in 1947 with 20 ladies choosing not to go to Keysborough. The club initially known as Lakeside Golf Club Associates formally commenced in 1953 when the course became a public course. The Club was affiliated with the VGLA as a Tuesday club, and it wasn't until 1977 that Saturday members were recognised, allowing for two competition days. There was always a little friction between the weekday and the weekend players. They both coined names for each other- these being the "Tuesday Cheats" and the "Saturday Sneaks", but when they played matches against other clubs they called themselves the "Lakeside Luvlies".

In November 1977 the Club decided to make the main day of play Saturday due to the increase number of players that chose the weekend to play. The Tuesday and the Saturday groups seldom mixed except at social functions and the annual meeting.

In 1987 the clubs' name was formally changed to Lakeside Ladies Golf Club.

Over the years there have been attempts to amalgamate the two Albert Park Clubs, but all to no avail; the women state that there is no advantage for them and they are happy as they are.

Before 1995 all golfers, including the members, had to use the ball race to obtain a starting time. There was a certain amount of cheating with balls changing place, so a brick was removed from the starting shed and the race was put inside, out of reach of temptation.

8. A display of memorabilia relating the Albert Park Golf Club was provided by Golf Society members, Leon Rowbell, Max Findlay and Moira Drew. The display included of golf clubs by a former Albert Park professional Dick Banks, a Club Championship cup won by John Dooley in 1954, war medals of H L Newland who was a club professional in the 1930's, old score cards, newspaper articles and cuttings from 1891 to 1965.

9. The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking all the speakers, and Peter Flockart who helped organise the venue. He said that a lot of research has been collected about golf at Albert Park. He asked for extra help in further research particularly concerning Emerald Hill, to establish if it is in any way connected with the start of golf at Albert Park.

The meeting concluded at 3.15pm.