

GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

GOLF CLUB HISTORIANS' MEETING

Report of the meeting held at Peninsula Country Golf Club on 22nd February 2010

Attendance - See attached sheet.

1. The Chairman, Ian Rennick, opened the meeting and welcomed all present, particularly people attending for the first time, including Peter Molloy, Secretary of the Peninsula Golf District Association. Special mention was made of the guest speakers, Michael Caraher, Eric Lucas, Keith Wood and Moira Drew.

2. **The History of Peninsula Country Golf Club.**

Michael Caraher who is an historian at Peninsula Golf Club presented a brief history of his club

A prospectus was issued in August 1922 by the Tower Golf House Company Ltd calling for financial support to establish a residential golf house on land in McMahon's Road, Frankston. Three of the people mentioned in the Articles of Association were Alexander Mac Neil, William Alfred Tower, and Gordon Bernard Oliver who listed his occupation as Naval Architect. The 460 acre property was to be bought for £11,000 from the Tower family, and Oliver, who was also a golf course architect, was employed to design the course. The initial design was for an 18 hole course as well as a 9 hole course especially for the ladies. The property included a substantial building known as "Tower House" that was situated on an elevated position overlooking the sea. The building was to be enlarged to accommodate 100 visitors with a special feature of hot and cold water in each room.

The public offering was far from successful – only 7000 shares were taken up leaving a £43,000 shortfall – Tower and Oliver were determined to proceed with the project which included buying more land including land on the north side of Skye Road. In December 1923 the Tower Golf House was opened for business. The facilities comprised 11 golf holes, a putting green, tennis courts and a croquet lawn.

If the entire 460 acres were not required for the project some 200 acres could be subdivided and offered for sale, which was hoped would cover the entire cost of the property to be developed by the Company.

In 1924 the company was changed to a private country club and the name changed to "The Peninsula Country Golf Club." The first Committee was formed, and included Alex MacNeil (President), General Grimwade and William Alfred Towler, amongst others.

There followed 18 months of hard work during which the course was extended to 18 holes and was re-opened on 25th September 1926.

The next 20 years were very hard for the club. First there was the depression and then the war during which the Army took over the accommodation facilities. A persistent worry to the club was the lack of water for the course. In 1949 the first bore was sunk and was soon producing 12,000 gallons per hour, greatly relieving pressure on mains water supply, only to have the course flooded a few years later by 47 inches of rain.

By the early 60's Peninsula's one time stately isolation in a bushland setting had come under pressure from all sides. Once a haven for holiday makers, Frankston was on the move with freeway extensions, housing subdivisions, and major drainage works intruding on all sides. In particular, the proposed extension of McMahons Road to intersect with Skye Road would cut through the middle of the golf course.

In 1963 The Committee resolved to ask Sloan Morpeth to provide an opinion on the suitability of the club's land on the north of Skye Road. The club had in mind two 18 hole golf courses, and a new club house to service 2000 members!

In January 1964 Sloan Morpeth was appointed as golf course architect to design the two courses, both approx 7000 yards in length, at an estimated cost of £400,000 plus a further £350,000 for the new clubhouse.

The means to pay for these not inconsiderable sums were however close at hand. In 1965 the club negotiated the sale of the original Tower House property, including 41 acres for £213,000 and a further 118 acres on the east side of McMahons Road to T.M.Burke P/L for nearly £302,000. The club was left with 354 acres north of Skye Road on which to carry out Sloan Morpeth's design.

Within 3 years the North Course had been carved out of virgin bush and partial swampland, including the removal of two lakes and three unwanted hills, and opened for play on 22nd April, 1967.

The new club house was officially opened on 22nd July 1967, after the final farewell to the original Tower House three weeks earlier.

1976 saw one of the most important events in the Club's history with the linkage completed to the MMBW re-cycled water line from Carrum Downs's sewerage plant, via a 1.5 km pipe from McClelland Drive along Skye Road.

In 1974 in the club's 50th year, golf course architects, Harris Thomson and Wolveridge were engaged to recommend any changes that they thought were required to both courses. In 1999 Michael Clayton was engaged to carry out changes on the North course and in 2001, changes to the South course

The clubhouses has had many changes, and in 2006 major renovation were made to the accommodation with several rooms being joined to create larger suites, as well as construction of the new wing of "luxury" suites. On completion of that work, a start was made on the construction of new men's and women's locker rooms, renovated entrance/reception area, and a greatly enlarged pro-shop complete with storage basement.

2007 saw the completion of the Michael Clayton plans for both the North and South courses, and, with membership standing at over 1700 at the end of 2009, Peninsula has come a long way from its original "residential golf house" concept in 1922.

3. Eric Lucas

The Chairman introduced Eric Lucas as a golfing legend of the Mornington Peninsula, if not Victoria. In the 1940's Eric started caddying for the professionals of the day. He later played at Northern golf club but for most of his life Flinders was his golfing home. He related a story about his first set of golf clubs. One day at Flinders he was caddying for Mrs Clive Leonard and she asked him if the club he was practicing with was his. He replied that it was his brothers and that he did not own any clubs. Mrs Leonard, who was a member at Royal Melbourne, then asked Mrs H F Creswick to arrange with Arthur Le Fevre, Royal Melbourne professional at the time, to make up a short set for Eric. Eric hurried home and told his family but they did not believe it would happen. Shortly later the clubs arrived, and one of the clubs was a sand iron called an 'Exploder'. Gene Sarazen had brought out several club heads from America and could not sell them because no one had heard of them. Eric still has the club and has played with it all his life. He has offered it to the Golf Society for the museum, but only after he has stopped playing golf.

Eric spoke on how golf started in Victoria with the early settlers, who were mainly Scots, hitting balls around their open paddocks. As towns developed and more settlers arrived small clubs started and unofficial competitions commenced. In 1903, when the VGA was formed, all Victorian Golf Clubs started playing under the official rules and golf became very popular. In 1923 the Country Week competition started. This was very important for country players as it gave them an opportunity to come to Melbourne and play on the good courses. The peninsula area was zoned as part of Gippsland.

Eric's early association with professional golfers has left him with the greatest respect for their ability and their contribution to Australian golf. He can recall the Clubs where each professional worked and the courses they helped design. He would like a book written showing the great contribution the early golf professionals made in the development of golf in Victoria.

4. Modern Golf Club Manufacture in Melbourne.

Keith Wood related an interesting story about golf club head manufacture in Thomastown, a suburb of Melbourne. While helping to clean up a house of a friend, a 'part made' metal driver clubhead was found. A friend, Robert Dunbar, said had he had worked at a factory of Super Alloy Technologies that designed the club heads for Cobra, TaylorMade and Calloway. These were the first forged light weight, spring faced, titanium club heads made in the 1997. Super Alloy had the clubs forged by National Forge, a company that also made aeroplane engine parts and the forgings were returned to Super Alloy to be finished. The club heads were then sent to Thailand for painting from where they were sent to America to be assembled and then returned to Australia for sale. This was before China got into the act of club manufacture, but the first manufacture of the modern drivers was in Australia.

5. Collection management resources

Moira Drew, the Society Archivist, went quickly through the basics of preserving important documents mainly for the Clubs that were attending the meeting for the first time. She advised that there were detailed sheets on various subjects available and was happy to help with questions later.

Moira advised that there was a new publication available called *Publishing a Golf Club History* that might be useful for any Club thinking of writing their history. It is a companion to *Writing a Golf Club History*, a joint effort of the British Golf Collectors Society and the Australian Golf Heritage Society. Copies were available at the meeting or can be obtained by emailing the Golf Society at golfsocietyaust@gmail.com

In a question directed to Moira, there was a discussion about conducting oral history interviews as a way of compiling the history of a Club. A number of people spoke on their experiences. Moira agreed to prepare a paper for a future meeting.

A report on the collection of information of golf course changes was made and information was now being collected from the South Australian golf clubs. All the information collected is available on the Golf Society web page.

6. Show and tell.

Max Findlay displayed a spliced head driver from about 1890 which had the unusual characteristic of being spliced four ways. This intrigued Max that he experimented and found that the only way he could replicate this feature was to splice two square pieces of wood and then shave them down to make them round. Max also showed an interesting silver tray won by J R Porter at Yarra Yarra in 1933.

Peter Molloy showed a sand iron from the 1950's that was stamped Martin Smith who was a well known professional who worked at several golf clubs in Victoria.

Norman Richardson spoke of his research on early golf in Tasmania. Michael showed a newspaper cutting written by Jane Williams, dated July 1890. Jane was a descendant of Alexander Reid who established the Ratho farm at Bothwell in 1823. The article stated that golf had started in Bothwell over 30 years previously but due to deaths and other changes had ceased to be played there. This seems to indicate that golf started in the Ratho area in about 1860

Terry White showed several unusual clubs. He had a Smith patent anti-shank iron circa 1890, a Gassiat mallet putter designed by Jead Gassiat, a Calamity Jane putter used by Bobby Jones, a Stratson square shafted putter, the hosel is round but the shaft and grip area have been shaped square and a Monoplane putter with a half round hosel and shaft

7. General Business.

Thanks were expressed to all the speakers and the Peninsula Golf Club for the use of their clubhouse

The next meeting is scheduled for May