



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

Patron: P.W. Thomson, AO, CBE.

Report of Golf Historians meeting at Huntingdale Golf Club February 28th 2017

A record number of about 50 GSA members and club historians attended the first Golf Historians meeting of the New Year.

There is no doubt that the level of attendance was influenced by a return visit to Melbourne by Professor David Purdie who had left us wanting more on his visit about a year ago.

The reason for his visit this time was that he was bringing a copy of a very new painting, of a very old event, as a donation to The Royal Melbourne Golf Club. The very old event was the first holding of The Open at Prestwick Golf Club to decide the "Champion Golfer of the Year". There were to be 8 'gowfers' competing for a red leather Championship belt, very similar to the type of belt awarded to champion boxers of the day but no financial reward other than a tip, or tips, from successful gamblers who had backed them in with the bookies.

At this time there were no professional golfers as we know them today. No club professionals, and no touring pros, but there were club makers and ballmakers who also gave lessons, and were called 'known and respectable Cadies'. A decree went out to the clubs of the golfing world (i e Britain) calling upon their Cadies to enter a competition to be played on Wednesday 17th October 1860 over three 12 hole rounds in the one day, a major innovation, to establish the 'Champion Golfer of the Year', the title still used today. (a few 12 hole golf courses still exist , one of which is Shiskine on the Isle of Arran, the mountains of which can be seen in the background of the painting. This is a course that all golfers who wish to consider themselves serious students of the game should play at least once in their life.)

There were no practice rounds in these early days of The Open Championship; instead, those golfers who had caddied in the Prestwick Golf Clubs' Autumn Meeting in October 1860 were expected to compete. By caddying they would be expected to get' a feel for the course'! The painting shows a young Tom Morris, who aged into Old Tom, teeing off watched by a gallery which included Lt.Col James Ogilvie Fairlie, a former Captain of the R & A and the undoubted father of 'The Open'.



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Professor Purdie suggested that the young lad on the left of the picture standing beside the man wearing a blue cravat, might be Young Tom who went on to win The open 4 times in 6 years, but admitted that there is no evidence that is the case, yet. He did however undertake considerable research to establish the weather conditions of the day including the angle of the sun and its shadows and a phone call to the UK Hydrographic Office elicited that the tide at that time of that day was one hour below high water, and was on the way out! This, in my opinion, is a level of research that we should all aspire to.

Prints of the picture are available to purchase at www.openingdrive.co.uk. This includes a key as to who the people pictured were.

Huntingdale Golf Club Historical and Archives Committee member and GSA member, Brian Meldrum showed a video celebrating the clubs 75th anniversary.

In the Show and Tell part of the meeting Cliff George described a strong hickory club made by the great Robert Forgan in the early 20th century.

On display by the Club was some memorabilia associated with the late, great, Burtta Cheney.

Peter Gompertz
Golf Historians Convenor

Next Meeting: Monday June 19th at Sorrento Golf Club