



GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.

Golf Club Historians Sub-committee.

Minutes of Golf Historians Meeting At Kingston Heath Golf Club, March 16th 2015

The Golf Society's President Geoff Vincent welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Kingston Heath GC for hosting today handing over to the Historians Convenor Kim Hastie to open the meeting.

The first speaker on the program was GSA Committee Member Dick Kirby, a regular contributor to the forums.

He outlined the Society's statement of purpose and ran through the various events the Society run each year and also promoted the regular Hickory days acknowledging Cliff George's considerable efforts in putting together this year's program.

Dick talked about the Society's ongoing commitment assisting Golf Australia to develop and maintain a National Golf Museum, reminding us of the two current displays at the Sports Museum at the MCG and other at Moonah Links, Rye.

Dick updated us on the new home for Golf Victoria at the proposed Elsternwick site...advising planning has progressed with the interested parties Golf Australia, Golf Victoria, PGA and State Government all involved in the financial and permit planning of this exciting development. It is hoped this site will be the home of a National Golf Museum.

Dick gave an update on the Society's membership and the value of running Historians forum such as this today.

The second speaker was Kingston Heaths Club Captain Peter Clarke, who gave succinct account of the clubs history, it included some wonderful old photographs of members and the course.

The original club was formed in 1909 as the Elsternwick Golf Club and officially opened in April 1910. The course at Elsternwick was 5073 yards in length with a Bogey rating 75 and had a 3 room clubhouse. WW1 had a significant impact with loss of membership and revenue.

Post WW1 saw the membership increase and there was increasing pressure from the local council about using public land so an alternative site was sought.

Four members Dutton Green, Oakley, Vollugii and Collingwood negotiated separately for 5 parcels of land at Cheltenham for the total sum of 4,948 pounds and in December 1922 the members ratified the decision to move to a new site at was is now the current location.

In 1923 Dan Soutar from Sydney was engaged to plan the layout, his brief was to design a championship length course that would stand the test of time.



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Construction started in 1923 with Royal Melbourne lending greenkeeper M Morcom to oversee. The course was laid out at 6,813 yards with a bogey rating of 82

In 1925 the Elsternwick clubhouse was transported to Cheltenham with the official opening on April 4th by Royal Melbourne Captain James McLeod. The membership was 310 members.

In 1925 An Extraordinary Meeting of the members saw the proposed name change to Kingston Heath GC unanimously approved.

In 1926 Dr A Mackenzie was engaged to design the bunkering again with assistance of Morcom. Mackenzie also the 15th hole from a short Par 4 to the signature Par 3 hole we know today.

WW2 saw rationing which made equipment difficult to obtain. Interestingly but fortunately the club purchased a large stock of whiskey which lasted through the war year's. Peter went on to talk about the successive Committees in the 1980's that purchased land around the boundaries and how the club now sits on 173 acres, 46 more than the original land purchase in 1922.

In 1982 Graeme Grant appointed Course Superintendent who made changes in grasses and greens ensuring a first class playing surfaces all year round.

The club has hosted many tournaments including 7 Australian Opens, hosting its first one in 1948 where Ossie Pickworth defeated Jim Ferrier in a playoff.

In closing his talk Peter paid tribute the vision of the clubs forebears over the past 100 years.

The third topic on the agenda was about two Scottish men John Himmerman and John Kirk who came to Australia in the 1920's to start cleek club production.

Paul Burgess Past GSA Committee presented a very detailed and colourful slide show and it was obvious to the group Paul had done a lot of research along with his wife Pam in to these two men and he was able to confirm a lot detail about the establishment of their club forging business here in Melbourne.

Interestingly they were brother's law in law marrying the Cunningham sisters in 1904. John had been coal miner and worked in Tom Stewart's golf club factory in St Andrews. John Kirk a blacksmith and also worked in the factory. They migrated to Australia in 1922-23.



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1922 The magazine "Golf" in July and Dec 1922 featured articles about the establishment of a new factory in Mordialloc to manufacture iron golf clubs. Kirk would forge the clubs and Himmerman would finish the process

Their work was carried at the rear of premises at 25 Railway Street (Later Collocott St) Mordialloc

Paul has visited the property and spoke with a neighbour who was able to verify the name of the property as St Andrews. Due to subdivision there are no visible signs of its former manufacturing activities.

In 1923 Sydney newspapers reported the partnership trade mark had been registered. Officially accepted and advertised in November 30, 1923 listed as 36468 Golf Iron Heads Label device incorporating a cross and the words

"St Andrews Trade Mark - "Himmerman and Kirk, Mordialloc, Victoria "

Paul related some oral histories he has collected from a number of sources and showed various newspaper entries and photos.

He also indicated his research is not over and he feels there is still more to be learnt about this venture i.e. their return to St Andrews for different reasons. What appears a likely partnership break up and why they ceased business in the mid-thirties?

Paul encouraged any one to contribute further to the documentation made so far.

The next speaker was **Peter Gompertz** Committee Member and regular contributor to GSA forums, he gave an entertaining insight into the increasing use and popularity of hickory clubs.

He opened his talk with an interesting story about Golf writer Geoff Shackelford author of books such as Master of the Links and Spirit of St Andrews and his discovering the joys of hickories.

Geoff played "Kingarock" an old country 9 hole course near St Andrews with Geoff Ogilvy, Mike Clayton and John Huggan (in Peter's opinion currently the best golf writer in Scotland)

Interestingly Geoff Ogilvy's plays with hickories a couple of times a year, uses just four clubs and a replica gutty ball...claiming it keeps him fresh and inspired.

Geoff Shackelford describes his experience as something entirely fresh and wonderful preferring to play hickories over a 2002 yard 9 hole layout rather than play 99 percent of the course with modern equipment.

Geoff has made public his view on the modern game and in his recent book The Future of Golf makes reference to governing bodies USGA and R&A and their timid response to the



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incredible equipment technology changes seeing many grand old championship courses now considered not suitable for tournament play.

Peter talked of his own early experience's playing hickories.. One was in 1993 he partnered Bob Grant in a foursomes match against Cirencester GC help to celebrate its Centenary.

Some hickory facts.. It is estimated in the USA over 5 million golfer regularly play with hickories. Recently the 5th Annual Professional and Amateur Hickory Championship was played, interestingly with the same prize money (\$5000) as the first big tournament held 1925.

In the UK they play the annual Scottish, Welsh English and Central England Championships. Last year the 10th World Championships Hickory event was held at Craigelaw Golf Club near Edinburgh They had 95 entrants including 9 professional not competing for any prize money. It was won by Sandy Lyle. Hickory championships are held in Austria, Holland, Finland, Germany and Sweden. An Australian professional Perry Somers takes part and wins most of them.

Peter then talked about the Golf Society's ongoing commitment to educate and encourage the play of hickories.. Reminding us of the first GSA Hickory day played at Royal Melbourne in 1983 when the society was founded.

He promoted the new monthly Hickory Heroes competition thanking Cliff George and Max Findlay for their input to the program for this year.

Peter encouraged play with hickories as it usually involves a choice of only 6 or 7 club's the bag is light and usually carried, helping to speed up play. ...

His closing words "you may hit only one good shot but you will remember it and always swing slowly as it may well improve your steels game."

The final speaker for meeting was GSA Past President Ian Rennick talking about golf in early Victoria, Ian presented his talk using a series of slides showing an early map, newspaper articles and letters.

Many articles have been written about early golf in Victoria, most of them have quoted what was written in Australia's first golf book "**The Australian Golfer**" Written in 1906 and the author was Dan Soutar. Ian showed us a copy of this wonderful book but believes some of the details are not correct. Soutar was a professional golfer from Scotland who came to Australia in 1903. He lived in Sydney and admitted he knew little about Victorian golf. The chapter about Victoria was written by R A A Balfour-Melville who had not been in Melbourne very long arriving in Melbourne in 1893. He in turn got his information from James Graham who



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was in his 80's, and was talking about something that happened 50 year before. So you can see that some of the details could and were wrong.

Following is Ian's notes and the comments attached to his slides, many showing interesting dates of relevance, taken mainly from newspaper extracts.

MAP 1 1838

"Golf in Australia" stated that

"The course played on, extended from Flagstaff Hill to about where the present Flemington Bridge is erected the whole then being vacant ground"

Flagstaff Hill is now called as Flagstaff Gardens and the area is completely different from what it was in 1840. It is now confined by four streets but in the 1840's there were no boundaries and the area to the west wet down to Batman's Swamp. The history committee from the Golf Society have spent many days at the Melbourne library, and at the Royal Historical Society, and there was no reference to golf or any sport played near to the Flagstaff.

The University Libraries advice on sources of information it lists

Primary Source

Secondary Source

Tertiary Source and some others depending what you are looking for.

In an effort to verify the details in Soutar's book, primary source information are required because we want to know historical details and exact dates. If we are relying on newspaper articles we want a newspaper article written at the time of the event not one written years later that rely on some ones memory. If you are relying on details from a book, it must state where the information came from, and we know that supposed facts are repeated, and often added to.

In searching through early Melbourne newspapers we have found many interesting articles concerning golf.

1842 **Melbourne paper quoted**

Batman's Hill was a pretty little knoll covered with trees, on the site now occupied by Spencer Street Railway Station. The Hill was utilized as a "Grand Stand" for the visitors to the first two race meetings held in Port Phillip. It was a beauty spot on Melbourne and the first cricket match was held there...

MAP 2 1845 **Herald May 2nd.**

Reported that with sincere regret the race course area was taken over to grow vegetables and a large area was fenced off. It also was used for cricket, shinty and other manly recreations. Shinty was an Irish game very like golf. The article went on to say it did not know of any other land suitable for cricket



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1847 A number of articles stated that golf was being played in Melbourne and Geelong and named many of the players.

1849 Mr William Westgarth visited Europe purchased and collected a number of clubs for some individuals.

The consignment came to hand in May 1849 and some golf matches were started.

As the play season would commence when the cricket season ceased, golf it was thought, would succeed as a popular pastime, but it did not”

MAP 3

1850 **Melbourne Morning Herald June 28th 1850.** gave this account of the earliest attempt at golf in Melbourne: Golf—

“It is not generally known that this exhilarating, athletic Scotch game is played here every week, by a few gentlemen who intend forming themselves into a regular club to carry out the spirit of golf in all its genuine manliness. The gentlemen meet in the afternoon of every Saturday, weather permitting, somewhere in the vicinity of the Flagstaff, and go to work with that enthusiasm so characteristic of the game itself, and of the Scotch national character. The necessary paraphernalia, in the shape of balls (Gutta percha) clubs, &c, have lately arrived from England, and are of the most beautiful manufacture. To give something like a general outline to the English and Irish reader may be necessary- to a Scotchman, quite the contrary. A piece of ground, covering many acres is selected for play, in which, in a circle, several holes are dug, at equal distances of two or three hundred yards. To get the balls (which are not larger than those used in a tennis court, but as hard as iron) into all those holes first in rotation, is the trial of skill, and whoever does so is the winner. But to do this requires much practice in striking the ball from the ground with. From one hole past the other, and yet far enough to prevent a great number of strokes being applied, which necessarily occupies longer time. A nimble runner too has great advantage, as he has in cricket and other athletic games. As any number of persons can play at once, when the field is full the effect must be striking indeed. The season for golf commences and terminates just as the season for cricket terminates and begins, so that to the lover of genuine sport “there is no end to pleasure.” We hope to see the club regularly organised in a few days, with the election of the necessary offices, ECT and we feel certain of the satisfactory result.

1850 Final meeting took place at the Royal Oak Hotel in Queen Street November 3rd

1850. . Golf moved from Flagstaff to Red Bluff at Ormond



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MAP 4

1854 **Argus October 2nd.**

During the cricket meeting on Saturday some capital golf playing, by members of the Melbourne Golf Club, excited a good deal of attention. A match, it is said, between crack hands, will come off in a day or two.

1854. Golf moved from Flagstaff to Red Bluff at Ormond

1859 Drummond Wanliss played golf at Emerald Hill.

1864 Geelong G C formed in 1864 and members played on Ormond's property at West Geelong.

Golf played at Westgarth, Essendon and Heidelberg.. Golf match played between Geelong and Queenscliff clubs.

MAP 5

1867 **The Argus March 30th.** A letter to the paper written by Andrew Scott Jnr

Sir, Will you kindly allow me to ask through this column if there are any gentlemen in Melbourne who have golf clubs, and would feel disposed to unite together for the practice of the game?

I have been in the habit occasionally of playing at Emerald Hill, but I do not know more than two gentlemen who can play, I have been obliged to divide my set of clubs, neither of my friends have a set.

Though the ground at Emerald-hill cannot be compared to the links at St Andrews, Musselburgh, Prestwick, or even North Berwick, still a very enjoyable afternoon may be spent, with enough of "bunkers" practice to render the game interesting to a fellow who really likes this famous old game.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant

ANDW. SCOTT, JNR

70 Elizabeth-Street, March 28

MAP 6

There are several interesting aspects concerning this letter. Firstly it shows that golf was being played and secondly he mentions Emerald Hill. In 1867 the land from the Yarra to St Kilda in the south was called Emerald Hill and was very wet swampy ground. There are only several spots of dry ground that golf could be played. The question is where did Mr Scott play?

One was where the South Melbourne Town Hall is now located, but it was fully built on, another area is on St Kilda Road where the Military Barracks are located. The Barracks were built in 1860 and had some land south of it was called The National Agricultural Reserve so that could be used for golf. Another location was where Albert Park Golf Club is now located?? We know golf was played at Albert Park in 1890. It would be exciting to find that golf was played there in the 1860's.



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The years from 1860 to 1890 there is very little mention of golf because everyone in Victoria had gold fervour. From 1890 onwards many courses started. Most country towns had courses but the smaller towns gradually lost their course for various reasons which included WW1, and the ease of travelling to larger towns and later the 1930 depression made many small courses uneconomic.

Another project that the Golf Society has is to list the oldest golf clubs in Australia that are still active. The list started off with about 80 clubs and all were contacted to verify their details. Many of the clubs had relied on people's memories and were unable to confirm the dates. We are now fortunate, that with modern technology it is easier to search through old newspapers and to see what the true facts are. The list of the oldest golf clubs now has 44 clubs that definitely started before 1900 but some Clubs are still having trouble confirming exact dates. History research never ends.

Golf must have been played in Victoria from the time of the first settlement. The first Army Corps sent to Victoria was Scottish and the main settlers in the Western District were Scottish.

Show and Tell and Questions.

Marty Maguire brought along a couple of his own Himmerman and Kirk Hickories. He told us what he knew about them and they were passed around the group. Overall a very interesting meeting with the topics complimenting each other there was a lot of discussion and a number of questions were put to the speakers.

Meeting closed and advised of next forum **at Barwon Heads Golf Club, Monday 15th June 2015**

Geoff Vincent, gave a vote of thanks to Kingston Heath Golf Club and to the speakers. He also paid his own personal tribute to the clubs forebears with particular reference to member Vollugi.

Ref Hist, Agenda KHGC2015

Correction Page 4 should read "The Australian Golfer" not Golf in Australia