



## **GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA INC.**

### **Golf Club Historians Sub-committee.**

#### **Minutes of the Golf Club Historians Forum Yarra Yarra Golf Club Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Geoff Vincent President of the Golf Society of Australia (GSA). Opened the meeting and welcomed all to Yarra. Kim Hastie forum Convener introduced the speakers.

The forums first speaker was Peter Swan. Peter is a 40 year member of the club and Convener of Yarra Yarra's Historical Sub-Committee.

Peter told us that Yarra Yarra meaning "flowing flowing".

He gave us a brief insight into the clubs early beginnings (Eaglemont Golf Club) going through many significant dates and the decisions made during the early years at the Eaglemont and Rosanna sites 1889 -1911

May 1911 Rosanna site purchased. Officially opened March 30<sup>th</sup> 1912. The club was formally incorporated as Yarra Yarra Golf Club Limited.

In 1927 to maintain a successful course and membership it was deemed necessary that the Rosanna site should be sold and so land at Benthleigh in the Sandbelt was bought.

Opening day was February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1929 - nearly 87 years on this current site.

Peter mentioned member Herbert Darvall several times citing his major contribution and influence through these years.

Peter also gave us some of his personal thoughts; one nice story was the clubs acknowledgement of longstanding staff member Gordon Sharrock. The club installed a flagpole out the front to recognise his many years of service.

Peter touched on the Clubs tournament hosting history citing many well-known winners. He mentioned the Clubs wonderful staff over the years, the course changes and in recent years a significant club house renovation. Peter answered several questions from the group.

#### **The second speaker was**

Tim Groves, long time member and Yarra Yarra Historical Sub-Committee Member.

He spoke about the activities that the history group carry out, acknowledging a small, hard working, group of members that carry out this important work.

Tim supported his talk with a power point presentation, discussing what the history group believe are some of the most important details in the clubs history.



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Methods for collecting, recording and storing the data remains one of the biggest challenges. There is considerable archival data stored in several ways and it has been huge task to improve and streamline access to it.

Other points of interest include the committees' keenness to educate, and increase, member awareness such as during the play of a significant event, the Trophy being competed for is put on display with some informative history.

They believe it is important to interview older and significant members.

The club is fortunate to have a dedicated History room for the committee to work in, and members to enjoy.

Throughout the clubhouse, Yarra Yarra have wonderful artwork, photos and memorabilia on display and it is a credit to this working group.

His presentation gave us an interesting insight to their work and prompted a number of questions such as how they manage certain projects.

### **Visit to Golf Museum in Regensburg, Germany**

Graeme Ryan, a Yarra Yarra member for many years, produced a wonderful slide show of his recent visit to a Golf Museum in Regensburg, Germany.

Privately owned by an antique dealer, the museum is housed in a renovated cellar and has an extensive, and impressive, collection of golf memorabilia.

Graeme's photo's came up really well and we could appreciate the many beautiful pieces on display.

Graeme highly recommends a visit to this museum. His presentation stimulated questions and several in the room had been to the museum agreeing is worth the visit.

### **Did Mary Queen of Scots play golf?**

The next presentation was from Ian Rennick Past GSA President, and Life Member.

He opened his talk by reminding us of the importance of checking facts before presenting them. Be sure to check your sources as over time as new evidence is found dates and location can change referring to a previous talk he made about early golf in Victoria.

Ian gave us a short history lesson about this fascinating, and controversial, Monarch who ascended to the throne when only 5 days old in 1542

It was quite humorous at times and following is a summary of his notes.



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What is the likelihood of Mary playing golf? It has been established that golf was being played in Scotland when Mary was born. It is recorded that her father had purchased golf balls, and clubs, so he did play golf. When she went to live in France she may have played 'Pall-Mall' that is a golf like sport. On her return to Scotland in 1561 it was recorded that she spent time playing archery, billiards, cards, dice, reading, music and dancing. But there is no mention of golf.

Over the past two hundred years comments about her golfing have grown and been exaggerated. Her father has been mentioned as teaching her golf, but that is impossible as she was only 5 days old when he died. It has been suggested that St Andrews course was constructed because she wished to play there when she visited St Andrews. There are twenty golf courses in Scotland that state that she played there. She has been described as an 'avid golfer', a 'talented golfer' and 'a golf fanatic' and 'the first women to have played golf regularly'. There is also a claim that she taught her son to play but this cannot be true as the last time she saw him was when he was ten months old. There are a number of paintings of Mary playing golf, but they were painted over 100 years after she died.

Mary's opportunities to play golf in Scotland were extremely limited. Mary only lived in Scotland for the first five years of her life, and then for a brief period between her return from France and her exile to England. Despite the many contemporary references to her playing golf as well as the many references of her playing other sports the only reference to her playing golf was a document which aimed at discrediting her.

### **The final speaker for meeting was**

Peter Gompertz, GSA Committee and a Member of the British Golf Collectors Society since 1987.

He gave an entertaining talk about his recent visit to Askernish Golf Club in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland.

Land owner Lady Cathcart engaged Old Tom Morris in 1891 to lay out a course for her house guests. Morris described the land for 18 hole lay out as 'second to none'

For 30 years this wonderful course was maintained by the local crofters for the enjoyment of her many house guests. Some crofters also doubled as caddies.

In early 1930s, after her death, the course fell into disrepair.

Peter went on to outline several significant dates and the many changes the course, and land, went through bringing us right up to 2005 when golf course consultant Gordon Irvine, and golf architect Martin Ebert, rediscovered the Old Tom Morris 18 hole layout and brought it back to life.



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Peter supported his talk with some wonderful photos and we could definitely sense the raw, and natural beauty of Askernish.

Peter a declared and passionate links player described Askernish as probably one of the most natural golf links in the world, and like St Andrew's everyone should play it at least once, not die wondering.

#### **For the show and tell and general discussion part of the meeting**

GSA Committee member Cliff George spoke briefly about the increasing interest in hickory golf, and the popularity of the monthly GSA Hickory events.

Cliff informed us of the recent appointment of Committee member Max Findlay as an approved supplier and restorer of hickory shafted antique clubs.

He encouraged members to contact Max if needing help with antique hickory clubs.

Cliff went on to talk about, and stressing, the importance of identification when acquiring and collecting hickory clubs

He brought along two clubs as examples for discussion. The first one being identified as a Golf Medal No 3, and the second, a quite unusual looking aluminium unmarked centre shafted putter. The clubs were passed around the room for members to see.

Graeme Ryan brought along a club to show us. It was a graphite shafted, Persimmon, driver estimated to be 25 years old; never used and in pristine condition.

In closing... Geoff Vincent produced an amazing item for examination and discussion... it is the original, personal, scrap book of RAA Balfour-Melville, first Secretary of Royal Melbourne Golf Club.

The scrap book, looking a little worse for wear, showed extensive newspaper articles and photos with much of the content seeming to be about racehorses and golf.

GSA has this book on short term loan from a family descendant. The pages have been carefully scanned and plans for restoration, and rebinding, of the original are being discussed. It seemed that everyone at the meeting took the opportunity to have a quick look at this fantastic piece of history. It certainly raised much interest and comment.

Geoff closed the meeting, thanked all for their attendance and proposed a vote of thanks to Peter Swan, and Yarra Yarra, for their hospitality.