

# The Long Game

**The Official Newsletter of the Golf Society of Australia**

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## Feature article:

This issue features a research paper on **David Conacher** by Noel Terry. It outlines the family background and David's life in St Andrews in the 1830-1840's and provides some insight into his club and cabinet-making skills.

It was Noel's research into Conacher's role in laying out the (Royal) Melbourne Golf Club course at Caulfield in 1891 that lead him to the connection with David Strath reported last issue.

Barry Leithhead's article on **Peter Corsar Anderson**, mentioned in the last issue, has been held over for the next issue, so that both can be given sufficient space.

Each makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the development of golf in Australia.

**Below:** Playclub made by David Conacher—see pp 4-7

**Photograph:** Noel Terry



## Inside this issue:

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## From the President:

There is never a dull moment in golf with changes always to be expected across all segments, whether it be the playing of the game, club management or national administration of the sport.

Golf is the biggest participation sport in Australia. Change is inevitable and to be encouraged, whilst history and tradition must be preserved.

Golf Australia is on the move, preparing to relocate its national office. The present office is also the home of our Museum and Library which also will be moving to a new home. This new home for the Museum is yet to be determined with a number of options currently being considered. The present display at Moonah Links is to remain.

The moving has been a huge and delicate task which has kept the Committee extremely busy over the last few months, sorting and packing for storage. This task, under the guidance of Moira Drew, our archivist, presented an opportunity to inspect and review all the Museum items together with the Library books. The major items have been photographed, which will be an invaluable reference resource in the future.

(continued p8)

**Dinner: Victoria GC — 19 June 2006**

**Speaker: Bill Richardson, General Manager/**

Members and guests who attended this dinner were treated to a fascinating overview of 50 years in Australian golf through Bill's account of both his and his father's roles in golf club administration. Significantly, his father, also Bill, while Secretary at Royal Melbourne Golf Club, was Secretary of the Australian Golf Union.

In providing a summary of his father's career, he outlined some of the issues confronting golf clubs and the various ways they were dealt with: the encroachment of housing, the need to obtain freehold land and the advantages of doing your homework.

His recollections of Bill Sr's involvement with the Canada Cup at Royal Melbourne in 1959 told of an era when television did not begin until 4pm but during the Canada Cup all three television

channels showed the golf all day every day!

Bill told of his own experience in the Army before also taking up golf club administration, firstly at Huntingdale. After recounting an unfortunate scenario where he had arranged the removal of an item donated by a past Captain, he shared with us his first 'lesson in golf club management' - you are there to look after the needs and wishes of the majority, not just a few. This seemed to strike a chord with many present.

After taking up the appointment at Royal Melbourne in 1996, one of Bill's 'big events' was the President's Cup. As Bill described it, "I had been involved in running 8 Australian Masters at Huntingdale and the Greg Norman Classic at RM. The Presidents Cup was on another level again."



He concluded with some observations on the state of golf in Australia, highlighting the number of high quality courses, first rate staff, the ability to run top rate tournaments, a high representation of top professional golfers and a high per capita level of involvement.

During the Dinner, Michael Clayton entertained (or taunted) us with a Quiz.

Stephen Spargo won the prize (a Bobby Jones book), but special mention must go to Ross Bradfield who seemed to know everything else!



**Results: Don Lawrence Trophy**

Monday May 29 at Kew

**18 holes:** Ian Rennick & Bob Stannard

**9 holes out (tie):**

Jean Gilbert & Ranald Macdonald and  
Dick Curtis & Havel Rowe

**9 holes in:** Norm & Bernice Davies

**9 mystery holes:** Norie Macleod & Geoff  
Vincent

**Left:** Bob Stannard (L) and Ian Rennick (R)  
were presented with the **Don Lawrence  
Trophy** by President, Keith Wood

## **New Members:**

Welcome to new members:

Des Tobin  
Mark Wade  
Keith Stone  
Virginia Gorrell  
Trevor Herden  
Pam Millikin  
Joan Drummond  
Paula Gompertz  
Bill Young  
Greg Ramsay  
John Johnston

## **FOR THE DIARY:**

### **Next function:**

Monday September 4

### **Dinner**

### **Commonwealth GC**

**Speaker: Tony Hallam**  
CEO, Golf Australia

**'Memories in Sport -  
how we trace memories  
in our lives through  
sporting achievements'**

## **FOR THE DIARY:**

### **Next golf day:**

Monday August 21 10 am

### **President's Trophy**

### **Royal Melbourne GC**

### **Coming up:**

Monday November 13 pm

**Doug Bachli Trophy,  
Annual General Meeting  
and Cocktail Party**

### **Victoria GC**

## **Dinner: Kingston Heath GC — 10 April 2006**

**Speaker: Trevor Herden, Tournament Director, Golf Australia**

The guest speaker at the Kingston Heath dinner was Trevor Herden, one of the most experienced and respected tournament directors in world golf.

He has recently returned to Australia after two seasons working on the American Senior Tour to take up the role with Golf Australia that includes the organization of all their major events including the 2008 Eisenhower Cup in Adelaide.

He had previously spent fifteen years as the Tournament Director for the Australian Tour, a job that involved officiating at The Masters, The US Open and The British Open.

Every week on the tour there are amusing stories of rule confusion and controversy

and the game is littered with well-chronicled incidents of famous players falling foul of the rule book.

Trevor recalled two of the better known incidents of recent times when he was called upon to disqualify the highest paid player in the field. At The Palm Meadows Cup in 1990 Greg Norman had inadvertently taken an incorrect drop from a water hazard during his second round of 63, a score that had him at the top of the leader board.

The local golf fans had flocked to the course on Saturday to watch their hero only to see Greg admitting his error to the assembled media and departing without any further participation in the tournament.

A few years later Nick Faldo came to Bali and had played his

way to a seven stroke lead with only a few ceremonial holes to play before his anointment as champion. Craig Parry in a different group then hit his ball into a bunker and went to remove a piece of coral from a bunker, something he had seen Faldo (playing under the assumption that European Tour and not Australian Tour rules were in force) do the previous day.

Herden was called to officiate and to dispatch himself to the adjoining hole to inform the biggest star in the game of his fate.

Australian golf is fortunate to have Trevor back in the country and he will be an important part of our biggest events for years to come.

Michael Clayton

**David Conacher (1827-1891) -  
Cabinetmaker, Builder, Golf course  
designer & Clubmaker**

By Noel L Terry, Historian — Clubs & Balls,  
Royal Melbourne Golf Club, 2005

**Preface**

In the first book on the history of The Royal Melbourne Golf Club, Volume 1, 1891-1941 by A D Ellis, David Conacher is described as one of the two men (with Mr T J Finlay), who laid out the Caulfield course. It also states that in his youth he had been a carpenter and club maker at St Andrews.

In the Royal Melbourne collection of historical golf clubs, the Brentnall part of that collection includes a D Conacher club.

This sparked my interest, so I decided to study whether or not this man may have been Australia's first clubmaker or even perhaps our first professional golfer.

**Introduction**

Australian cities were just coming alive when David Conacher arrived with his wife Ellen in 1854. At age 27 what huge courage must have been required to sail off to this new land which in its earliest days was considered only suitable for the criminals and undesirables. Reports of a hot and dry continent, settled with largely Aboriginal people, would have unnerved all but the very adventurous, but they left their friends and family and came, backing their skills, and seeking a new life of greater prosperity.

David was unlikely to be thinking that making clubs would form some part of his income even though his early days were spent doing just that.

These were raw times in this new country but the lure of gold lying on the surface of the ground was likely to stir the heart of many a Scot. From 1850 to 1852 Victoria's population grew from 77,000 to 540,000 and David joined them in 1854.

**The David Conacher Story**

David's branch of the Conacher family came from Perthshire to St Andrews, and records of Conachers in St Andrews date back to the C15<sup>th</sup>.

The earliest marriage records of a Conacher [or Connacher] occur with the marriage in 1811 of Robert Conacher of St Andrews and Jess Galloway from the nearby village of Carnbee.

In St Andrews Robert had three sisters, Katherine, Jane and Agnes, all of whom married locally. His three brothers also married locally. Charles became a mariner leaving a young family in St Andrews. Peter married and moved to Cellerdyke, where he became a fisherman, and John remained in the town as a land labourer.

Robert and Jess lived in Golf Place, St Andrews, as it became known after 1821. Among their nearest neighbours was Robert Kirk, sometimes weaver and caddie, David Robertson, who lived with his celebrated ball maker and golfing son, Allan, at Sandyhill at the top of the Links, and Hugh Philp, wright, joiner, cabinet and clubmaker. James Wilson, a journeyman, wright and clubmaker, who was employed by Philp, lived next door.

Philp and Wilson clubs are some of the most sought after in the world, as are balls and anything relating to Allan Robertson.

Robert Conacher farmed 20 acres of land tenanted from the Cheape family of the Strathtyrum estate. He was also available as a carter and, with his elder sons, was a contract labourer.

The Conacher family were St Leonard's parishioners attending Sunday service at St Salvators Church before the Disruption in 1845 when, like the Philp, Forgan and Wilson families, they joined the newly constituted Free Church of Scotland, worshipping at the Myrter's Church in North Street.

Robert and Jess were born in 1788 and 1791 respectively. Robert died, aged 86, in 1864, and Jess died in 1854.

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Their eldest son, Charles, was born in 1812 and he was followed by William [b1814], James [b1816], Robert [b1819], Mary [b1821], Euphemia [b1824], **David** [b1827], Janet [b1830] and finally John in 1835.

Of Robert and Jess' children, only David and John were educated at the Madras College St Andrews and both became indentured apprentices in the wrights trade, almost certainly in David's case with the master himself, Hugh Philp, once referred to as the Stradivarius of clubmakers.

Philp was the only known clubmaker in St Andrews at that time and did not record apprentices in the Trades book nor take indentures, preferring instead to invite lads into his employment. They were not paid therefore for the duration of their apprenticeship. Philp obviously had talents other than just clubmaking!

If this is correct and it seems very likely so, then it makes any D Conacher club infinitely more interesting. There are only two known to still exist.

David's career path mirrored that of Philp as both of them practised the business of cabinetmaking, as well as clubmaking.

David was born just six years after Tom Morris and lived 50 yards away around the corner. He, Tom and other boys of the area would almost certainly have spent many a summer evening belting balls around. James Wilson the great clubmaker would no doubt have been one that joined in. As a boy David would have made his pocket money raking, digging or whatever on the Old Course at St Andrews so he would have been an integral part of all activities of the links.

David married Helen Clark in Fifeshire, Scotland in 1854 at the age of 27 and sailed off to the 'Promised Land', Australia, that same year.

David and Helen had 5 children, Jessie, Robert, William, James and Elizabeth. James listed himself as a clubmaker in 1894, so he followed in his father's footsteps.

The early 1850's date that David may have left Philp's employ, is very interesting as in 1852 Philp brought his nephew Robert Forgan into the business. Immediately David's neighbour and one of the world's other great clubmakers, James Wilson left Philp to start up his own business. Perhaps times were not very happy with the Philp team at that time. Forgan took over the business when Philp died and changed its name to his own.

David's early life in Australia was difficult and work hard to find. His first job was splitting wood and eventually he graduated to making drays, used by the miners to transport their goods to the gold fields. Things improved with time and he was able to return to cabinetmaking for three years. In his later life he became quite successful as a contract builder.

I was lucky enough to recently trace, through the Stanton family, Arthur Mc Lean who at 83 recalled his mother Elsie May McLean [Lindsay], David's granddaughter and daughter of Jennet [Jessie] Conacher.

Elsie and husband David Ray McLean often told the story that David claimed to have brought golf to Australia and claimed to have been its first clubmaker as well. There is evidence the former is wrong but the latter correct. He had obviously returned to his old craft, and in his spare time, was making a few clubs.

Arthur Mc Lean is the proud owner of a chest of drawers made by David Conacher. I had the privilege of photographing this chest and have attached a copy to the paper. (see p7)

David's first wife Helen died in 1884, after 30 years of marriage, and he was later to return to Scotland where, at age 58 he married a second time to Mary Brown. This took place in 1888 in Montrose.

One will never know how David found pleasure in golf before the first courses in Australia were established, but I suspect he was very much a part of the group, referred to in various papers of the time, who hit balls around places like the Flagstaff Gardens in central Melbourne.

### **The David Conacher Story (continued)**

Whatever was the case, people in the know considered David's years of golf involvement worthy of him being chosen to work together with Mr T J Finlay to design and build a golf course at Caulfield for the newly established Melbourne Golf Club. This was to create history in 1891 as the first continuing golf club in Australia, and became The Royal Melbourne Golf Club when the use of the Royal prefix was granted by Queen Victoria in 1895.

The course at Caulfield was opened on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1891, but by the 17<sup>th</sup> of October that same year David died of broncho pneumonia, aged 64. He was buried on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October in the St Kilda cemetery, Melbourne, Australia.

Without doubt David Conacher was one of the first to play our much loved game on the paddocks of Victoria and I suspect he made and repaired clubs for his mates.

Evidence so far at hand certainly suggests he was Australia's first golf club maker.

History shows he was not a Founding Member of Royal Melbourne but was soon after made one of the first Honorary Members "in consideration in connection with the formation of the club". Now understanding his background much better, his contribution to this now famous club should never be underrated.

I believe David and friends would have been found belting a ball around a paddock somewhere most weekends well before the Melbourne Club was established in 1891. What an interesting story to contemplate. I suspect we will never know the answer but the probabilities are very high.

### **Acknowledgements:**

Dr David Malcolm of St Andrews, Scotland, spent tireless hours in assisting me, with great humour, in the research from that end. His knowledge of the game of golf and the people who are consumed by it, is nothing short of astounding.

Beverley Greenway carried out much of the hard slogging, line by line, file checking here in Australia, until she was starting to get so absorbed in the whole matter I had to call her off!

June Belcher (Conacher), Peter Crabtree, Bob Gowland, Leon Rowbell, David Stanton, Arthur McLean and Norm Hogg all helped.

Thank you for allowing me to tell the story of this interesting man and his family. What we found is forever a valuable contribution to this history of early golf in Australia.

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### **Seaside Golf**

How straight it flew, how long it flew,  
It clear'd the ruddy track  
And soaring, disappeared from view  
Beyond the bunker's back—  
A glorious, sailing, bounding drive  
That made me glad I was alive.

And down the fairway, far along  
It glowed a lonely white;  
I played an iron sure and strong  
And clipp'd it out of sight,  
And spite of grassy banks between  
I knew I'd find it on the green.

And so I did. It lay content  
Two paces from the pin;  
A steady putt and then it went  
Oh, most securely in.  
The very turf rejoiced to see  
That quite unprecedented three.

Ah! seaweed smells from sandy cave  
And thyme and mist in whiffs,  
In-coming tide, Atlantic waves  
Slapping the sunny cliffs,  
Lark song and sea sounds in the air  
And splendour, splendour everywhere.

John Betjeman

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## Book Review:

### Golf Course Design -

#### An annotated bibliography with highlights of its history and resources

by Geoffrey S Cornish and Michael Hurdzan

Grant Books, UK: Fiddlers Green, Cloth Limited and Card cover editions ([www.grantbooks.co.uk](http://www.grantbooks.co.uk))

If you are unaware of who Geoffrey Cornish and Michael Hurdzan are, and their important and extensive contributions in the area of golf course architecture, this probably is not the book with which to start. This book has interesting introductory chapters but it is basically a valuable resource book. On the inside of the front cover it states,

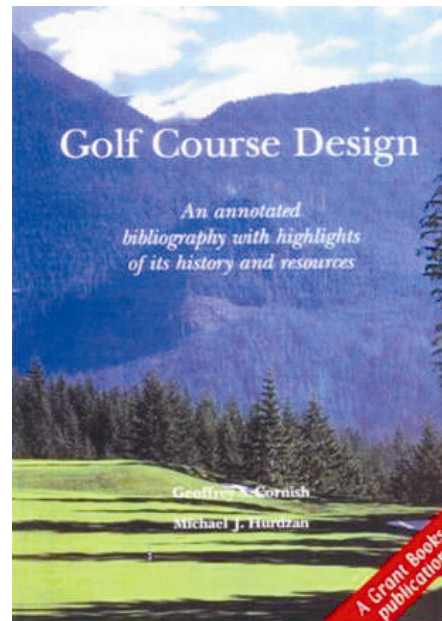
*"The book will be of great importance to golf architects, managers, course superintendents, and all associated with the creation, upkeep and management of courses. Historians, authors and anyone who has an interest in the history and design of golf courses will find the book an invaluable resource."*

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Chest made by David Conacher - story pp 4-6

**Photograph:** Noel Terry



The book itself does not answer questions about design; it lists important books and resources that direct attention to various aspects of design. From the authors' comments it is then possible to choose which books are likely to be of greatest interest and value to the reader. While both authors are American, this book is not parochial, and Australian writers such as Crafter, Crockford, Daley, Johnson, Ramsay, Riddell, Scarth and Soutar are included in the extensive compilation of works.

This is a book that golf club librarians should have at their disposal as an important aid to selecting books, both historical and current, on the topic of golf course design and maintenance. It should also help them decide which books should be kept in a locked cabinet. Readers of **The Long Game**, who already have a significant library of golf books, also are likely to find it of value. Those with only small collections would be better advised to encourage their club to purchase a copy, so that they and other members can consult this book from time to time.

Any book of this nature in the end relies heavily on the opinions of the authors. Anyone who has doubts about the credentials of these men to provide sound advice, should just check out the awards they have received by going to the Web.

John Green



## From the President

(from P1)

The Golf Club Historians Group continues to grow with increasing interest of members from a wide range of clubs throughout the metropolitan area and country districts. Meetings are held regularly with guest speakers being a highlight; this group is encouraging an interest in preserving the history and evolution of our great game. Photographs, press clippings and memorabilia are being identified and retrieved before they are lost to the new generation of golfers.

The second golf event of the year, The Don Lawrence Trophy, was a most enjoyable day held at the Kew Golf Club. Congratulations to Bob Stannard and Ian Rennick.

Please keep your diaries up to date for the forthcoming dinners and golf events.

Keith Wood AM, President



## Museum on the Move !



**Above:** Museum items were packed into boxes and then into crates for storage

**Below:** R&A Captain's jacket and other blazers ready for storage— each on a custom-made padded hanger with a calico cover

The sale by Golf Australia of buildings in South Melbourne and their move to new premises has seen the Museum being removed from the Cecil Street building.

All items and display cabinets have been packed and removed to storage while arrangements for the future of the Museum are finalised.

With approximately 1,000 Museum items catalogued, plus the Library, this was a major exercise, assisted to a large extent by several Committee members who helped with packing and recording.

There will be a small display in the new Golf Australia premises and those at Moonah Links remain in place.