The Long Game

The Official Newsletter of the Golf Society of Australia

No 26, July 2007

VALE

Hedley Ham

Hartley Mitchell

Norman Von Nida

Photograph: Golfers Museum, Sydney

In this issue we pay tribute to Norman Von Nida, who died in May at the age of 93. In his 'Farewell', Tom Moore, recalls the development of Von Nida's career, while Michael Clayton speaks from the perspective of a young pro to whom he was a mentor. Together they provide a comprehensive profile.

We also record the deaths of Hedley Ham and Hartley Mitchell, both of whom died in June.

Hedley John Ham

Hedley joined the Society in 2002, and although his time of membership was short, his contribution was invaluable.

Over the past four years he has been a member of the Society's history research group, which aims to clarify the 'true' history of early golf in Victoria. Hedley was instrumental in writing the findings, and has spoken at Golf Club Historian meetings on the progress made. His enthusiasm and knowledge of research will be sorely missed.

In 1995 Yarra Yarra Golf Club decided to publish a history, and Hedley became a driving force in the Club's History Sub-Committee. His attention to detail and ability to locate material in libraries and private book collections was amazing. Whenever he found a golf article, he not only saved copies but was happy to distribute them to any Golf Club mentioned.

His collection of articles on golf is vast and will be of great value to future golf historians.

As John Brice recalled at his funeral, from this work, two major objectives arose for Hedley (maybe obsessions might be more accurate!)

For the Diary:

President's Trophy — Royal Melbourne GC
Monday Aug 20, 2007

Recent Event Results:

Frank Shepherd Trophy
Peter Gompertz

Burtta Cheney Trophy
Beverley Waite

Don Lawrence Trophy
Paula and Peter Gompertz

Details and photographs — p2

Hickory Day: Kingston Heath GC — 25 March, 2007

Stableford competition with hickory clubs—10 holes

Results:

Frank Shepherd Trophy - Peter Gompertz

Burtta Cheney Trophy - Beverley Waite

Don Lawrence Trophy:

Kew GC — 28 May, 2007

4BBB Stableford competition—18 holes

Results:

Don Lawrence Trophy

    - Paula and Peter Gompertz - 42 points

9 holes out - John Johnston and Keith Wood

9 holes in - Bob Stannard and Ian Rennick

Secret 9 - June Lane and Geoff Vincent

Below: Bob Stannard, John Johnston and Ian Rennick

Below right: Geoff Vincent and June Lane with Daryl Cox and Avice Cookes

First to make sure that records of EVERY Club event were kept, be it golf, social, or management items; be they in a newspaper, a photograph, a letter, or a meeting minute. John described his role as to curb Hedley's enthusiasm by adopting a ruthless editing, recording and filing system. The final resting place of many items was not always achieved satisfactorily without lengthy discussion.

The second objective was to establish clearly the respective roles played by Alister Mackenzie and Alex Russell in the design and construction of the course at Yarra Yarra Golf Club. Here again, Hedley's willingness to share information with Clubs associated with Mackenzie was much appreciated and a source of satisfaction to him.

More recently Hedley had been involved in the selection of memorabilia for the interior of the new Yarra Yarra Golf Clubhouse, a job which had required a major contribution from him at this most difficult time in his life. It was fortunate that he was able to be present at the opening ceremony where he was able to experience the wide expression of member approval of this historical presentation. This result gave him great satisfaction and considerable comfort.

Hedley will be greatly missed by all his friends at Yarra Yarra,

Hartley Mitchell

Hartley, also of Yarra Yarra Golf Club, won the Australian Foursomes Championship in 1949 with Doug Bachli, the Victorian Amateur Championship in 1955 and the Yarra Yarra Club Championship five times.

A summary of an interview conducted with him for the GSA Oral History Program appeared in **The Long Game** No 25 in February 2007.

New Members:

Welcome to new members:
- Peter Larkin
- Geeva Ramanthan
- Garry Simmons

From the President

As the year goes quickly by, golfing events and dinners, together planning for a new Museum, have kept the Committee busy and our activities focused.

The Hickory Day at Kingston Heath was played in ideal conditions after a most enjoyable luncheon.

Kew Golf Club hosted the Don Lawrence Trophy, where good scores were recorded in the 4BBB stableford event.

Members enjoyed the dinner at Victoria Golf Club on 25 June. The speaker, Colin Jordan Managing Director and CEO of RACV Ltd, gave an over-view of the organisation's activities, including golf course developments at Healesville and Cape Schanck. Michael Clayton then spoke about the changes to the course at Healesville.

Our next golfing outing is the President's Trophy at Royal Melbourne—on Monday 20 August.

The Committee continues to be very active, with a number of ongoing sub-committees, working on:

- The history of Golf in Victoria;
- Interviewing past champions;
- the Golf Club Historians group;
- golf at the MCG's National Sports Museum;
- The Long Game; and
- the GSA website.

The new Museum at the MCG is exciting. It will give both golfers and the general public an opportunity to easily view golfing memorabilia, history of the game and interesting stories of our past champions. The display is an excellent location with an anticipated 150,000 viewers a year passing by.

The Long Game is now being published regularly three to four times a year. Our thanks go to the Editor, Moira Drew, who also is responsible for the web page content and updates. Don't forget www.golfsocietyaust.com

Please keep you eye on the calendar of events yet to come - and happy winter golfing.
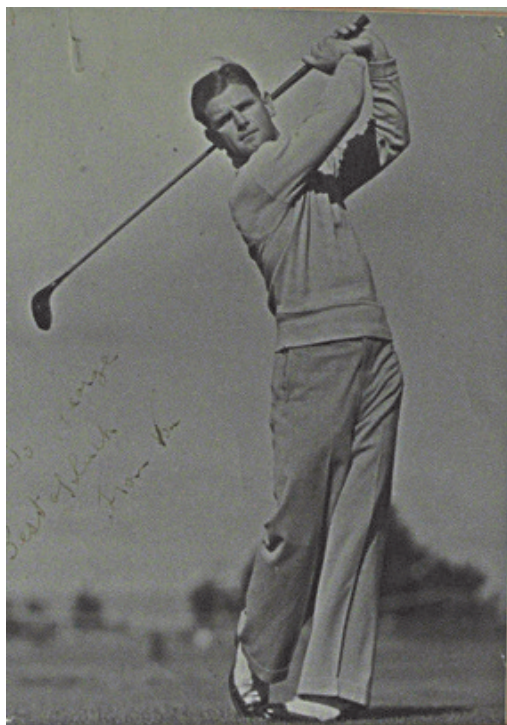
Keith H Wood, June 2007

Farewell 'Von'- by Tom Moore

Norman Von Nida, Norm, or the 'Von' as he became known world-wide, was born in Sydney in 1914. Soon afterwards his family moved to Brisbane. Norm grew up not far from Royal Queensland Golf Club and earned a few shillings caddying. This led him to take up the game and he became Queensland Caddy Champion. By the age of 18 he was playing scratch golf and won the Queensland Amateur title. Although small in stature, Norm was determined to make his mark on the world's golfing stage. He continued to play often for large sums of money. This toughened him up for tournament play.

He won a staggering 100 tournaments throughout his career. Astute judges have told me that just prior to the 2nd World War, he was unbeatable. The 5 years of war robbed him of what should have been his peak playing years.

In 1946 Von set sail for Britain, arriving with just 17 pounds in his pocket. Fortunately he was helped by Archie Compson and ex-patriot Australian Bill Shankland who arranged money games for him with wealthy business men. He was an instant success on the tournament scene, culminating with the 3rd best score in The Open (295), won by Sam Snead with 290.

Photograph: Golf Australia Museum collection

His best year was 1947. Although he finished 5th in The Open he finished the year by winning the Vardon Trophy for the best average score of 71.25 for 52 rounds of tournament play and a record amount of prize money.

I first saw Norman in the 1949 Australian Open at the Australian Club in Sydney. As a caddy at the Killara Club, I was used to seeing members, judges, barristers and leading businessmen, arrive at the Club, beautifully attired in their suits and then change into their playing clobber, some of which left a lot to be desired, but here was a man who looked as if he had just walked out of one of David Jones display windows.

In the morning round he was dressed in dark blue slacks, navy shirt with 2 white stripes, black and white golf shoes and of course, his trademark black beret. After lunch, it was tan slacks, cream long-sleeved silk shirt, tan shoes and topped with a tan beret. Although Norm played beautiful golf, he did not win. It was the turn of another great Australian golfer that year, Eric Cremin.

Norm continued to play right up into the 1960's, winning the Queensland Open in 1961.

He was the inspiration to a large contingent of young Australian golfers, Peter Thomson, Kel Nagle, Ossie Pickworth, Bruce Devlin, Bruce Crampton, Frank Phillips, Jack Newton, and many others, urging them to test themselves on the world's golfing stage. That they have done so with great success is testament to Norm's encouragement. He complained in later years of his woeful putting, but his short making continued to be superb. I personally saw him hit shots that Nicklaus, Ballesteros et al have only ever dreamed of.

If I were writing his epitaph it would be: 'He walked with Kings and Princes, Presidents and Potentates, yet NEVER LOST THE COMMON TOUCH".

Good golfing on the courses beyond Norm, may the fairways be wide, the greens smooth and generous and three putting something that has never been heard of.

Norman Von Nida — recollections from Michael Clayton

There has been so much written about Norman Von Nida, who died in May at the age of 93, that there is little to add. Long ago it was accepted that the little man from Brisbane was the pioneer of Australian golf, who showed the way for Peter Thomson, Bruce Crampton and Bruce Devlin and all who followed.

He had caddied for the great Hagen at Royal Queensland and not long after he was a good enough player to take on, and beat, Gene Sarazen in a match. He wrote of his encounter with the pair of American superstars with typical candid honesty in his autobiography that 'I admired Hagen as a golfer and as a man. I admired Sarazen as a golfer.'

It was not until the second war finished that he took the long boat ride to Britain and started his run of great years. He won seven times in Europe in 1946, a record that not even Ballesteros, Faldo, Langer or Olazabal could match.

He understood that the game needed entertainers, controversial characters who made the watching of it interesting for the galleries and the Von bought his personality to the British game then dominated by staid, conservative introverted pros struggling to break free of a system that saw them as second-class citizens. Ironically it was men like Hagen, Von Nida and Peter Thomson who showed the British pros the way forward as they forged a place for the professional game in a country where there amateur cricketers emerged onto grounds from a different gate that the one used by the professionals.

Social pretension was something that Von Nida always looked upon with disdain.

He saw it as a responsibility to mentor younger Australian players and he was still handing out advice freely long after his failing eyes had lost sight of all but the shortest shots. He refused to accept that our players were not as good as any in the world and his unfailing confidence in their ability was always verbalized.

John Kelly and I spent two weeks with Norman just after we had turned pro in late 1981 when Seve Ballesteros was the king of the world,

especially to our generation, but the Von would tell us constantly 'you are both as good as him.'

Of course he was wrong but the point he was trying to make was that unless you think you are as good as him you are wasting your time trying to beat him.

He was well-known as the master of the sand and we would just watch him hit shots from the sand and he was indeed a genius with a sand wedge in his hand.
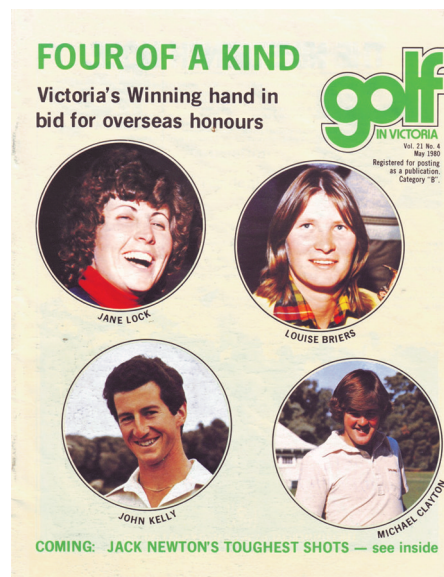
Once at Sunningdale he wandered down to the practice bunker to hand out a little advice to Wayne Player, son of Gary.

The young player had no idea who the little old man was and it was with some disdain that he told Norman that 'my dad is the best bunker player in the world.'

'And who the hell do you think taught him.'

His game deserved an Open Championship but for what ever reason he never won the biggest prize but you can be sure there was no prouder man than Von Nida when Thomson took his first Open at Birkdale in 1954. He was there to guide the 24-year-old in over the last couple of holes and for the next fifty years he was the father then the grandfather of the professional game in our country.

He will be missed but never forgotten and as he said not long before he died, 'no man has had a better life than me.'

Golf in Victoria. Vol 21, No 4, May 1980

Golf Course Locations research

In 2004-2005, with the objective of recording the changed locations of all Victorian golf clubs, a questionnaire was circulated with the assistance of the Victorian Golf Association (VGA).

Details are now held for all VGA Member clubs in the metropolitan area, and many others throughout Victoria, including VGA Provisional, Associate and Affiliate clubs and Victorian Golf League.

The clubs listed, although no longer in operation, are part of the early history of golf in Victoria.

Golf Clubs in Victoria no longer operating

Altona: see Western Beach

Amstel Park: on Ferntree Gully Rd 2 miles from Oakleigh

Australasian: Aspendale

Batman: near Footscray

Batman's Hill: Herald 27 July 1942 refers to golf being played at Batman's Hill in 1854. See also Flagstaff Gardens

Beaumaris: see Mordialloc

Bluff at Elwood: see Point Ormond

Brighton: corner South and Bluff Rd

Chelsea: Affiliated VGA 1927

City of Melbourne: original course closed 1924, ran along west side of Moonee Ponds Creek. See History of Royal Park Golf Club

Clayton: Affiliated VGA 1922

Coburg: No details

Doncaster: Doncaster Road opposite Eastern Golf Club

Eaglemont: 1890 Club south of Eaglemont Railway Station

Emerald Hill: Ballarat GC history mentions golf in 1858. Also Argus 30 March 1867. After 1900 Emerald Hill was included in pennant competitions. (Research suggests course was south of Military Barracks in St Kilda Rd on "National Agricultural Society Reserve')

Essendon: 1878 Near Essendon Railway station Leslie Road to Maribyrnong River. Refer to Northern GC

Fairview: Kew

Fairway: see Kew Lunatic Asylum

Fawkner Park: 1929 Toorak Rd, South Yarra, 18 hole putting green, 6 pence a round

Fisherman's Bend: refer to Victoria Golf Club and Sandridge Links

Flagstaff Gardens: Course stretched from the present site of Flagstaff Gardens in Melbourne to near the present Flemington Bridge, refer to The Australian Golfer. (NB: The course was actually nearer to Batman's Hill)

Flemington Bridge: 1929 started as 9 holes then extended to 12 holes. On Alexander Rd, clubhouse was grooms quarters of 'Travencore'

Forest Hills: refer Spring Valley

Frankston: refer Golf Courses of Victoria 1937

Geelong: 1892 'Balliang' banks of Barwon River. 1893 moved to Bell Park. Closed 2005

Gleneagles: Carrum Downs, later Patterson River

Greensborough: Affiliated VGA 1924

Hyde Park (Kew): Mention of golf on Hyde Park before golf clubs were formed in Melbourne

Hyland Park: see Preston

Keilor: No details

Kirkwood: Coburg

Kirwin Park: No details

Kew Lunatic Asylum: 9 holes on land between Chandler Highway and Yarra River on site of Guide Dogs

Melbourne: Caulfield 1890's - See Royal Melbourne. Argus October 2 1854 refers to Melbourne Golf Club

Melbourne Cricket Ground: see Point Ormond. History of Geelong GC states golf played

Melton Railway Golf Links: near Melton railway station in Brookland Rd. Refer Melton Valley GC

Middleborough: on area of Box Hill Cemetery. Refer Box Hill

Mont Albert: 1936, 9 holes sand scrapes bordered by Union Road, Belmore Rd Rostrevor Parade and Kenmare St

Mont Park: Affiliated VGA 1925

Moonee Ponds Creek: see City of Melbourne

Mordialloc: September 1913 San Remo club at Beaumaris closed and members transferred to the Mordialloc Club (later Woodlands)

Moreland: Original course East Coburg. Bounded by Rennie, Harding and Nicholson Sts and Darlington Grove

Murrumbeena: 1912 on land at Flagman's Paddock near corner Koornang and Neerim Rds 6 holes. Refer

Commonwealth GC

Park Orchards: Doncaster Road opposite Eastern

Point Ormond: Royal Melbourne GC history states golf moved from Flagstaff Gardens to the Bluff at Elwood and later to near the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Suggested area bordered by Glenhuntly Rd, St Kilda St, and the Esplanade

Preston: Called Hyland Park located opposite Preston cemetery. Closed 1950, members offered member-ship at Latrobe GC

Ranelagh: Mornington

Reservoir: Affiliated VGA 1933

San Remo: see Mordialloc

Sandridge: 1927 Land leased from the Harbour Trust at Port Melbourne close to the Savings Bank Homes at Fishermans Bend

Spotswood - Where Westgate is, 9 holes sand scrapes played by Kevin Hartley in 1948

Surrey Hills: 1892 Surrey Hills GC north of Mont Albert Railway Station. Refer Riversdale

Travancore: see Flemington Bridge

Western Beach: Affiliated VGA 1933, see Western

Western : 1928 First known as Western Beach GC, started on 85 acres of land. Sold 1932 and became Western Golf Club. Disbanded 1938 and became Altona Golf Club which ceased about 1945. Part of course was west of Bell St, in line from Bell St to Queen St, is near 2nd hole at Kooringal Golf Club

Recollections of R A A Balfour Melville

The work of the History of Golf in Australia sub-committee has involved making contact with many people around the world with family connections to early Australian golfers. One such family is that of R A A Balfour Melville – from whom we have a copy of a manuscript 'Incidents in the Life of Robert Andrew Agnew Balfour-Melville', written circa 1935, and provided to us by his great grandson, David Wardle. Much of it relates to his early life and his trials and tribulations after arriving in Australia, but there are some enlightening excerpts relating to golf.

" on the 9th June 1891, I was married and I have never regretted it since. …."

" .. then I came to Melbourne with a wife and twelve months old son and took a cottage at Caulfield.. [appears to be around March 1893]

As golf had begun to be played then, I was the leading golfer in Australia. It got me a lot of friends, but no money at first. Just after I came a man, M L Anderson, came also; he was the son of a Minister at St Andrews, who lived next door to us there. We had many fights for Championships. I used to come to the 18th hole ahead, then he holed a twelve foot putt without exception, and it got on my nerves. Several times we had to play the 19th hole, a tree always caught my approach shot and lost me the hole. I could beat other men who beat Anderson, but he had got on my nerves so much that I could not beat him. I held all the records of the Links; record for one hole, for going out and coming in, the round, the mixed pairs, and the doubles. I began to get a little business. As for golf I may say that I played with all the Governors. Lord Brassey was always coming down and asking me to play *; I had to give him two strokes a hole. I played Lord Lamington, Governor of Queensland, Lord Hampden, NSW, Earl of Glasgow, NZ.

With regard to my golf for which I was so well known in Australia: I won the medal at Hoylake and the Championship of Australia**, and I had this unique distinction that, though I won many prizes, I won them all from scratch and had no aid from any handicap. I gave up the Secretaryship of the Golf Club [Melbourne Golf Club, now Royal Melbourne], though I remained on the Council of the Club for several years. ** "

The manuscript concludes with, "I am now well over 85 and older than any of my relatives have been, so I cannot expect to live much longer – "

* Lord Brassey was Governor of Victoria and Patron of Royal Melbourne Golf Club 1895-1900

** R A A Balfour Melville won Australian Amateur Championship in 1895.   He does not appear as Club Champion, but won several other 'board' events.

*** R A A Balfour Melville was Hon Secretary of RMGC from 5 May 1894-27 July 1898

Dinner: Victoria Golf Club — 25 June, 2007

Garry Simmons and Barry Donaldson

A convivial atmosphere in the rotunda

Hugh Graham

Peter Scurrah enjoys a laugh with Geoff Cupples

Murray Cropley, Avice Cookes and Daryl Cox