

THE LONG GAME

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WW1 War Medals

by Moira Drew

In 2007, the appearance of a VGA (Victorian Golf Association) World War I 'Red Cross' War Medal for sale on e-bay prompted discussion amongst members of the GSA Golf Club Historians network.

The image illustrating the item for sale showed a beautiful little medal, bronze and approximately 2.5 cm in diameter, featuring the letters 'VGA' within a circle, superimposed over a red cross. Engraving on the reverse side shows that it was won at Mordialloc Golf Club by W Jones, with a score of 86-16-70 on the 2nd of October 1915.

Mordialloc Golf Club was the fore-runner to Woodlands Golf Club and it was the historians there who were seeking information about the medal. It quickly became apparent that it was uncommon, or at least few had been seen before by Club archivists. Yarra Yarra GC was at that stage the only other Club known to have one. As it turned out, Woodlands was successful in purchasing the medal and it can now be seen on display in the clubhouse. A fortunate outcome certainly, as it might not always be possible for a club to purchase an item on 'the open market'. As well, it is difficult to place a dollar value on such items.

Championship records at national and state level and many club honour boards show that championships generally ceased during wartime. While some clubs did continue scheduling them, and Mordialloc was one to continue championships during WW1, the only event held in most clubs was for War Medals.

continued on page 2 >>

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page 1-3

WW1 Medals

Page 3

Richard Whitecross

Page 4

Golf Historians at Kingston Heath Golf Club

Page 5-6

Golf Clubs – The Great Changeover - Hickories to Steel Shafts

Page 7

Dinner at Commonwealth Golf Club

Page 8

The New Game. Lawn and House Golf

FOR THE DIARY

4th May

Dinner at Kingston Heath Golf Club

26th May

Don Lawrence Trophy at Woodlands

15th June

Golf Historians at Barwon Heads Golf Club

3rd August

Presidents Trophy at Royal Melbourne Golf Club



First 1915 War medal



1916 War medal

As Garry Mansfield points out in **A History of Golf in Victoria**, ‘the medal competitions became the only real competitive golf played’ during war time. Championship records and honour boards reflect this.

As early as September 1914, the Australian Golf Union (AGU) cancelled the Australian Open and Amateur Championships and in February 1915 Delegates to the VGA Annual General Meeting passed a resolution to abandon ‘Championships, Pennant Matches, Foursome Challenge Shield Competitions, and Open Meetings ... until the conclusion of the war’. (VGA Committee Minutes February 26 1915 / VGA Annual Report 1915).

At the same time fund-raising for the ‘war effort’ became a major focus for the VGA and its ‘Associated’ and ‘Registered’ clubs. Garry Mansfield describes the VGA during this time as more “a community welfare group than a sporting association. After all there were no tournaments to supervise and few rules decisions to offer”.

In early 1915 the VGA established a War Medal Fund, with players ‘buying’ a competition card to participate. Examples of the 1915 medal show the letters VGA above ‘War Medal’ and the year below, within a border of a laurel wreath.

The first competitions were successful and in July 1915 a separate Red Cross Fund was created and a Red Cross War Medal struck to be played for in July, August and September. The VGA Annual Reports for 1915 & 1916 list receipts from Clubs for each of the Red Cross and the War Medal funds.

In the 1915 financial year 28 golf clubs contributed to the Red Cross Fund and 81 to the regular War Medal Fund. Several clubs contributed to both funds and in some instances there was a separate contribution from the Associates/Ladies.

In the early history of Woodlands Golf Club, Hunter Rogers reports that in 1915, “The usual monthly medals became known as Red Cross Medals and were obtained from the VGA on payment of one pound two shillings. Of this amount one pound was paid into Red Cross funds and the two shillings provided the medal” (page 21). Mordialloc was one of the clubs contributing to both the Red Cross and War Medal funds.

The development of the VGA War Medal competitions is explained by Garry Mansfield (p 55): Initially “The rules were simple enough - all members were entitled to take out a ‘war medal’ card and could play as many rounds as they liked as long as they had bought a card.

At the end of June of that year, the player with the best three aggregate cards would win his club’s medal. The idea was such a success - £460 raised in six months - that the VGA introduced a scheme of Red Cross medals, with clubs playing for them monthly and all entry fees going to the Red Cross.”

In the 1916 Annual Report the final receipts are recorded for the Red Cross Fund; £234/9/6 being contributed through monthly medal competitions at 31 clubs. The total amount raised through both VGA war medal funds during WW1 was £1302/10/6. (VGA Annual Report 1919).

From 1916 Red Cross appeals became just one of a number to which the VGA contributed from the War Medal Fund. The VLGU (Victorian Ladies Golf Union) had also opened a fund, for instance to purchase a motor ambulance, and a number of golf clubs arranged their own fund-raising activities for similar and other purposes. In many clubs fundraising for Australian Red Cross continues in some form today.

In March 1916 the VGA struck a new medal for competition within clubs. This medal features the words VGA War Medal in a central panel. Above the panel are crossed golf clubs and below, a cannon. The reverse is blank, allowing space for engraving.

Richard Whitecross

by Leon Rowbell and Douglas Seaton

All winners of War Medals after 17 March 1916, who had played in at least four War Medal competitions, were eligible to “play off over their own course and the two leading players qualify to compete for the VGA War Medal trophy to be played over one of the principal courses in Melbourne”. (VGA Minutes, March 1919)

The War Medal Trophy play-off was held at Sandringham (Royal Melbourne Golf Club) during the Victorian Championship Meeting in 1919 and won by A M (Afton) Morcom of Royal Park (son of Mick, brother of Vern and later Life Member of Kingston Heath GC). The trophy for the play off was a specially struck War Medal trophy - and I wonder where that one is!

In this period of commemoration of World War I it would be interesting to gain an overview of what activities took place in golf clubs, what records there are and in particular, how many medals are held in club archival collections.

Sources:

Victorian Golf Association: Minutes 1915 and 1919, Annual Reports 1915-1920, and 1939-1945

Australian Red Cross, Victorian Division: Annual Reports, 1914-15 to 1919-20, Divisional Council Minutes 1914-1920, Press Clippings

Royal Melbourne Golf Club: Council Minutes, Associates Committee Minutes, Annual Reports, Associates Annual Reports, Competition Books

Hunter Rogers, **Woodlands Golf Club – the formation of the Club and its early years 1913-1938**,

Gary Mansfield, **A History of Golf in Victoria**, pub 1987

Don Lawrence, **Victoria Golf Club 1903-1988**, pub 1988

Joseph Johnson, **The Royal Melbourne Golf Club – A Centenary History**, pub 1991



Richard Whitecross's grave at Brighton Cemetery

Richard Henry Whitecross born 7th May 1883 at Saltcoats Farm, Gullane, Scotland, son of John W. Whitecross, agricultural labourer, and his wife Marion Stewart Crooks. Richard became a brick mason by trade, living with his parents in Sunnyside Cottage, Gullane.

He was a member of Dirleton Castle Golf Club and won the Wotherspoon Medal in 1902; he also played in the 1906 Open Championship at Muirfield, finishing equal 15th. Whitecross won the prestigious Hope Challenge Medal at Kilspindie in 1908, and entered the Amateur Championship in 1909 and then, joining the professional ranks in 1911, he was appointed professional at Bridge Of Allan Golf Club. In 1912 he emigrated to Australia and arrived in Melbourne hoping for a position as a professional at an Australian club. He played in the 1913 Australian Open Championship at Royal Melbourne Golf Club. In 1913 Whitecross played in professional tournaments at Fisherman's Bend (Victoria G.C.), and at Elsternwick G.C. where he finished in 6th place. In the Argus newspaper Whitecross was described as a professional with a good record in the UK and his performance at Fishermans Bend gained him a large number of supporters. His 6th place was notable, as 3 of the five who headed him were the greats, Carnegie Clark, Dan Soutar and Arther LeFevre.

He was not attached to a golf club but entered the tournaments from Dirleton Castle Golf Club. Unfortunately he never achieved his goal of becoming a club professional and by 1914 he was living in Dimboola, north-west of Melbourne, where he worked as a bricklayer.

In 1915 Whitecross enlisted in the Australian Infantry and was attached to the 22nd Brigade. The Australian troops sailed to England joining the British Expeditionary Force on Perham Downs, near Andover; they were then posted to France. Before enlisting, Whitecross had suffered from varicose veins in both legs which were painful when he marched; he also had asthma and while on active service overseas he was admitted to hospital several times with severe asthma attacks, and bronchitis. He drank heavily and this accelerated his waywardness. After several bouts of drunkenness, and insubordination, he was arraigned before a Court Martial in 1917 but in October of that year a Medical Board decided that he was permanently unfit for general and home service; he was discharged from active service due to ill-health and returned to Australia. He was sent to No.11 Australian General Hospital at Caulfield where the medical staff assisted in the rehabilitation of disabled soldiers.

By 1918, Whitecross was still at Caulfield Hospital suffering badly from asthma, bronchitis, pain in his legs and alcoholism. He was then invalided out of the army. There was no likelihood of a position as a golf professional, nor much chance of going back to his trade as a bricklayer and with only 3 shillings in his pocket, after nearly 3 years in the army, alone in hospital, his family back in Scotland, dark thoughts entered his mind and at 9.53 am on the 3rd of January 1918 at Caulfield Hospital he committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor blade; he was 35 years old. He was accorded a military funeral and, on the 4th of January 1918, buried in Brighton General Cemetery, Melbourne. A cable from his regiment was sent to his father at Gullane notifying him of his son's death, his name was later inscribed on the family headstone in Auld Kirk graveyard, Gullane and on the local WW1 memorial.

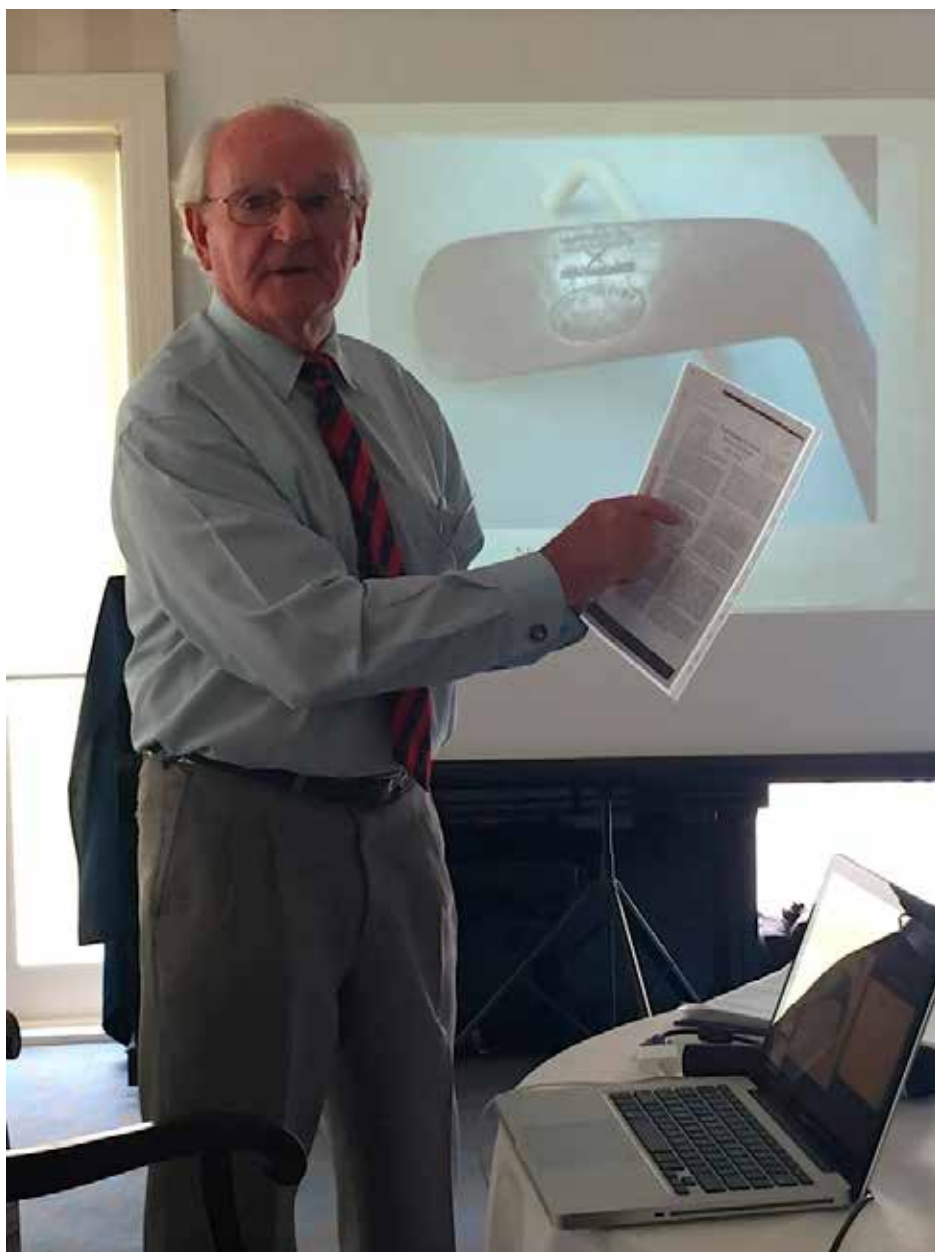
Golf Historians at Kingston Heath Golf Club

Our President Geoff Vincent opened the meeting to welcoming the 30 participants to his home club. He then introduced Dick Kirby who outlined the purpose and activities of our Society.

Our first speaker was the current Kingston Heath Captain, Peter Clarke who told how the Club started at Elsternwick in 1909, survived loss of membership and income through the first World War; in response to pressure from the local Council, four members, Hercules Voluggi, Oakley, Collingwood and Dutton Greene bought parcels of land, including a pear orchard, which the club then consolidated into the course that Dan Soutar laid out and which we play over today. In 1925 the members agreed to changing the name to Kingston Heath and in 1926 Alister MacKenzie was engaged to advise on the bunkering. Since then 'the Heath' has become a world famous course hosting numerous championships.

Next up was Paul Burgess telling us of the results, so far, of his research into John Himmerman and John Kirk and their clubmaking activities in Mordialloc. Both men had been employed in Tom Stewarts golf club factory in Scotland. They set up a club making factory in in a shed behind a house called 'St Andrews'. In 1923 they registered their partnership trademark 'a cross below the words St Andrews, and a back stamp 'Himmerman & Kirk, Mordialloc. During 'Show and tell 'Marty Maguire passed around a couple of such clubs.

Paul was followed by Peter Gompertz talking about the popularity, and increasing use of hickory clubs by professional golfers as well as history buffs; over 5 million golfers playing with hickories in the USA, and a string of National Hickory championships played all over Europe.



Paul Burgess

He also encouraged the audience to take part in the various 'Hickory Heroes' events currently scheduled.

So we came to the main event, Ian Rennick immediate Past President, led us through a well described, well illustrated and well evidenced journey through the early days of golf in Victoria stressing the importance of primary sources. Ian dismissed the views of some early golf writers who had clearly been listening to old men with faulty memories; he also showed a newspaper reference to the Irish game of 'shinty' which some mistook for golf in the 1840s.

It is the intention of your editor to publish, with the approval of their authors, a couple of the above items on the agenda as longer pieces.

Golf Clubs – The Great Changeover - Hickories to Steel Shafts

The year 1929 was notable for events other than the ‘Wall Street crash’, and the beginnings of the great depression. It was the year that the R & A gave approval for the legal use of steel shafts; they had been the fashion in America for some years but they were not permitted for competition play in areas under the jurisdiction of the R & A which included Australia.

The introduction of steel shafted clubs in 1929 did not, however, inspire an overnight sales bonanza. They were only available in a limited supply of matched sets at high prices. Coincidentally, first quality sets of hickory clubs were being marketed even as the steel invasion was launched. The R & A had kept quiet about its’ plans to approve steel shafts so golf club manufacturers and importers were left lamenting inadequate supplies of the new steels.

Prior to the late 1920s, woods and irons were bought off the rack as individual clubs. Overseas makers supplied the Australian market with iron ranging from driving irons and cleeks down through mid-irons, mashie irons and jiggers and mashies in various guises from deep faced, pitching, straight faced and approaching.

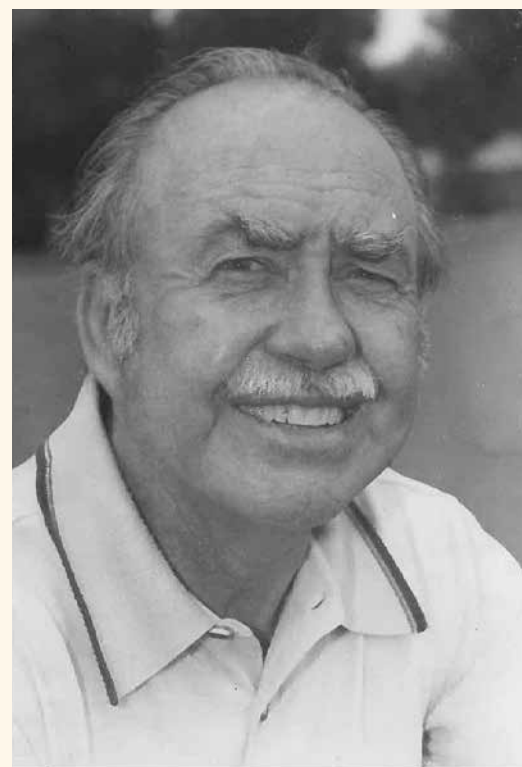
Mashie niblicks, lofters and niblicks came in all shapes and sizes with assorted loft and weights. Strangely there was not a big difference in cost, with top of the range hickory irons around 25/- (\$2.50) and woods 35/- (\$3.50) with steel shafted clubs retailing at 10/- (\$1) to 15/- (\$1.50) above that price.

Predictably the first clubs to be thrown away in the changeover were the hickory shafted woods, and many a faithful driver was relegated to the tomato plant as a stake.

Golfers welcomed the new steel shafted woods with the promise of straighter shots, but to mis-hit with a steel shaft gave a jar far from joyous. The steel shaft ruled out many of the hickory shaft behavioural problems. Swing weighting was an unknown science and hickory shafts, irrespective of their original playing qualities seldom retained those characteristics, and could develop no end of bows and bends.

There was some controversy, and many theories, concerning the best method of retaining the playing qualities of the hickory shaft, and the opposing schools of thought debated the virtues, or otherwise of the ‘good oil’ – to regularly apply linseed oil, or an occasional coat of varnish, to keep the termites, and the weather, out. Considering the slender taper of the old time hickory shaft, especially just above the socket flange, it is a wonder they actually survived one full playing season. Those clubs were being clobbered around on golf courses with hard clay or fine gravel surfaces! Irrigation was restricted to sparse sprinkling of tees and greens, and the fairways were as hard as flint; indeed, the old hickory shaft must have been from good stock to survive.

The main sales gimmick that stampeded players into discarding hickory in favour of steel could be summed up in one word, TORSION; or rather the lack of it. Torsion, always present in unwanted, and unknown, quantity in the wood shaft performed the bewildering function of twisting in a spiral fashion during the swing and at contact with the ball. The wood shaft also produced a backward, and then a forward, whipping action and both these movements were at their maximum and most devastating effect near to the moment of contact with the ball.



AL Howard

What actually happened was, to a large extent, guesswork, for without the techniques of today's advanced photography, the common belief was that the downward swinging shaft, and head, were lagging well behind the hands as they moved closer to impact. To counteract such a delay, golfers favoured the debateable ‘pause at the top’ and placed emphasis on the ‘late hitting’ technique. This action was further complicated by a wrist right hand rolling over the left at impact to compensate for the supposedly rearward curve of the wooden shaft. No wonder duck hooks were common! Old time golfers knew that the clubhead was on its’ way down from the top of the backswing but, like a freight lift its’ arrival at ground level was a matter of some conjecture. Mis-timing was frequent.

Spalding in the late 1920s had made a vast improvement to the wooden club market with the introduction of matched sets of clubs.

continued on page 6 >>



Continued from page 5:

Golf Clubs – The Great Changeover - Hickories to Steel Shafts

The time honoured practice of bestowing historical, and descriptive, names to individual clubs still exists but Spalding's matched and numbered golf sets sounded the death knell of the quaint catalogue of names that had graced the old time clubs. Gone, and almost forgotten, are the cleeks, mashie irons, jiggers and such. The driving iron, the No.1 iron today and its' club mate, the cleek, were somewhat unreliable relics of this period and used at your own peril and the delight of your opponent. The cleek, though more ancient, was a most nondescript piece of old iron with a shallow but slightly lofted face. Many of them, after an unsuccessful career as a cleek, suffered severe lopping to emerge as another museum piece, the approach putter.

The driving iron was favoured by golfers who were at odds with their woods, who, from a teed up position could obtain reasonable length and, maybe, stay on the narrow fairways.

The technique of successful iron play with the hickory shafts was the "push" shot, taking a shallow divot, and restricting the follow through. It is also known as the "punch" shot and was the trademark of Scottish golfers playing the windswept links. They made 'many a mickle into a muckle frae the Sassenachs' with this shot. To observe old Dan Soutar, and his compatriots, punch this shot away with their characteristic "Carnoustie" dip gave one a breath of the heather direct from Scotland.

Into a head, or cross, wind the ball started out low with a rifling trajectory and stayed down under the wind until near the end of its flight when it soared upwards for brief spell before floating down on to the greensward; well sometimes. The push shot was an acquired technique and most of the golfing champions of hickory vintage were quite versatile with this 'wind cheater' shot. The steel shaft with its lack of torsion, and whip, cancelled out much of the delayed, or longer contact, between clubface and the ball and divot, ending the flight of this most spectacular shot.

Among the hickory wood clubs were the driver, the brassie and spoon, or baffie, which came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes from the deep faced drivers to the sharply curved sole and deep loft of the bulldog spoon. The versatile, shallow faced spoon made an initial appearance in the late 1920s. Almost without exception, the wooden clubs had plain persimmon faces plus a rams horn insert above the soleplate and, whereas previously the ball had been teed up on a small pyramid of wet sand, the 1930 visit of Hagen and Kirkwood also brought into play the first mass produced tees. These were the excellent "Yello" tees made from compressed cardboard, and later, the locally made wooden tee. During the tour Hagen and Kirkwood seldom deigned to pick up these new tees, and youthful galleries scrambled under their feet to retrieve those much sought after mementoes of their exhibition matches.

Many youngsters fingers narrowly escaped a sharp spike in these sorties for throw-away souvenirs.

But back to the tees, and what was not apparent, at first glance, was the whittling away effect, even of the compressed "Yello" tees, would have on the persimmon wood faces. To offset this erosion a whole new club making craft came in to being with wooden club inlays and inserts. The early model Spalding inlays were extremely durable and creative works of art with their Kro-Flite woods featuring that feathered fiend in full flight as a black insert into a white bakelite inlay. Equally impressive was their multi-coloured and multi-section inlays, and from memory I fail to recall any Spalding inlays, or inserts, that became split or fractured. Spalding's new type cellulose overlays covered and protected the socket binding at a time when the thin sockets were the 'Achilles heel' in fitting shafts to a snug fit. They would split quicker than your best, and only, pair of Sunday pants. Eventually, tapered wood ferrules and more robust sockets brought much needed strength, and durability to this previously fragile neck of the woods. (To be continued).

(This article was originally a chapter in 19th Hole Nostalgia written by the late Al Howard, and is reprinted by kind permission of Ross Howard. It will be in two parts Ed.)

Dinner at Commonwealth Golf Club

By Peter Gompertz

Seventy members, and guests, gathered in the clubhouse at Commonwealth Golf Club to hear guest speaker John Hopkins OAM. Unfortunately for us, John lives in Perth and we had secured his attendance at the Dinner as we knew he would be in Melbourne for the Handa Australian Women's Open.

Apparently, whichever airline John favours was having a bad air day, so, about an hour before we were due to meet, our hardworking Secretary Tony Mclean received a phone call from John advising that he would be a no show.

Tony immediately rang Michael Clayton who was not available. Tony left a message on the answer phone, and went to plan Z which is to ring your correspondent who had once foolishly offered to step in at no notice if a guest speaker could not attend at the last moment. Fortunately for you, Michael who was attending the dinner anyway, rang back and became our guest speaker.

After a very pleasant meal to Commonwealth's usual high standard, Michael delivered, without notes, an interesting round up of his busy life including his latest design project, with Geoff Ogilvy, on a sandy, pine tree clad island about a 5 minute drive from Royal Hobart, moving on to interesting insights into the character and ability of Australia's new star Sue Oh for whom Michael had just caddied at the 13th Beach, Oates Victorian Open. Having just turned professional, and missed out on a card for the potentially lucrative LPGA tour, she has a bubbly, no side, attitude to her golf and, for the moment, is not interested in the money. Michael invited his audience to attend at Royal Melbourne the next morning at 7am, to follow Sue's practice round before the Handa Women's Open!

Michael went on to express his strong opinion advocating accessible golf courses, such as Barnbougle, and the lack of first class courses away from Melbourne; he then invited questions which resulted in a heated discussion, from the floor, particularly on the subject of professional golfers playing Pennant, a topic he had outlined in a recent article in this newsletter; he also marked our card with the names of a couple of future Australian golf stars besides Sue Oh, namely Ryan Ruffles and a 12 year old called Elvis Smiley, currently with a handicap of 4; and so home, after an interesting evening. Thank you Michael.



Ross Baker, Jean Macleod, Norie Macleod and Margo Vincent



Di McLean Jill Spargo Michael Clayton



President and guest speaker Michael Clayton

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