

THE LONG GAME

NEWSLETTER OF THE
GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA



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Presidents Trophy 2015

by Cliff George

This delightful annual event was held on Monday 3rd of August at Royal Melbourne Golf Club and attracted a strong field of 26 eager participants. In the most challenging conditions of rain, hail and wind, accompanied by warm sunshine, and a golf course in perfect condition, the field was reduced to four qualifiers for knock out match play, after a most enjoyable lunch.

The first two ball match between Paul Burgess and Paul Bray was decided very quickly on the first hole of the East Course in favour of Paul Bray. The second match, between Bill Young and Rod Hiscox produced some very exciting golf when the first hole was halved.

Proceeding to the second hole of the East Course the struggle for supremacy continued with this great par 4 hole deciding who would go forward and challenge Paul Bray; Rod Hiscox emerged the victor and we proceeded to the third hole on the East Course for the dramatic playoff between Rod and Paul Bray. With Rod playing off a handicap of 26, and Paul off 4, the lower handicapped man quickly emerged a convincing winner with a comfortable par 4 resulting from a beautiful approach putt, a feature of Paul's game all day.

I had the pleasure of playing with Paul in the morning qualifying round when he emerged as leading qualifier, with some excellent golf, despite the tough conditions. Congratulations to Paul Bray who was presented with the trophy by Geoff Vincent back in the warmth of the clubhouse.



Paul Bray with Presidents Trophy



Hail on the West Course at Royal Melbourne

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FOR THE DIARY

Monday October 12th

Golf Historians at
Yarra Yarra Golf Club

Sunday October 18th

GSA Hickory Championships
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Monday November 23rd

Doug Bachli Trophy at
Victoria Golf Club

Golf Club Historians Forum at Barwon Heads Golf Club

By Peter Gompertz



Val Lawrence



Anthony Masters



Greg Libbis



Mandy Buckley

Thirty GSA members, and golf club historians, attended at Barwon Heads Golf Club in a meeting room which overlooked the 18th fairway and green. The course looked in prime condition but our attention was held by a variety of informed speakers who kept us attentive.

In the absence of President Geoff Vincent, Convenor Kim Hastie spoke on the role of the Golf Society and introduced our speakers.

Val Lawrence and David Edge, both members of the Barwon Head Golfs Club Museum committee, gave us interesting insights into the history and development of the club, and its course, since its foundation in 1907. Like a lot of golf clubs founded in the early 20th century a club house fire had destroyed useful historical material but diligent research by a succession of interested members including a journalist, Pamela Evans, has reclaimed most of the history so that when the time came to write the history of the club it was less difficult.

The area is well served with quality golf courses and the General Manager of 13th Beach, Anthony Masters, spoke with pride about the history of his club from its opening in 2001. The course has hosted the Victorian Open and expects to for the next few years. It has a large residential base of members and as part of the RACV group, continues to prosper. The Beach course, designed by Tony Cashmore, was laid out over land that had previously been used to grow Asparagus and later raise beef cattle. The Creek course, a later development by Tony Cashmore, with input from Sir Nick Faldo, is found to be less difficult by the members.

Greg Libbis, President of Torquay Golf Club, outlined the continued development of his club since its early days as a 9 hole course attached to the Palace Hotel, and an extension to an old house, which formed the first clubhouse obtained by buying the dining room from the 1956 Olympic Village. The club is well supported in summer, with visitors camping nearby and the club running a 'Townies' versus 'Tenties' golf match.

Mandy Buckley, a Life Member of Torquay Golf Club, entertained us with some amusing details of the politics of Western District Ladies Golf Associations over the years.

As Cliff George was confined to bed with the flu, Peter Gompertz read Cliffs contribution on the current activities of the 'Hickory Heroes'. Kim Hastie proposed a vote of thanks to all the speakers for their contribution.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to

Dr Jennifer Picking and Barbara Aylen

OLD HICKORY IN YOUNG HANDS

John Fischer III

(Note: The following article has been adapted from a presentation given at the 2008 Annual Dinner of the Golf Collectors Society.)

John W. Fischer Jr., my father, was the last person to win a major championship, the 1936 U.S. Amateur, using hickory-shafted clubs.

By the early 1930s, most tournament players had changed over to steel, but my father stayed with the girl he brought to the dance, and who had been so faithful to him. In fact, Dad played with hickory-shafted clubs until 1955. He did not change over to steel because of the benefits of new technology; he changed because he could no longer get quality hickory shafts. His supplier, the T.W. Minton Company of Barbourville, Ky., no longer produced them.

Newspapers first noted a young Johnny Fischer in 1927 when at age 15 he won the Cincinnati Junior Championship at match play and the Cincinnati Caddie Championship at stroke play, in both cases using seven borrowed clubs.

He won the Cincinnati Metropolitan Championship in 1930, the NCAA Individual Championship in 1932 playing for Michigan, three Big Ten Individual Championships, was twice medalist in the National Amateur, twice quarter finalist and once semifinalist in the Amateur and played on three Walker Cup Teams (never losing a match) and, of course, won our national amateur championship in 1936, defeating Scotland's Jack McLean, 1 up in 37 holes, at Garden City (N.Y.) Golf Club.

I mention this history not to extol my father's competitive record, but because it was accomplished using hickory-shafted clubs against players who were using steel-shafted clubs. Among the players he defeated with his hickories were Chick Evans (twice in the Amateur), Tommy Armour, Gene Sarazen, Walter Hagen, Johnny Goodman and Lawson Little.



John W. Fischer Jr., the last USGA champion to win with hickory-shafted clubs. (Courtesy of John Fischer III)

My father had several reasons for liking hickory, and continuing to use them after the advent of steel shafts. First, he had a very fast swing, and he felt that the slightly heavier irons, about a D-2 swing weight, and stiff shafts were better suited to controlling his swing. Second, he learned to play with borrowed hickories. Having developed his swing by watching better players as a caddie and copying their methods, he didn't want to change. His swing was designed to get the best results from a person of his build – 150 pounds (68 kilos) and six-foot one and a half inches tall (184 cms). He had a flat swing and took the club past parallel on longer shots.

He knew a variety of shots, and always worked the ball, usually from right to left. But he could make the ball do what he wanted when necessary. As an example of his swing knowledge, and ability, consider his comments about a swing adjustment he made during the 1936 U.S. Amateur: "I changed my flat swing to a more upright stroke in that rain squall during my semifinal match against Johnny Goodman at Garden City. I did this to counteract a watery film between the ball and the clubface."

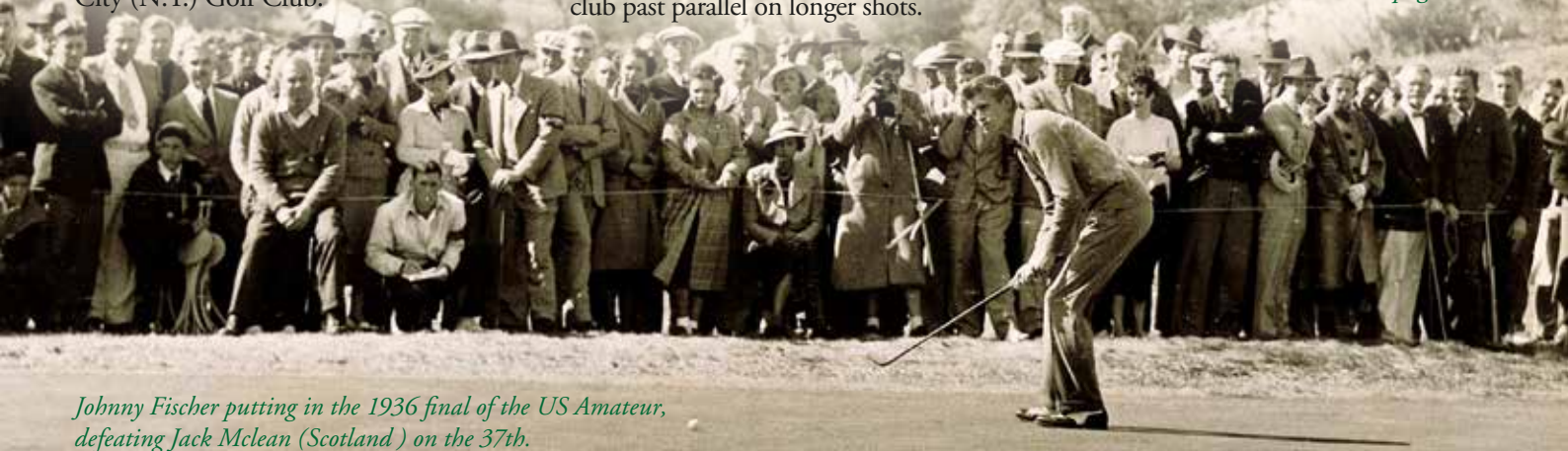
Imagine changing your swing in mid-championship for one match. He had the confidence that he could make that type of adjustment when necessary, and it worked since he won that match, and the final, on the following day after reverting to his standard, flatter, swing.

In a 1940 article, my father described his clubs as follows: "My pitching irons are heavier than the other irons. Although my irons are a mongrel set of hickory-shafted clubs, purchased one at a time, workbench tinkering to obtain the proper 'feel,' has, to my surprise, produced a graduated set of irons, in which the driving iron weighs 13¾ oz. and the niblick 16 oz., while the intermediate clubs fit into this weight range in proper order."

It was an odd set. Most of the clubs were Tom Stewart designs, but there was a niblick marked "Sunningdale," a few odd George Nicoll clubs and a dreadnought niblick by James Spence.

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Johnny Fischer putting in the 1936 final of the US Amateur, defeating Jack McLean (Scotland) on the 37th.



OLD HICKORY IN YOUNG HANDS *John Fischer III*

He shafted and re-shafted his clubs in his basement workshop, and filed the shafts and heads by hand to get the correct feel.

Manufacturers today can make shafts that do everything, but Dad could adjust the flex point by sanding the hickory shaft, and while it was said he carried 22 clubs when he won the Amateur, some were probably duplicates with a different shaft. In presenting one of the clubs he used to Garden City Golf Club in winning the Amateur, he wrote, “the niblick which I sent to the club was one of two niblicks which were almost identical and which I interchanged because one had a stiffer, stronger shaft for use in playing in the wind.”

Before the 14-club rule came into effect in 1938, my dad also utilized some specialty clubs. As he once said, “I carry a bevel-edged chipper, which is in the nature of a putting cleek, and use it mainly where I need a very short flight and a long roll, that is, from the fringe of the green.” He also carried a left-handed mashie iron and spade mashie for shots where the ball was close to a tree, bush or wall and unable to be hit right-handed. These left-handed clubs weren’t just to bunt the ball back in play; he could play a good game of golf left-handed.

However, the chipper and the left-handed clubs had to go in 1938.

It is interesting to note that Fischer was born in 1912, a vintage year for golf, for Ben Hogan, Sam Snead and Byron Nelson were all born in the same year. By sticking to hickory and his game, Fischer was a dominant figure in amateur golf during the 1930s, while the other greats born in 1912 were finding their games with steel shafts.

After winning the Amateur at Garden City Golf Club in 1936, he explained his love of hickories: “My friends have kidded me about those wood-shafted antiques. They told me to donate them to a golf museum, but I had the last laugh. Hickory shafts may be obsolete for most golfers, but they happen to suit my game. You see, I have a very fast backswing – a rather treacherous thing to control when playing full irons or pitches. Hickory shafts have more resistance than steel ones and thus help slow me down. My worst tendency has always been to hit from the top of my swing – we golfers call it ‘rushing the clubhead.’ Steel shafts exaggerate this error. Hickory is the ideal antidote.

“I never would have controlled those low shots into the wind on the day of the fifty-mile-an-hour gale, during the semifinals of the 1936 Amateur, if I had not had hickory-shafted irons.

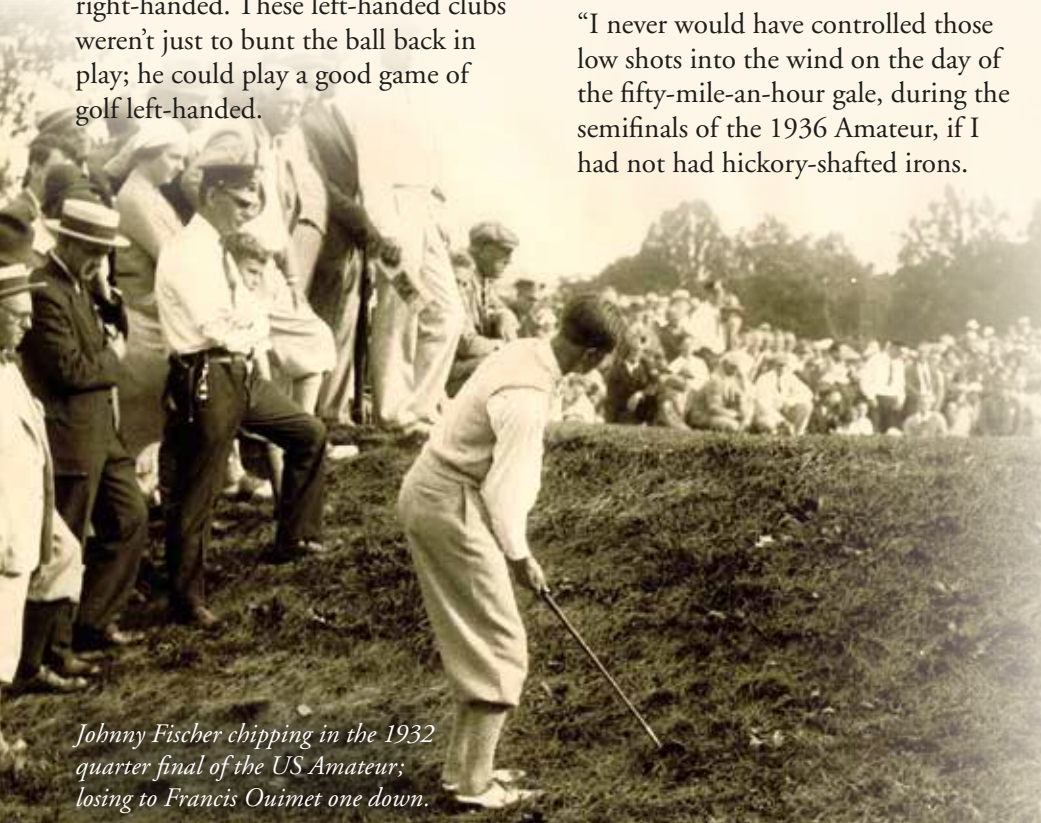
That struggle in the rain against Johnny Goodman was my stiffest obstacle. Goodman lost because the smooth, neat, grips of his new steel-shafted woods and irons kept slipping and turning in his hands on the last few holes when the rain soaked the padded handles.

“My clubs are all six or seven years old. The grips are roughened from prolonged usage. They got soggy rather than slippery in that downpour and I was able to keep a firm hold on them. Little things like this, unseen by the gallery, often decide golf matches. Mind you, I’m not arguing that hickory shafts would improve other people’s games, but they do keep me from hitting too soon.”

There’s a bit more to the grip story. As long as I can remember, my father would “rough up” his grips with a car key so they wouldn’t slip in his hands. The marks are quite evident on the grips of his hickories. He continued to do it when he changed to steel. He’d stand on the first tee roughing up his driver grip, and do it to other clubs as he walked down the fairway.

Grips on hickories were generally a thin strip of leather wound around the shaft. Dad believed that power in the golf swing came from timing and hitting with the hands. Dad gripped the club more in his fingers than across the palms. Because of torque in a hickory shaft, the hands had to roll over to square the face at impact. With a thin shaft and thin grips, hand action was made easier. Thick grips tend to restrict the hands and take them out of the shot.

Fischer had his critics who felt his swing was too fast and too “wristy,” but consider what one first-hand observer had to say about the result. In the quarterfinals of the 1932 U.S. Amateur, Fischer lost to defending Champion Francis Ouimet. After the match, Ouimet commented, “Johnny hits the ball far off the tee, with a beautiful well-timed stroke. His stroke is very fast, but he gets 100 percent efficiency out of his wrists and is very seldom off line.



Johnny Fischer chipping in the 1932 quarter final of the US Amateur; losing to Francis Ouimet one down.

St Andrews

– In the steps of Old Tom Morris

by Roger McStravick

by Des Tobin

With the irons, midiron, mashie and niblick, he is sensational at times and never presses, using a short, compact stroke with a open stance. In approaching he is highly accurate. Fischer is a good putter, and the breaks on the green never seem to bother him.”

Ouimet became my father’s mentor in many ways, and probably was one of the reasons for him being chosen for the 1934 Walker Cup team when Ouimet was the playing captain.

Ouimet tried to get my father to change to steel-shafted clubs in 1935. He loaned him a set of Spalding steel-shafted irons and sent a note, “I...think you will like these clubs very much. One advantage in having a good set of steel shafted clubs is this: The shafts remain the same at all times and while good hickory is fine, the shafts are apt to get soft from constant use, dry out in the winter time or change radically in some way.”

Fischer tried the steel-shafted irons as Ouimet recommended, but eventually sent them back. In spite of the weaknesses in hickory Ouimet had pointed out, he found solace with his old hickories.

As with most competitive golfers, the onset of World War II led my father to put away his hickory sticks. In the years after the war he devoted his time to his law practice and playing golf with his friends, although he did play in the 1950 U.S. Celebrity Pro-Am in Washington D.C., finishing second to Ben Hogan.

When my father finally switched to a set of steel-shafted irons in 1955, he was still playing to a scratch handicap with his hickories. He assembled his steel-shafted clubs with the help of Toney Penna at the old MacGregor plant on Spring Grove Avenue in Cincinnati. He picked clubs from bins, sifted through heads and put the set together by feel. He had difficulty finding steel shafts as stiff as those of his hickories. He had master clubmaker Howard Delaney grind heads for him. My father swung the clubs in the factory and “waggled” them in his hands. The long irons and mid-irons were Tommy Armour, and the 8, 9, 11 and utility wedge were MT models. The process took two full days. In selecting the clubs, he never hit a ball. The clubs were all picked by feel alone. When the clubs were tested for swing weight, they all came out at D-1.

After 1955 until his death in 1984, my father never bought another club.

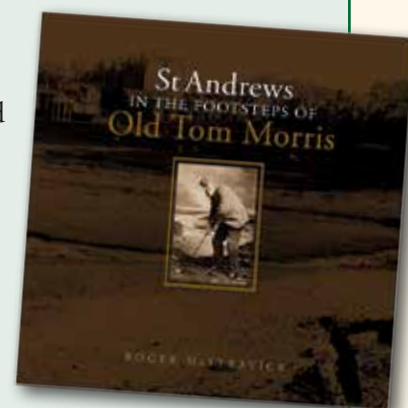
(A member of the USGA Museum Committee, John Fischer III is an attorney in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has been a frequent contributor to Golf Journal, and continues to write about golf collectibles, and legends of the game. Ed.)

Until the publication of this stunning new book I was of the view that more had been written about the city of St Andrews, Old Tom Morris and other pioneers of golf than is actually known. I was wrong! In his thoroughly researched, well written, and lavishly illustrated book, Roger McStravick transports us back in time. Metaphorically speaking, McStravick takes the reader by the hand and leads him, or her, through the streets, laneways, buildings and other places of significance of this captivating city.

Little has changed in St Andrews since the era of Old Tom, and this book’s narrative skillfully links local golfing lore with the broader culture of the town itself. As we are led, street by street, through the town, we discover that every street, house, church, hotel and pub has a golfing story to tell and we gain a new understanding of the lives of the Morrisises, Auchterlonies, Robertsons, Forgans, Straths and Herds. We visit the homes in which they lived, and the workshops in which they worked at their ball, and club, making trades. We gain new insights into the significance of the many ‘special’ places in St Andrews including its famous taverns and hotels, the St Andrews railway station which opened in 1852, St Andrews Castle and Cathedral, and the ancient cemetery where the bodies of Old Tom, Young Tommy Morris and so many more legendary St Andeans were laid to rest, but whose ‘souls’ and ‘spirits’ still reside within its precinct and beyond, and so much more.

This book is truly a work of art. Exquisitely designed by the award winning book designer Chic Harper, *St Andrews, In the steps of Old Tom Morris* contains 290 pages with over 350 digitally enhanced, sepia coloured illustrations, some which have never been previously published

St Andrews, In the steps of Old Tom Morris makes a welcome, significant, contribution to the history of St Andrews, and the heritage of golf. It may be purchased through www.thegolfbookshop.com and is available in three editions. The soft cover *1821 edition* is priced at 60 pounds - \$A130.00 - and will appeal to a general readership audience. There are two special editions that will interest serious collectors. The leather bound, numbered and signed *79 edition*, limited to 79 copies (representing Old Tom’s lowest ever score on the Old Course.) is priced at 395 pounds, \$A845.00, while the *Collectors* edition, limited to 250 copies, is 295 pounds - \$A630.00. Postage and handling costs are additional and are calculated as orders are processed.



Seven Clubs enough for Harry Vardon

By John Fawcett

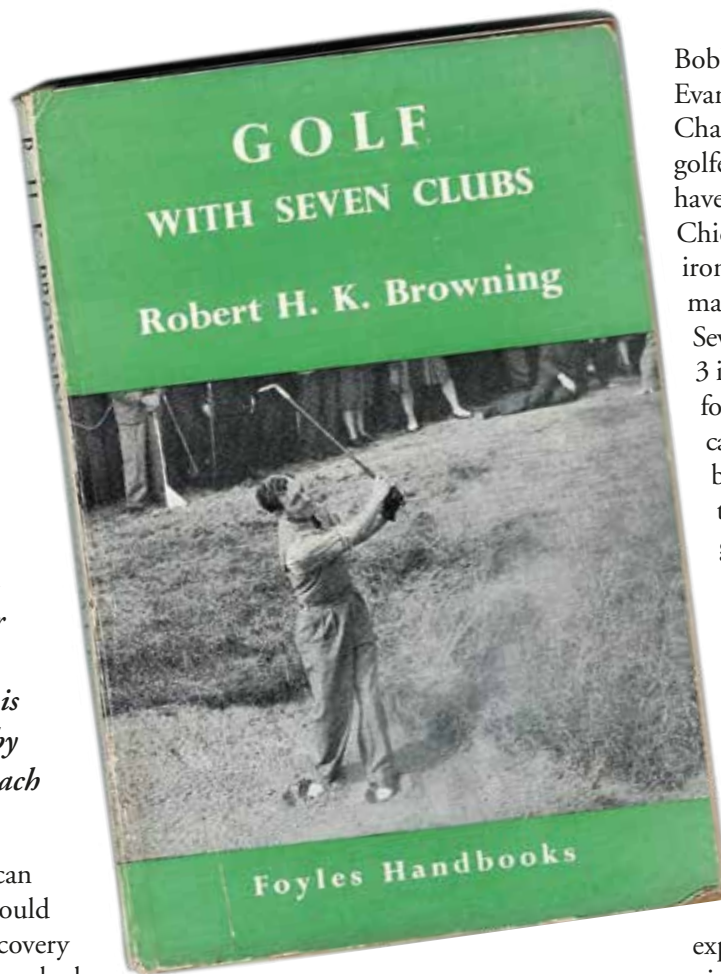
When Vardon won his record breaking six Open Championships he used only 7 clubs. Joe Kirkwood needed only seven clubs to win the 1920 the Australian Open. The present limit under the R&A Rules of Golf is 14 clubs but there are some American pros urging that this number should be increased. Old time golfers had the notion that it was the man, rather than the club, that made the shot. The modern idea is to buy a 'shot in the shop' by buying an implement for each variety of shot.

There are many golfers who can make a mid iron talk. They could play a 180 yard shot and a recovery from a bunker with the ball in a bad lie with the same club; they 'judged' shots, while todays champion uses his judgement mostly in working out which implement is called for to do which deed. With a standard club he then uses a standard swing.

Modern high pressure salesmanship has more to do with big sets of clubs rather than golfing necessity. New models that come along as regularly as did new model motors tend only to feed the pride of possession, not help a mans' golf.

It is alright for anyone who can afford the latest designer clubs but, any notion that they are going to be a big help to golf is quite another matter. The cycle of changes in styles goes round as it used to do in the case of women's hats.

Not wholly untypical is Australian Amateur Champion Hector Morrison's experience 65 years ago. Over the years he had gathered a quaint but happy 'set' of rare clubs.



Someone presented him with the latest set of matched clubs; his golf improved immediately and he was immensely proud of them. Big hearted, and in spite of his Scot's blood, he gave away his old clubs. Friends in almost every State got a sample. Less than six months later Hector was in a panic; it took him several months, and the most subtle forms of persuasion, to regain the despised clubs that had stood by him for so long.

In 1931 Willie Hope, a gifted ex-Cambridge golf blue who had represented England in the Home Internationals, and Britain against the USA, arrived in Australia. Many local golfers were keen to look over his clubs. They were, surprisingly, rarer than Morrison's famous 'set' – driver, brassie, 2, 3, 5 and 7 irons and a putter, but with those 'sticks' Hope showed, by winning the Australian Amateur Championship in 1933, how a great golfer can make great shots.

Bobby Jones in 1930 said of Chick Evans, former US Open and Amateur Champion "he is the one first class golfer who has stuck with what some have called 'old fashioned ideas'. Chick's golf bag contains a strong iron, an iron closely resembling a mashie, a niblick and a putter. Seven clubs in all, and in reality only 3 irons. How he does it is hard to say, for he never seems to lack the shot called for. Possibly he figures that it is better to know a few clubs well than to have a slight acquaintance with a great number".

Others have said that the less expert player ought to carry fewer clubs until he can learn to play with those he has. That may be true, but I can't help thinking that the present day assortment makes the game easier for him. He doesn't have the highly sensitive touch of the more experienced man and it ought to be easier to play many clubs in the same way than a few clubs in very many ways. It takes less time to acquaint oneself with a few pieces of iron and wood than it does to acquire the skill of a Chick Evans.

Henry Cotton, in one of his books, said that before the 14 club rule became mandatory Lawson Little, winner of a US Open, had 23 clubs in his bag and at least eight of them were niblicks! Pity the poor caddy.

In 1964 a 7 Club professional tournament was held at Turnberry, one of Scotland's strongest tests. The general club selection was 2 woods, 3, 5, and 7 irons, wedge and putter. The winning score was 288 (70, 74, 72, 72) by Lionel Platts, a Ryder Cup player. The low score of 68 was returned by a London club professional, Tony Fisher.

I was fortunate to win a now defunct 5 club competition in 1989 with 39 Stableford points using a 4 wood, 5, 7, irons, sand wedge and a putter. It can be done.

Claytons Corner

Golf was, unsurprisingly, invented in Scotland because hitting a ball with a stick across the broken crumpled dune land linking the sea to the farmland beyond made perfect sense. With no equipment capable of moving soil in any great amounts, the early golfers played across the ground as it was, making uneven lies, blind shots and hazards in the direct line to the hole a part of the fabric of the game.

Mostly too, they played matches against each other eschewing the need to count every single stroke they took. "Golf is much more fun when you don't have to score – we do it because we have to but I'm not sure why people find the need to count all their shots every time they play – its not really what the game is about" said Geoff Ogilvy as we walked the Old Course at St Andrews preparing for this years Open Championship.

Arriving in Scotland the week prior to The Open I watched some of the final day of the Scottish Open at Gullane and walked Muirfield and North Berwick, two incredible but utterly different courses just up the road from Gullane.

Anything more than an unthinking, or rudimentary, study of these amazing courses will show off to the golfer just how far golf around the world has strayed from its Scottish roots, and how many of the original concepts have been distorted.

Inevitably of course the game would change as it moved inland from the idyll of the seaside, and no doubt there are many brilliant inland golf courses all over the world. What changed was the introduction of the concept of 'fairness' and the idea formulated primarily by Americans and adopted largely by Australians (and most others) you had to be able to see where you were going.

The notion of the 'blind shot' was seen as somehow silly, poor design and something to be avoided by golf course architects at all costs.

Bunkers in the middle of the fairways came to be viewed as ridiculous hazards catching 'perfect drives'. If the measure of a perfect shot is its position in relation to the one following how could a drive into a deep and penal bunker possibly be seen as 'perfect'?

That two players could hit almost the same shot and come up with two quite different results was seen also as being unfair and the result has been a sanitization the original game. Architectural quirk, the luck of the bounce and multiple ways of playing a shot and a hole make the game unpredictable, offending the 'predictable' crowd.

The most important lesson of the Old Course is surely that the game isn't fair and it's why it is not only the most important course in the game but arguably its best; if it's not the best it's at least in the final. Jack Nicklaus once answered a reporter sympathizing with him over a particularly bad bounce and the unfairness of it by saying 'yes, it was unfair – but the game isn't supposed to be fair.' How you deal with the unfairness is surely golf's greatest mental challenge.

The most worn out modern cliché of them all is the course 'should be playable for all standards of players.' It's at the head of every marketing document spruiking every new course to ensure the attraction of investors and new members.

St Andrews might be the most playable of them all but try building an opening hole in this day and age with a stream right across the front of the first green and where having to carry across it is unavoidable.

Imagine trying to sell the principle of a course with any number of bunkers strewn randomly across the landscape, many of which are blind and from which escape by a less than competent players is all but impossible. At St Andrews, Muirfield and North Berwick it's all a part of the game.

There are many enormous greens at Muirfield, and North Berwick, running fifty paces from front to back but at St Andrews you can be forty metres short of the 5th green and still have 120 metres to go to reach the hole.

At North Berwick's 13th hole players have to pitch the second shot across and ancient stone wall built long before the 1832 dated course. Two holes later comes The Redan', a blind par three and a hole to spawn hundreds of imitations all over the world. The critics of the wonderful blind 17th hole at Kingston Heath should spend a few minutes contemplating 'The Redan' and perhaps re-assess their ideas.

At Muirfield, seen as perhaps the 'fairest' of all Open courses, there are deep and fearsome bunkers well short of several of the greens, and directly across the route to the hole. In many cases they don't affect the better players unless they drive into trouble but in this age hazards only affecting the poor players are seen as bad hazards. Few see them as making the game interesting for all players. Why must hazards only be placed for the good player?

St Andrews though is always the most interesting place to watch the game being played and the championships held in what is as much a university town as a golf town are the best of them all.

We should thank the Scots for what they gave us and next time something unfair happens thank them for understanding how to make the game the most interesting of them all.



David and Susan Wardle present the Balfour-Melville Clubs to Geoff Vincent

Balfour-Mellville Clubs

by Peter Gompertz

David and Susan Wardle, great grand-children of R.A.A Balfour-Mellville, have donated 6 of his clubs to the GSA for future exhibition in the GSA Museum. The clubs include a fine Carnegie Clark brass putter. R.A.A Balfour-Melville was Secretary of the Royal Melbourne Golf Club for 5 years in the 1890s.



The Golf Society of Australia was formed in 1982 to research and preserve the history of golf in Australia. As part of this role, the Society manages the Museum and Library for Golf Australia. Golf Australia supports the Society by providing office space and administrative assistance.