

THE LONG GAME

NEWSLETTER OF THE
GOLF SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA



No 59, JANUARY 2017



Doug Bachli winner Rod Hiscox



Lady winner Kim Hastie

Doug Bachli Trophy

The Doug Bachli Trophy was held on Monday 21 November last. Due to a very strong hot, dry wind, over 8,000 people in Melbourne were treated in hospital for 'thunderstorm asthma'.

Although golfers are considered to be tougher than most it was decided, for safety reasons, to reduce the round to 9 holes for the 20 brave souls who turned up. The Doug Bachli Trophy was won by Rod Hiscox with a creditable 16 points from Dick Curtis. The lady winner was Kim Hastie with 15 points from runners up Helen Smith and Barbara Allen. Members who attended then held inquests into their own rounds with suitable refreshments before moving into a more formal setting for the Annual General Meeting.

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Northbridge Golf Course
Sydney, NSW

FOR THE DIARY

February 28 Tuesday

Historians Forum at
Huntingdale Golf Club

March 6 Monday

Dinner at
Commonwealth Golf Club

May 8 Monday

Dinner at
Kingston Heath Golf Club

May 23 Tuesday

Don Lawrence Trophy at
Woodlands Golf Club



Geoff Vincent and Graeme Ryan

AGM Election Results

By Kim Hastie

Geoff Vincent, President and Tony McLean, Hon. Secretary stood down and did not seek re-election. As two nominations had been received for the position of President a vote was conducted.

Geoff Vincent gave each candidate the opportunity to address the meeting. Following a ballot, Graeme Ryan defeated Peter Gompertz for the position of President of the Society.

Vote counting was overseen by Tony McLean, with Ruth Summerfield and Geoff Knight appointed scrutineers.

Dick Kirby was re-elected as Hon. Treasurer and Kim Hastie was elected as Hon. Secretary.

David Hewitt, who filled a casual vacancy during the year, was elected as an Ordinary Member for a 3 year term. Neil Walker and Tony Rule were elected as Ordinary Members.

Virginia Gorrell having served 6 years on committee was, therefore, not eligible for re-election.

Historians at Royal Melbourne

By Kim Hastie

The first speaker was well known RM member Richard Allen, a past Captain, and author of several books. Richard gave us a very entertaining, and informative presentation, on how the club went about producing a book for the club's 125th year. He went through the differences between the Joe Johnson 100 year book and the new book, and the process required to update the club history.



Richard Allen

Moira Drew, a Member of RMGC History and Archives Committee, needed very little introduction as a past presenter and regular contributor to historian meetings. She told us about the systems and methods they have in place to catalogue, and store, their historical material. Currently they are working on migrating this extensive data from Excel spreadsheets into Mosaic. For clubs that are keen to catalogue their archival material in a better way, Moira recommends this software program. Moira discussed the importance of preservation, and storage, of historical material and photographs. There were many items on display showing the correct way to store valuable historical items using the conservation grade materials that are available today.



Tony Rule



Max Findlay



Brian Simpson



Ross Baker

Tony Rule, RM Council member, gave an informative presentation, complemented with slides, giving his audience a better visual image of the changes to the East course. He was able to produce wonderful historic images alongside more recent images.

Graeme Ryan from Yarra Yarra Golf Club offered insights into a book he is publishing about Dr Stableford, the extraordinary man who invented, and introduced, the Stableford scoring system for golf in 1932.

The introduction of the stroke index at that time greatly contributed to the fairness, and effectiveness, of the system and its subsequent, lasting popularity throughout the golfing world. It also gave players more enjoyment, and encouragement, compared with the general frustration caused by stroke or bogey play. For this, Dr Stableford is known as 'The Patron Saint of club golfers'.

Max Findlay GSA Committee member, and hickory enthusiast, brought some antique clubs from his own collection. He showed three clubs that had links with Royal Melbourne. A deep dimple face Mashie Niblick, banned by the R & A in 1923, with names on shaft of RMGC Pros, Jack Patterson, and W Thomson, and a J Victor East, Maxwell Putter

Max also showed another putter; stamped on the head with the letters A.R., possibly for A R Lempriere employer of Ivo Whitton in 1913.

Ross Baker GSA member, and traditional golf club maker, brought along several interesting, and valuable hickories, from his own collection. Ross, an entertaining speaker, went through some of the special aspects of his precious pieces. Marty Maguire from Commonwealth also brought along some of his own clubs for discussion.

Geoff Vincent gave us update on the first Secretary of Royal Melbourne Golf Club, RAA Balfour-Melville's, personal scrapbook. GSA has had possession of the book for sometime since the family of Balfour-Melville has allowed its restoration, and copies to be made. The original was on display at the meeting and will be returned to the family soon.

Thanks for the Privilege

Seven years ago, after a GSA day at Kew, Ian Rennick advised me that it was the Committee's wish that I take on the role of Editor of 'The Long Game' from Moira Drew.

Thanks to the professional way in which Moira launched me on my editorship, the support of Presidents Ian Rennick and Geoff Vincent, the efforts of my correspondents and the skills of Rachael at Avenue Press, together, with Kim Hastie's willingness to take photographs at various functions and my wife Paula's patience with me not turning up on time for supper I have been able to publish about four issues a year which have been well received by you, the members. It is, after all a record of the members' activities on the golf courses we are privileged to play, as well as the words of golfing wisdom that our guest speakers have imparted. It hasn't been that difficult.

It is now time for a fresh pair of younger eyes to source interesting topics for articles and chivvy the correspondents along to meet cut off dates. I understand that there are to be two 'editors' succeeding me, which I will take as a compliment. I will always be available to them for help and advice, and probably the occasional article. I look forward to reading what they have to say.

Peter Gompertz

Welcome to New Members

Peter Vlahandreas and Rod Haines

Old Time Professional Golf Shops

by Al Howard (with kind permission from Ross Howard)

If you could walk back in time and enter an old time pro's golf shop it might bring a tear to your eye, although not necessarily from a flood of memories.

Additionally, should you time your visit to coincide with the smelly glue pot coming to the boil and the pumped up primus with fiery flames under a ladle of lead on the melt, an immediate exit was a wise move. An even worse aroma was the all pervading "pong" when the molten lead was poured into the putty mould shaping the rear weight groove in old style woods. As though in retaliation, the scorched timber and putty would release a few pungent sizzles of its own particular odour.

This mass assault on the nostrils by these various vapours made up a vile witches' brew to the uninitiated, but to old time golfers it was the scented aromatic whiff of which nostalgic golf shop memories are made.

To the golf pros, and their assistants, who frequented those domains, the professional golf shop was essentially a place of work, but not without its lighter moments. When I observe the gyrations of today's 'break' dancers it recalls the frantic antics in the workshop when the molten lead, at the moment of pouring, overflowed onto the toe cap of your shoe. Many a previously leaden footed assistant, thus fired into action became an instant Fred Astaire.

The days have long passed when the golf club makers and artisans produced the special handmade clubs of their craft, but in the period when I served my apprenticeship every pro shop was a miniature factory producing 'handmade' golf clubs. Some even added the patriotic slogan 'Made in Australia', and at a time when we were promoting the image of Australian made goods it is worth mention that at the Paris Exhibition in the 1920s, Australia won an award for golf club manufacture. Australia was, on this occasion, represented by the talented Melbourne professional, Arthur Le Fevre, who specialised in hand crafted wooden clubs. Any golfer with an Arthur Le Fevre club 'had the wood' on most other golfers. Le Fevre clubs had an indefinable stamp of quality and their popularity was spread abroad in somewhat the same fashion as the famous Packard car slogan 'Ask the man who owns one'.

First class golf club design, and manufacture, was not limited to Arthur Le Fevre. The expertise displayed by him was practised in pro golf workshops at most major golf clubs. This was mainly due to the many artisans in golf club manufacture who came to Australia from the United Kingdom in the late 1920s and established the golf trade following the introduction of steel shafts and the new inlay-faced woods.



Undoubtedly, their 'know how' and skill with elementary hand tools created the Australian golf industry at a time when the magical machine equipment and electric power tools, now in common use, had still to be marketed.

Among the pro golfers and club makers who arrived early last century were the Clark brothers, Carnegie and Walter, Dan Soutar and Jim Scott who became Elanora's first professional. The dynamic David Blacklock sponsored young professional club makers like Don McDonald and Bill Gosden from the British Isles and started his Golf Supplies company in a small warehouse in Clarence Street, Sydney, then later in Surry Hills. Scottish golf club makers who joined Slazengers at this location were mainly employed in the manufacture of iron heads with names that could have come direct from St Andrews such as Andy McIntosh, Davey Fyfe and Jock McNab. They were to play a major role in the development of an expanding golf industry that lasted for many years.

One of the most authentic of the old professional workshops was that of Bud Russell at Barwon Heads near Geelong, Victoria. He later retained his shop as a museum workplace to show how clubs were made and repaired in the days of his youth. Arrayed on the shelves would be the various brews and potions used for staining and French polishing wood heads and hickory shafts.

From this concoction, would issue a subtle whiff of gum catechu and permanganate of potash, added to a sniff of pitch and waxed thread mixed with shellac and varnish, with a swig or two of methylated spirits and turps! What golfer's nostrils could ask for more? It was an elixir of excellence to me, but perhaps just a bad smell to others.

Originally, persimmon heads were handmade from large wooden billets rasped and filed down to a desired size and loft of driver, brassie or spoon and fitted with brass soleplate and ram's horn inset. Woe betide the club maker who could not deliver a snug fit to the brass soleplate with bevelled edge and diminishing wedge shape. The acid test of a snug fit was to give the clubhead a sharp downward thrust, and the soleplate had to stay in place, minus screws or glue. In shaping wood blocks for the Driver one retained the maximum amount of timber to retain the driving power of the 'live' wood. The added weight of the brass soleplate, screws and, even more so, the lead poured or plugged in to make up the standard 13-ounce wood was regarded as necessary, but 'dead', weight.

Although some of the old type drivers had no protective soleplate the ram's horn insert dowelled into the face provided some protection against pebbles or abrasive surfaces. One of the first, and most important, tasks in the making of any wood club was the exacting job of drilling out, with hand powered brace and bit, the four-inch-long tapering hole to fit the shaft.

Any minor drilling deviation from that unseen internal shaft line could result in an offset sliced socket, or one with an in-built hook, plus of course, an exaggerated upright or flat lie. After the brass plate was slotted in for final fitting, four or five base screws were symmetrically aligned with matching slots and countersunk to fit the curved soleplate.

Next came applications of stain and finish for the traditional French polish treatment, or maybe a lash out into the new-fangled lacquer surfaces. At Concord Golf Club the paint firms such as Berger, Sherwin Williams, and Majors provided samples of their products for testing, plus a new brand of lacquer from Dulux. Although all these products went on with varying success, they all came off second best in double quick time. This was mainly due to the iron clubheads being jammed back in to the small mouthed golf bags which did tarnish the varnish somewhat. Protective covers for the wooden clubheads were things being knitted by maiden aunts and often used as golf ball washers by caddies or just 'got lost' during play.

However, prior to the above processes there remained one final test of the clubmakers' art called stamping. A heavy iron stamp was struck mightily with a heavy hammer to imprint the maker's name on the wooden clubhead. Like a solid belt on the head with a blunt instrument, it was the clubmaker's 'Kiss of Death'. This precise manoeuvre called for a back to front and upside down impression on the clubhead by the iron stamp, hit with considerable clout and with no practice swings or instant replays. One hit and that was it!

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Old Time Professional Golf Shops

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The stamp had to rest lightly on the smooth and curved surface of the wooden head while the toe of the club was pressed up tight into a felt buffer against the big vice on the bench. The clubhead already shafted was held firm in this position by a worried assistant, while an even more worried hammerer was readying himself for the king hit. The first blow with the hammer had to be 'absolutely bloody final'. If not struck fairly and squarely the stamp would jump on the semi-finished smooth clubhead and leave a distorted, or multiple impression. Trying to expunge the initial error could lead to many explicit expletives. Assuming the stamp had impressed itself deeply enough into the wood was only the first hurdle in this steeplechase of the jumping stamps.

After the maker's name on the wood head there were two more imprints to be made, such as 'Special' or 'Hand Made' and sometimes the name of the professional's home club. But first, one final, and vital, inspection.

Was the stamp straight? If not, it would be slanted off centre, and the face of that club would forever seem to be askew and perpetually hooked or sliced as viewed by the player at the address position. Selling golf clubs so afflicted called for all the guile of an 'Arfur Daley'. The sales pitch was to sell to the slicers the woods stamped for a hook and vice versa, and everybody lived happily ever after. As Arfur would say, 'That's elementary, innit?' Fortunately the stamping of wood heads was made obsolete by the introduction of a simple wipe on and wipe off transfer, but in passing we should pay tribute to the wonderful timber which could survive such stamping onslaught without splitting, and give many years of faithful service.

Persimmon's toughest test came with the development of the shallow faced spoon in the 1930s which in time graduated to be the No 5 wood in our present-day golf set. They proved a very valuable club to all golfers but created many problems for the club maker.

During the drama of stamping, this shallow block was prone to split and, unfortunately, with much less wood in the head, weight was added per medium of the heavy brass plate and lead inserts. In the late 1850s most golf club manufacturers made even smaller woods in the lofted category. I daresay shrunken heads, whether human or wooden, will always attract a certain clientele and I am not about to knock these blocks. With their accentuated curved sole they were the answer to 'picking' a ball out of a tight lie. However, there had to be a limit to the number of holes one could drill into this tough persimmon timber and still have a club head remain in place. The number of holes drilled into these small heads for weight inserts, brass plate, dowels and inlay screws was considerable. First was the hole for the socket, then one for the shaft pin and five baseplate screw holes, plus a crescent groove for the lead at the back of the head. The face inlay and dowels and screws would average five holes and some heavy excavating under the plate provided holes for still more lead weight. In all, 14 holes or thereabouts. Just a passing thought – if wooden headed humans had 14 instead of just 7 holes in the head, would they be half as dense? The final straw in manufacture however was the heavy brass plate and the continuous loosening and tightening and replacing with longer, wider and larger screws eventually fractured the skull of this long suffering 'baffie'.

The introduction of plastic compound heads such as the 'Little Slammer' and others of that ilk finally allowed the persecuted persimmon to rest in 'pieces'. Although the plastic heads were hailed as the answer to a club maker's prayer, they were not entirely new. After steel shafts were legalised, a synthetic Bakelite type drive was developed by Chesterfields in the early 1930s, and was accorded a moderate reception among golfers.

Again, the main problem was weight. It needed holes bored in the head to lighten the club. Oh well, nothing's perfect.

In the pro shop at Concord around 1930 there were four of us at work while the boss, Tom Howard, was engaged in playing golf tournaments, or designing golf courses, all aimed at meeting the not inconsiderable wages bill even for those depression days. Len Tombs, later to establish a factory for East Brothers was chief club maker, shaping up and shafting made to order clubs and fitting the imported hickory shafts into the new iron heads. Bill Bolger was senior assistant and the two apprentice pros at Concord were Bill Davidson, later at Pennant Hills, and myself. We were engaged in finishing and fixing hair line fractures in shafts. For relaxation, we re-painted golf balls, kept the rust bug out of 350 sets of golf clubs and spread varnish and shellac o'er all with speed, if not skill. A couple of slap-dab hands were we!

The club cleaning charges were 2/6 (25c) per month and the sets had Brasso applied and then wiped off each time they were used. Brass plates were buff polished once a week and the woods given regular coats of varnish. Golf club repairs were 7/6 (75c) for iron shafts and 10/- (\$1) for woods and if the old grip could be taken off, and re-wrapped, it was. New golf grips from specially selected cowhide set you back 3/- (30c) while the most popular grip was top quality pigskin. For 4/6 (45c) it came to you with knobs on. Wrap-around leather knobs were built under the top of the shaft and were very much the 'in thing' for quality clubs of the period.

The hickory shafts for woods and irons were imported from the US in boxes of 500. Selecting the right shaft for special orders was not a task entrusted to us trainees.

Each hickory shaft, no matter how straight, had an almost imperceptible bow which had to be fitted to match the top of the club's socket line. In selecting a shaft for burly, big hitting Club Champion Bill Dobson you'd ferret around for a shaft similar to a broom stick.

Alternatively, if the re-shaft was a mashie iron or cleek repair for that fine old gentleman Lachlan W Broughton, a Magistrate who handed down verdicts on the Rules of Golf at Concord, and heavier sentences in Court, a supple ringer hickory shaft would assist his wristy action, and yet survive for a decade of divots.

Fitting a new shaft into any wooden club was no great feat, but removing the broken remnants of the original shaft was the sticky bit that stuck in the club's throat. The major problem was to immerse the wooden club in water hot enough, and only long enough, to melt the glue inside the head socket. Do it right and it allowed you to ease, or slide, out the old shaft without damaging, or splitting, the already wafer thin top of the wood socket. Do it wrong and allow the hot water to blister the varnish and a free stain and French polish was needed to maintain customer relationship.

With iron club re-shafts the tapered fit between the iron head and the shaft had to be such that when driven up with a couple of hefty clouts, it snuggled up to the protruding timber flange, but never split. Not while the boss was about anyway. Any such casualties were reborn as putter shafts. I excelled in this unwanted expertise and due entirely to my efforts we were never short of putter shafts at Concord. Money yes, but putter shafts never.

Stainless steel iron heads in the hickory days were few and far between and the English Vickers models were among the minority of 'rustless heads' as they were stamped in those days.

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Old Time Professional Golf Shops

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Popular brand clubs were the Star Maxwell models with a perforated socket to keep the weight down in the clubhead. Gibson's of Kinghorn marketed iron heads and the Kinghorn grip around which you were always happy to wrap your hands. Stewarts of Scotland marketed the well-known Pipe brand clubs and Auchterlonie, Sayers, Gilbert and Anstruther, Forgan and Logan were others supplying us with implements to furrow the fairways, and delve for divots. The iron head favoured by many players was the Geo. Nicholls with its distinctive 'HAND' insignia and recessed face markings. Later models had another advantage to us club cleaners, they were stainless!

In the period of the hectic changeover from hickory to steel shafts, and from mild steel to stainless heads, many expert golfers preferred the softer, mild steel to the bright, but hard feel of the stainless blades.

Be they rusty or bright, one never-ending chore at Concord was club cleaning, and although Tom Howard won the 1923 Australian Open with just seven clubs, by the year 1930 the typical golf set comprised ten or more clubs.

To us lowly assistants, the days we dreaded were those when weekend afternoon storms pelted down. In double quick time, and from all quarters of the golf course, came a deluge of dripping wet golf sets. On these occasions, as far as Bill, Davo, and I were concerned there were too many Chiefs and not enough Indians around that place. The stove-pipe golf bags of that era were usually without hoods to keep out the rain and, doubly unfortunate, there were no holes in the base for drainage! I wish to wring every drop of sympathy from you in this saga of the sodden golf set, so kindly pay attention while

I unravel the memory, and chronicle the chaos in the pro chop created by these afternoon storms. First task was to wipe down, and dry off, the heads to prevent overnight rusting, then the same treatment to the wet shafts to prevent an attack of 'the bends', and then turn all the golf bags upside down to allow them to drain. Finally, in a very late finish to a long day, golf clubs and bags were strewn around the shop in unholy confusion, plus the umbrellas, and would be left in such abandoned state to dry overnight. It was not a pretty sight! Then it was time to lock up and make ready for an extra early start on the morrow to create order where chaos now reigned supreme. At such times I swear we met ourselves coming in the door as we went out. Such were the joys of an assistant pro in those days now long past!

Who Taught Caddies to Count

The Hollywood snob will look through you
And stalk back into his clique
For he knows he is better than you
By so many grand a week.
And the high caste Hindu's fangs are bared
If a low caste Hindu blinks,
But they're just like one of the boys compared
To the Nabobs of the links.

Oh where this side of the Styx
Will you find an equal mate
To the scorn of a man with a 76
For a man with a 78?

I will tell you of a scowl that makes it fine
As the welkin hates the sun
The scowl of him with a 99
For him with a hundred and one

And this is why I wander alone
From tee to green to tee
For every golfer I have ever known
Is too good, or too bad for me.
Indeed I have often wondered Jamie,
Hooking into the heather,
In such an unhumble game
How anyone plays together.

Harold Lloyd and His Private Golf Course

by John Fischer

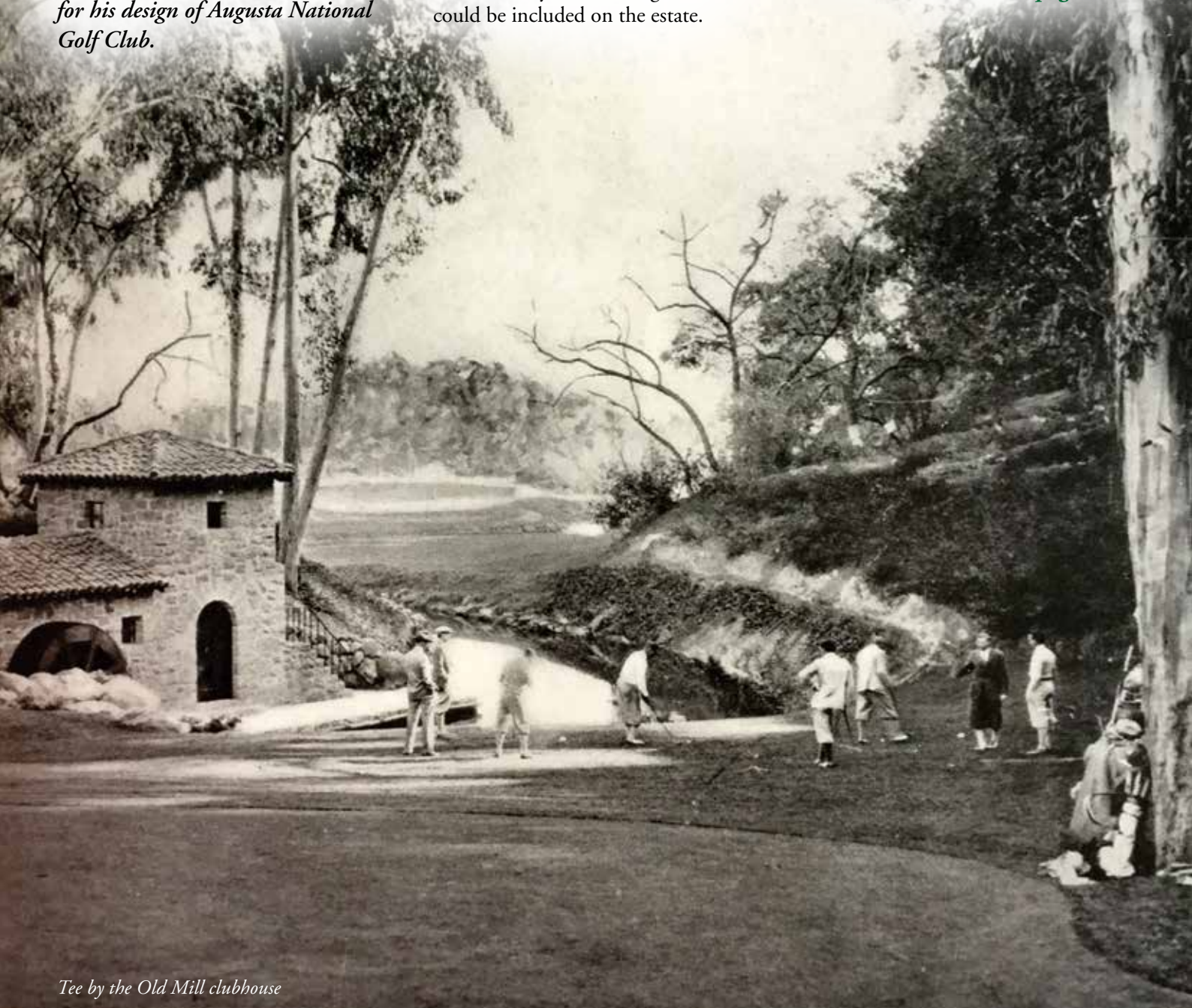
A while back I saw Harold Lloyd's World of Comedy on Turner Classic Movies, a movie composed of excerpts from Harold Lloyd's silent movies. I enjoyed the movie as it was very funny, physical humour but not slapstick, and in doing a little research on Lloyd afterwards discovered he was one of the most popular, and successful, comedy stars of the 1920s and of all things, he built a private golf course for which several reputable sources list Alister Mackenzie as golf course architect, best known for his design of Augusta National Golf Club.

I didn't pursue anything more about the course, or Mackenzie's design, until I came across a photo of Lloyd's course, dated December 1943, at a Golf Collectors Society trade show. The photo had been oddly trimmed but showed a water hole with a building in the distance.

I began to dig some more and from reading a Lloyd biography learned that he had purchased 16 acres on Benedict Canyon Drive in Beverly Hills for a new home in 1923 and hired noted landscape architect A.E. Hanson to design the grounds. During a walk around the site with Hanson, Lloyd asked if a golf course could be included on the estate.

Hanson told him it could, and contacted a top golf course architect, George C. Thomas, who turned down the engagement. The job was undertaken by William P. Bell who had worked on construction of several Thomas designs. Clearly Alister Mackenzie was not the architect of Lloyd's new course. There are unconfirmed references to Mackenzie designing nine hole courses for silent movie actors Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks whose estates were near Lloyd's property, perhaps creating confusion regarding Mackenzie and the course design for Lloyd.

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Tee by the Old Mill clubhouse

Harold Lloyd and His Private Golf Course

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“Lloyd’s course may have been short, but it wasn’t easy. Professional golfers considered it one of the hardest scoring courses in Southern California due to the water winding through each hole, and the contoured greens.”

Lloyd named his estate ‘Greenacres’, which had elaborate gardens, fountains, a tennis court and an Olympic size pool, but the golf course was seemingly unusual, not because private golf courses are themselves unusual, but because Lloyd had a physical infirmity which would suggest he wouldn’t be a golfer. In 1919, Lloyd was posing for a publicity photo lighting a cigarette with the burning fuse of a bomb which turned out to be live and not a dummy. An explosion ensued and Lloyd lost his right thumb and index finger. Studio boss Sam Goldwyn, a former glove maker, fitted Lloyd with a prosthetic to replace the lost digits. Lloyd resumed acting and doing his own stunts. He was in wonderful physical condition, extremely well co-ordinated, athletic, and he learned to cope with an odd golf grip.

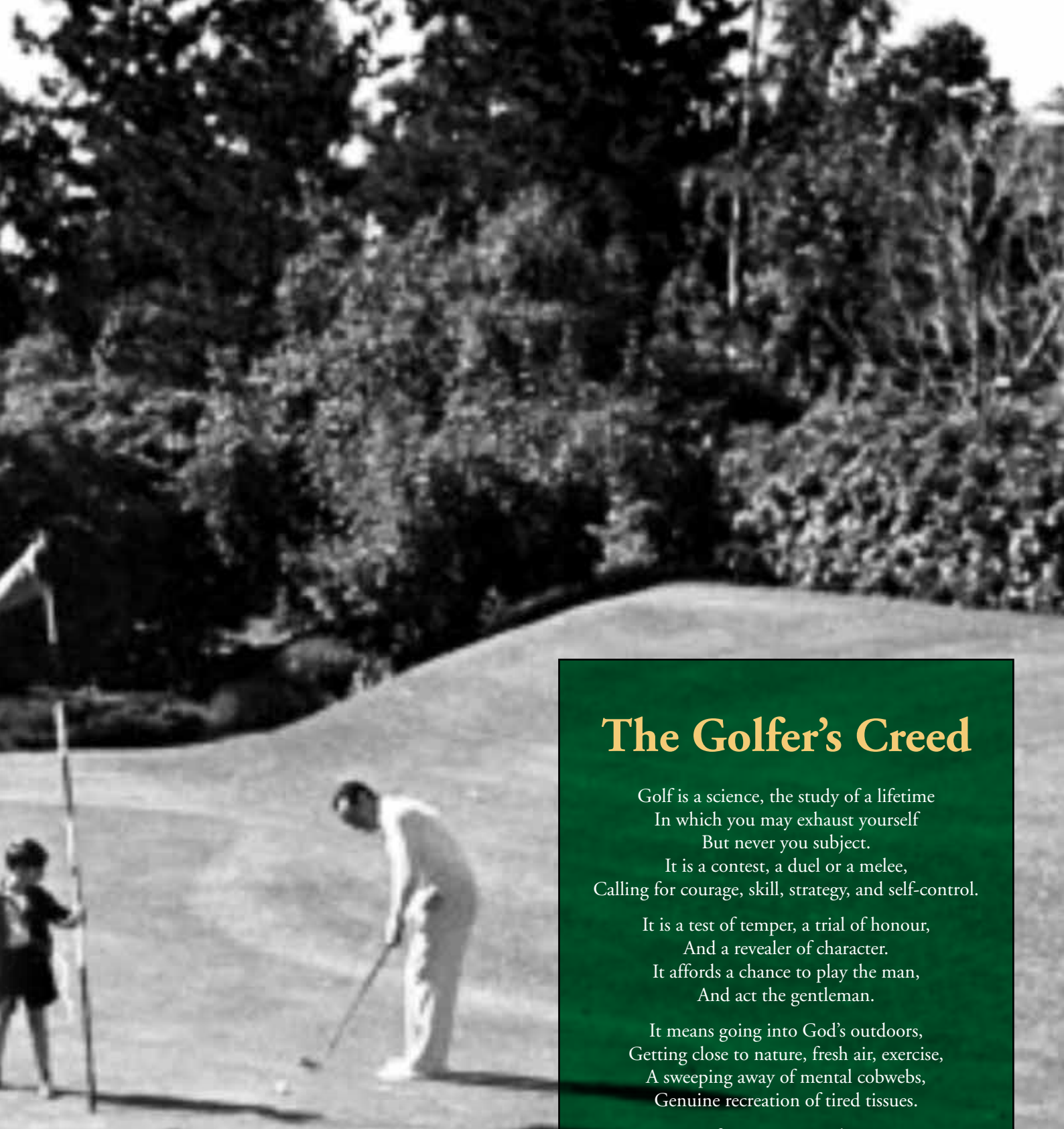
Lloyd named his new golf course ‘Safety Last’ after his hit movie of the same name in which he hangs off the hands of a huge clock atop a tall office building. The course has been described as having nine holes, and some say it was a par three, but both are incorrect. Journalist, writer and golf course architect Geoff Shackelford found Safety Last was actually a five hole course with alternate tees, making it a 10-holer, consisting of two par-fours and eight par-threes, all with water in play from the ‘canoe run’ which Bell included in his original course design.

Lloyd’s next door neighbour was Jack Warner of Warner Bros. Studios who had his own nine-hole course adjoining Safety Last. Lloyd and Warner built a passage through the fence which divided their properties so a full round could be played.

Lloyd’s course may have been short, but it wasn’t easy. Professional golfers considered it one of the hardest scoring courses in Southern California due to the water winding through each hole, and the contoured greens. The course opened in 1927 and before the Los Angeles Open that year Lloyd held a small invitational tournament with a field that included Tommy Armour, George Von Elm, Bobby Cruickshank, Walter Hagen and Joe Kirkwood. At that event, professional Eddie Loos, known as a great putter, returned a score of 28, four under par, setting the course record. Loos received a gold golf ball in recognition of his record. Lloyd kept other gold balls in a safe for anyone who set a new course record. It is unclear whether the 28 was ever bettered or whether the invitational tournament was continued in subsequent years.

Lloyd could well afford Greenacres and all its luxuries. He was a talented actor, comedian, hard worker and astute business man. He started by making short comedies, one a week, then graduated to longer films and then full length features. He owned the films himself and received 80% of the profits from Pathe, the distributor of his films and the entity which funded them.

Image: Safety Last punchbowl green - Lloyd putting as his son holds the flag



By 1929, Lloyd had earned the equivalent of \$2.1 billion in today's dollars.

Lloyd lived at Greenacres until his death in 1971 at age 77. The house, the golf course and the grounds were open to tourists until 1975 when they were auctioned off. The new owner kept the house and six acres, but 10 acres, including the golf course, were sold off for development. Safety Last was no more.

Lloyd is little known today except by film buffs, partly because he refused to allow his films to be shown on television during his lifetime.

The Golfer's Creed

Golf is a science, the study of a lifetime
In which you may exhaust yourself
But never you subject.
It is a contest, a duel or a melee,
Calling for courage, skill, strategy, and self-control.
It is a test of temper, a trial of honour,
And a revealer of character.
It affords a chance to play the man,
And act the gentleman.

It means going into God's outdoors,
Getting close to nature, fresh air, exercise,
A sweeping away of mental cobwebs,
Genuine recreation of tired tissues.

It is a cure for care, an antidote to worry,
It includes companionship with friends,
Social intercourse, opportunities for courtesy,
Kindliness and generosity to an opponent.
It promotes not only physical health,
But moral force.

*As read out by David Robertson Forgan
at the Chicago Golf Club awards dinner in
1899, shortly after winning the US Western
Amateur; a true son of St Andrews.*

Northbridge Golf Course Sydney, NSW

By Peter Coddington



Norman von Nida

There are many stories about Norman von Nida and a favourite concerns his attempt to break the course record at the short, tight as a miniskirt, Northbridge course in North Sydney.

To earn a quid from time to time The Von would announce that he was going to play a particular course with the intention of breaking the course record. There were several courses where he had done just this. A big gallery, paying several shillings each, would watch him take the course to the cleaners. So, there was a good crowd gathered around him as he strode to the first tee at Northbridge.

The first hole at Northbridge is a short par four. All the holes are in fact short. It is impossible to reach this green in one shot because a huge wire fence directly blocks the hole from a hitter on the tee.

You must lay up and then hit a chip shot at the dog-leg into a narrow green. Apparently, The Von was not amused that his chance of a birdie at the first was so limited. The second involves a blind shot off the tee. More anger from The Von. Remember his volcanic temper was legendary. The third hole involved yet another blind shot off the tee. The fourth was a straight forward, shortish, par four. The Von (who hadn't seen the Northbridge course before he started his record attempt) was still fuming when he reached the fifth hole.

Anyone who has played the Northbridge course will have dire memories of the fifth hole, a par three, and the shortest on the course. The tee is on the top of a hill with the green about 50m below. You can't see the green, yet hit the ball into the vast airspace and hope that it drops, like a shot bird, on to the green. The ball can go into the harbour if hit too long. If short, it goes into rough from which even Tiger Woods wouldn't be able to get the ball out, or it skids away down the steep slopes.



Aerial image of the 5th hole

The Von was not impressed. Told what he had to do on the tee, he promptly gave up his record attempt. Those of us who have struggled and cursed our slow way around Northbridge feel an affinity with The Von for sharing, if only for a few holes, the anguish that ordinary golfers feel on every hole they play.

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.

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