

Harry Williams: An Australian Golfer

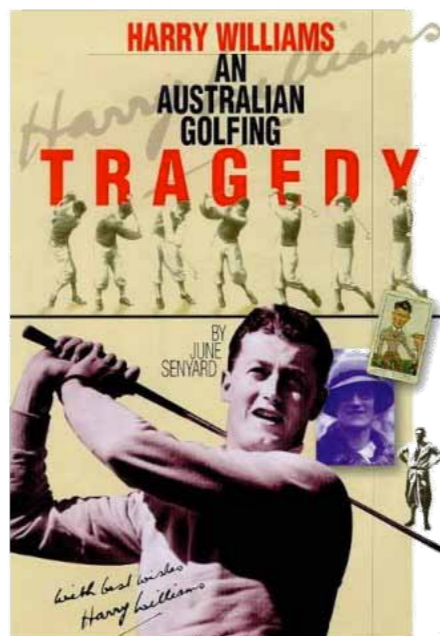
Recently I received a copy of “Harry Williams, An Australian Golfing Tragedy” (by June Senyard, Ryan Publishing 1998), although I had heard of the Legendary Harry Williams I did not know a book had been written about him. It was at the 2009 Australian Open that I met Graham Ryan, son of M.J. (Mick) Ryan, who won the Australian Open as an Amateur in 1932, who told me that a book had been written in 1998.

Harry Williams was a Boy Golf Wonder who won the Australian Amateur Title at age 16 in 1931 and had the golfing world at his feet. The American Champion Gene Sarazen, on a visit to Australia, wanted Harry to accompany him back to America and guaranteed him at least \$1000 a year. Harry came from a fairly wealthy family and turned down the offer. However, at Norman von Nida’s insistence, Harry did venture overseas to play in the Philippines Open in 1940 where he finished leading Amateur.

His matches against Jim Ferrier were legendary. Jim, about the same age, came from Sydney where his father, Ben, was Secretary of the Manly Golf Club while Harry was from Melbourne. In the words of Dan Cullen “...their matches were ELECTRIC. You could almost cut the tension with a knife” said Dan, “such was the rivalry.”

Because most of his golf was played in Melbourne, Harry was not as well known in Sydney, but his record speaks for itself. Between 1931 and 1940 Harry won a staggering number of Major Events.

I asked Darryl Cox, who played with Harry, for his impressions of Harry. Here’s part of what he wrote: - “I have had the pleasure of playing with the great Harry Williams and I have not seen any other golfer who struck the ball or flew it as well as Harry. High or low, fade or draw, run or stop, Harry had all the shots at his



command. Playing from a greenside bunker he could bring the ball backup a down sloping green. I have been privileged to see all the great players and while they hit great shots, had low scores and won events I have never heard anybody say “so and so” was better than Harry. When he struck the ball, it was with absolute precision. The face of his driver bore a mark about the size of a thumbnail where it struck the ball each time. This sweet spot was on all his clubs. The great Ossie Pickworth was the only other player I can recollect who

had such a small contact spot on a club.”

Harry, an only child, had a domineering father and a doting mother who attended to Harry’s every need. After his father died in 1932 Harry lost a lot of interest in golf but his mother, known as “Doll”, urged him on and provided his every need so that he never had to worry about getting a job.

After 1940, whilst the world was at war, nearly all golf was suspended. Harry continued to play excellent golf but had lost some of his brilliance. He drifted around the courses of Melbourne, often playing with wealthy Amateurs for large sums of money.

By war’s end the family fortune was dwindling and neither “Doll” nor Harry had the expertise to develop strategies to remedy this. In 1961 Harry and his mother passed away. Harry’s life and times have been well recorded in “Harry Williams, an Australian Golfing Tragedy” and it is recommended reading even for those not interested in golf.

Truly AN AUSTRALIAN GOLFING TRAGEDY.

Tom Moore

The Golf Museum at Granville is proudly sponsored by Golf Mart and supported by the NSW Golf Association, PGA of Australia, Women’s Golf NSW and Museums & Galleries New South Wales.

The aim of AGHS is to encourage the collection, research, recording and preservation of information and objects connected with the history of golf in Australia, to inform golfers, golf clubs and the community in general.

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President’s Message

I welcome you to the Autumn edition of “The Brassie”. There have been several changes on the Society’s Management Committee since June 2009. Tony Doggett has replaced Michael Sheret as Captain, Nikki Bethwaite, General Manager, Women’s Golf NSW, replaced Frances Crampton, John Lock of Carnarvon Golf Club is Society Secretary and Peter Read is the new Convener the Historian’s Group. Michael Sheret has also retired as editor of “The Brassie”. I would like to acknowledge Michael’s outstanding contribution as editor who, with the assistance of Graphic Designer, Tom Winter, produced an excellent Newsletter for the Society. Gerry Bush has replaced Michael as editor.



Tony Doggett has produced a comprehensive Hickory program for the 2010 year of which the Australian Hickory Championship is the premier event. It will again be played at the Georges River Golf Club in November and we are looking for increased participation. The 2009 Championship attracted a field of thirty three players and was won with a par round of 70 by Derrin Morgan of Royal Queensland.

The Society is in a sound financial position due to the continuing support of the PGA of Australia, Women’s Golf NSW, the NSW Golf Association and Denis Brosnan’s Golf

Mart. In recognition of Denis’ very generous support over the years, especially in providing the upper floor of the Golf Mart, Granville for our Golf Museum, the annual General Meeting 2009 elected Denis as a Life Member. As regards the Museum it is our intention to employ a part time Curator to assist Tom Moore with the operations of the Museum. Especially now that the Edgar Oakman collection has been received every member would enjoy a visit to the Golf Museum. Tom has once again been very active during the Summer setting up his Museum stand at tournaments held at The Vintage, NSW Golf Club and Oatlands Golf Club – despite the elements of heat, dust and rain – and they have proved to be a very popular attraction. Master craftsman Ross Baker from Tasmania was on hand at NSW.

The Historian’s Group conducted several gatherings over the past twelve months. Two of the more well attended meetings were the day at the NSW Golf Association, where journalist Terry Smith and Jim Webster, OAM, were guest speakers and the recent gathering at Pennant Hills.



Bruce Nairn

Captain's Comment

Our last event for 2009 was the Australian Hickory Shaft Championship on the Par 70 George's River Golf Course at Georges Hall. We were made very welcome by their staff ably led by CEO, Michael Kenny. Georges River, we thank you very much! Thirty three players contested the event on a fine day and the competition was keen. The winner was Derrin Morgan, a professional from Royal Queensland with a par round of 70. Derrin's friend, Perry Somers, a Queensland professional now playing out of Germany, was runner up with 71. Perry is the current French Hickory Open Shaft champion. They were chased home all the way by our own Les Browne of Long Reef with a fine 73. Perusal of the three leading cards showed 9 birdies so there is plenty of life in the old hickories.

Because we are not a large golfing organisation we do not generate much income to the clubs at which we play but with our period attire and old clubs we attract a lot of interest and hopefully a lot of thought for clubs to look into and preserve their own history. In that regard most clubs show a lot of goodwill towards us and we reciprocate by giving them confirmation of player numbers two weeks prior to the event. Please contact and advise me of your intention to play in events at least two weeks beforehand on Tel 9639 2849 or <apdoggett@hotmail.com> . The only exception to this will be the event at Windsor on 15th April organised by the Windsor Veteran Golfers where you should book early through Windsor Golf Club Tel 4577 4390. As per the AGM whenever possible we play as per the Rules of Golf and the local rules of the host club. Bunkers will be in play at all times in events organised by the Australian Golf Heritage Society. Charity and Fun events may be run differently by the committee of the day.

Yours in Golf, Tony Doggett

EDGAR'S COLLECTION comes home...

On Saturday 24th October a group of Members of the Australian Golf Heritage Society, including Australian P.G.A. President Geoff Scott, and Patron of the AGHS, Dan Cullen welcomed Edgar Oakman to the Golf Museum to officially accept his donation of his wonderful collection of golfing memorabilia. Edgar has taken 60 years to amass this wonderful and valuable collection as he followed his profession as a golf professional across Australia, New Guinea and New Zealand. He began his collection when he worked for the legendary clubmaker, Carnegie Clark, at Royal Sydney. Many of the "Haskell", or early wound balls, were recovered from the swamp which lay in the corner of the dog leg at the 18th hole, quite near the practice and teaching area. The collection consisted of clubs dating back to the 1870s, balls from the "Guttie" era, books and classic golf prints.

Edgar now lives at Bowral, in the Southern Highlands, and is delighted that his collection is now in a secure setting where it will be cared for and respected.

Tom Moore

Historians Group Report

This year is looming as a very interesting year for Club Historians. Many clubs are recognising the need to secure their history, photographs, plans, fixture books and written notes from long time influential members and others helpful to their cause. We do not collect and secure our club history for the current member, as most club members know the history of their club. Rather, items of historic value are put aside in a secure and proper manner for future generations. It is the good work that we do now that will allow future members to obtain data to reflect on the clubs' history in 50 – 100 years from today. All these items of historic value are only valuable to the member. It has been recognised that the paid employees of the Clubs are not always that interested in these items. Therefore it is important that club members take control and secure the items

It is best if a club's history is locked in an appropriate room/storage facility. Information about the correct storage is available through the 'Australian Golf Heritage Society'.

Many years ago David J. Innes wrote a book *The Story of Golf in New South Wales*. This book provides many fascinating insights into the history of golf in NSW. There are some fine illustrations, a wealth of detail and good anecdotes and quotations that provide some of the atmosphere of golf. For some time now discussions have been had with a view to update this book.

Also the NSW Golf Association has considered a proposal and have agreed in principle to proceed with the production of two new books. The first will be *The History of Golf in New South Wales*. There is still a large amount of work to be done before any action will occur.

However, one aspect of the new book will be the inclusion of *Women's golf in New South Wales*. The second book will be a *Directory of Golf Club Histories*. This book will contain one page per Club of standardised information. It is intended to gather this information through the web or email. All very interesting and will keep many people busy for a long time.

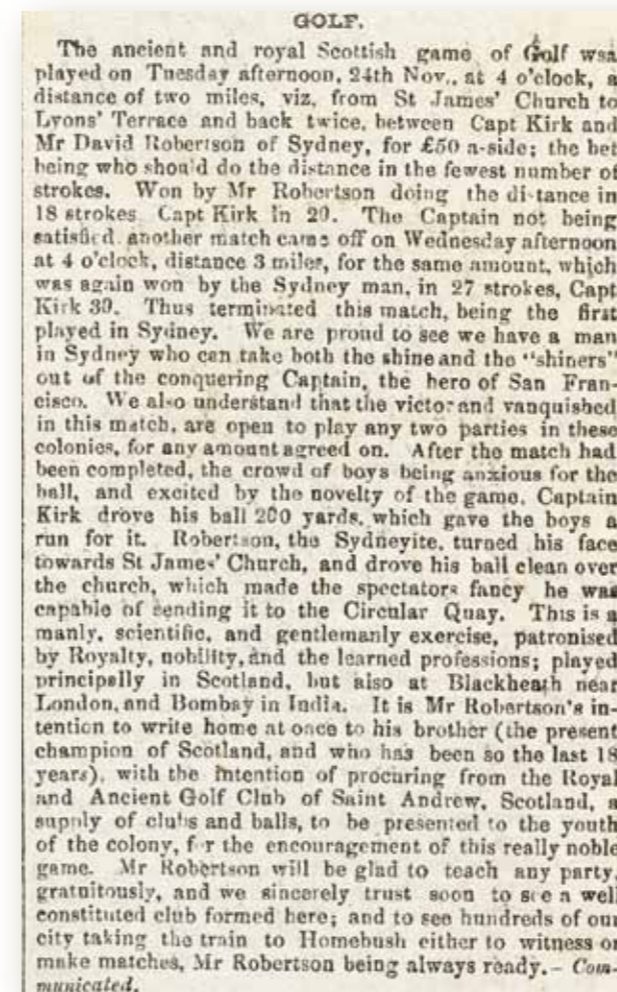
We are looking for competent people who might have the time and interest to contribute in some part to this project. If you are such a person please contact Peter Read at <peterjread@optusnet.com.au> or Tel 02 9871 3728.

Peter Read

Early Golf in Sydney

We all know that in the nineteenth century golf spread out from Scotland to rest of the world. Young Scotsmen left their homeland to seek opportunities abroad, sometimes as professional golfers or simply as what we might call missionaries for golf. One such pioneer in Australia was David Robertson (1824-64). David had been a senior caddie at St Andrews. He came to Sydney in 1849, commissioned by the Australian Golf Society to lay out a golf course in Homebush, a course that no longer exists.

David appears to have been fond of money matches. This account of one such match appeared in *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, 28 November 1857.



Facsimile produced by the reprographic laboratory of the State Library of NSW.

You might wonder at what sort of golf this was, played in a busy public park without any mention of holing out. In that era golf was often played on common unprepared land and bets were sometimes laid on who could cover a set distance in fewer strokes. Remembering that the clubs would be long-nosed, scare-necked and wooden-shafted and that the balls were early gutties (or possibly even featheries), the distances achieved are astonishing.



David Robertson left a golfing legacy to Australia, a unique collection of clubs and balls that belonged to his brother Allan Robertson. The best golfer of his time, Allan is considered to be the first golf professional in the sense that a significant part of his income was made from money matches. Exactly how or

when David got his brother's clubs and balls from St Andrews to Australia is not known, but in 1912 David's son, another Allan Robertson, donated them to Royal Sydney. They are on display in the clubhouse. It is a superb collection.

Michael Sheret

For more detailed information. *The Robertson Collection*, Noel Terry in *Through the Green* June 2007. *An Intriguing Mystery*, John Scarth in *Through the Green* June 2008. *Through the Green* is the journal of the British Golf Collectors' Society. Copies are held at the Golf Museum. Most back copies can also be read on <www.britgolfcollectors.wyenet.co.uk>

Coming Events in 2010 (for your diary)

Thursday 18th March 2 pm

Long Reef, Dan Cullen Trophy:
2 Ball Hickory Ambrose – 10 Holes

Thursday 15th April 9 to 10.30 am

Windsor Country Golf Club:
2 Ball Stableford Matchplay with Stableford Competition in conjunction. Hickory players have their handicaps increased by one third rounded to the nearest whole number.

Thursday and Friday 22nd & 23rd April

Federal Golf Club, Canberra:
Australian Golf Heritage Society (NSW) vs The Golf Society of Australia (Victoria). Jacket & tie Dinner on Thursday evening. (Book accommodation early as this event precedes the ANZAC weekend).

Thursday 12th August 2 pm.

Rosnay Golf Club Auburn:
Show & Tell Day, 9 Holes of golf, Trophies & sandwiches

Sunday 26th September, 3.15 pm

Liverpool Golf Club, Lansvale:
9 Holes of Golf, Qualifier for Scratch Matchplay. Des Froneman Trophy, Scratch & Handicap Events.

Thursday 7th October, 12 noon.

Port Kembla Golf Club:
13 Holes Stroke. Handicap Winner & Runner up competition.

Tuesday 9th November 1.30 pm

Georges River Golf Club, Georges Hall:
Australian Hickory Shaft Golf Championship. Scratch and Handicap Winner and Runner up.