

The following History of the South Australian Golf Association spanning its first Centenary (1904-2004) appeared in the SA Golfer Magazine August 2004 Centenary Edition.

The South Australian Golf Association

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FORWARD

The story of the origins and workings of the South Australian Golf Association has been written with the assistance of the research of Mr Clarrie Bell and described by him in his History of the North Adelaide Golf Club and of the parallel research of Ms Pauline Saunders in her University Thesis entitled 'Nota Game but a Way of Life,' Adelaide 1980.

Access to the Minutes of meetings of the Council and Executive Committee has ensured accuracy of events and I am indebted to Mr Peter Gilchrist, the Editor of the SA Golfer magazine for his format of the story and to Mr Malcolm Hall, first Executive Director for details of his first-hand experience of the acquisition of the Torrensville property.

My personal involvement with some of the events helping with the narrative and I trust that what follows will be of interest to readers.

After the departure back to Britain of the golf's mentor and originator, Governor Sir James Fergusson, membership of that first club numbered less than 30, all of them Scotsmen. But although obviously individual enthusiasts continued their involvement it was not until the 1890s that there was sufficient interest to encourage them to form clubs and in that decade a number of clubs came into being in the city and country centres. It then became obvious to a group of responsible city golfers that some form of organisation would be necessary so that all clubs would have guidance in organising their competitions. And this would ensure that there would be a better degree of comparability between clubs.

Eventually a meeting of concerned club officials was convened and although only eight attended between them they represented 10 clubs, Mr E. Phillipson representing and proxy for Adelaide, Kadina, McLaren Vale, Gawler and Hahndorf Clubs. The others were Strathalbyn, Walkerville, Beaumont and Oakbank. But a little confusion was caused when both Dr H. Swift and Mr W.

J. Gunson appeared to be representing the Adelaide Club. It seems that there were two clubs claiming the name in the 1890s and early 1900s both using the North Adelaide Parklands for their courses. One was based in the northeast and the other in the section now occupied by the North Adelaide Club.

Some members of the former club in 1896 agreed to amalgamate with the Glenelg Club but in doing so retained the name 'Adelaide' while others remained at the Le Fevre Terrace site, also using the same name until 1911 when it was disbanded. The amalgamation with Glenelg lasted until 1904 when the Adelaide members combined to purchase a large area of land at Seaton and transferred there taking the name with it. Subsequently the reconstituted Glenelg Club was formed in 1905.

The first meeting called to form an organisation was held at the old Gresham Hotel (since demolished) on 20 August 1904 when the following motion was put by Dr H Swift:

'That a Golf Association be formed and that it be called 'THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOLF ASSOCIATION.'

A Constitution was drawn up shortly after this meeting which directed that the affairs of the Association be controlled by an Executive Committee consisting of the President, two Vice-Presidents and two Committeemen; one of the early appeals from delegates was for the Executive to use its influence to ensure that the South Australian Championships for 1906 and the Australian Championships for 1907 be played at Glenelg. While the former took place as requested local golfers had to wait until 1910 for the Australian contest.

It is probable that the impulse to form an Association stemmed from action in the Eastern States where the inaugural meeting of the Australian Golf Union had been held in 1898 in Melbourne although there were only three clubs involved, Royal Sydney, Royal Melbourne and Adelaide, which did not achieve its Royal Charter until some years afterwards. The Union was created initially for the advancement of golf in Australia and to control Colonial and Intercolonial matches. Its stewardship was later extended to the control of rules and golf administration generally and its present day handicapping system, developed after a number of false starts and to which the modern Course Rating System is a necessary adjunct, has received overseas acclaim.

Although it was always not necessarily so, the President of the Union in modern times is the president for the time being of the State Association responsible for the conduct of the annual Australian Amateur Championships so that we now have a new President each year. Our State has contributed to date 14 Union Presidents: Dr H. Swift (three times), Messrs F. J. Irwin, A. M. Cudmore, A.A. Scarfe, D. C. Turner, C.T.Hargrave, I. A. McLachlan (4 times) and Dr W. D. Ackland-Horman (all under the old scheme and two of Dr Swift's terms were as a member of the Adelaide Club) followed by Messrs E.H. Fitzroy, G.R. Keane, J.D. Crosby, H.C.(Bay) McDonald, D.A. Cherry and P.F. Spence.

Locally the Association has had 33 Presidents in its 100 year existence the longest serving being Mr E.H. Fitzroy who held the position for eight successive years and followed Dr W.D. Ackland-Horman who was the leader for seven years. On the other end of the scale there were several whose untimely demise resulted in brief terms. Mr M.C.E. Summers who was elected in 1987, died suddenly in March 1989 and Mr M.S. Jones who was elected in June 1999 left us only five months later. In the same period there have only been 13 Secretaries although the last two incumbents Messrs Malcolm Hall and Peter Howard have been known as Executive Director. Mr Hall started his service as a Councillor in 1964 and in a part-time and acting capacity; in 1968 at the request of the President he accepted the position of Secretary, operating from an office at the Memorial Drive Tennis facility. A hiring agreement with the Tennis Association allowed this situation to continue until 1983 when full-time operations were conducted at the new premises at Torrensville (see later Chapter). Mr Hall continued in the position until 1990 when he retired having served for 22 years the longest term for the position. Added to Mr Howard's service the extent of the position is extended (unfinished) at 36 years.

In the ten years prior to 1968 the office of Secretary was held by a number of men who were not employed wholly by the Association and had their own private occupations and businesses. Generally, executive meetings were held at the premises of either the Secretary or the President.

The minutes of executive meetings give an indication of the waxing and waning of interest in golf in this state with clubs being accepted as members while others had perforce to abandon operations obviously due to financial problems. As with other sports golf suffered from lack of support, players and equipment, the early enthusiasm being eroded during the first World War of 1914-18 to such an extent that the Association went into recess in 1917. It was not of long duration and in 1920 it tried to add its weight in restoring some of the clubs to playing strength; even so in 1922 there were only three metropolitan clubs and 20 in the country. But interest quickened in the next ten years or so, the metropolitan contingent being increased to eleven and a similar proportional increase in the country saw 70 clubs in operation.

Currently in 2004 the membership of the Association is Group I (4 clubs), Group II (8 clubs), Group III (11 clubs), Group IV (70 clubs) and SA Country (132 clubs). These clubs cater for approximately 25, 000 male golfers.

The administration and control of golf in South Australia has been under the guidance of the Association since its formation in 1904 initially by the Executive Committee and ratified by a committee of delegates from the clubs. This system operated up to 1953 when a system of management by quarterly meetings of club delegates was trialled but leaving the operation of the executive unchanged and meeting regularly. In 1955 after the trial was considered satisfactory the Council was officially launched, its complement being 13 councillors which included the President, Vice-President, eight councillors representing metropolitan clubs, one for the associate clubs (now

called Group III) and two for the district or country golfers.

The complement of the Council underwent a number of changes in the next ten years even to the inclusion of an honorary Councillor. From the beginning country golfers had representation on the Executive Committee the first being Mr G. M. Meikle of the Strathalbyn Club and latterly by Mr Lance Chinner of Kadina but when the Association changed the country affiliation to a system of eight geographical areas called Groups, the representation was amended to an elected two delegates selected by a combined meeting of all Groups. This number was increased to three in 1956, then to four ten years later. In a later arrangement each delegate was given responsibility for two Groups.

Since 1966 the Council consists of the President (who is required to be an appointed delegate from an affiliated club) elected by the Council, two delegates from each of the four Group I clubs (Royal Adelaide, Kooyonga, Grange and Glenelg), one from each of the Group II clubs (Flagstaff Hill, The Vines (formerly Marino), Thaxted Park, Tea Tree Gully, Blackwood, Mount Lofty, Mount Osmond and Riverside), one delegate to represent the eleven Group III clubs and as stated above four for the District clubs. Group IV clubs have no direct representation. The Vice-President is also elected in a similar manner to the President except that the club the latter represents is obliged to provide a replacement. This gives a grand total of 22 but voting on any question is limited to 21 as the President has a casting vote only.

The President is automatically one of our two delegates to the Australian Golf Union, the second delegate elected from the remaining Councillors.

The Executive Committee that is elected each year from the body of councillors meets at monthly intervals to consider domestic matters and others of urgency and any decisions made at these meetings are subject to formal approval by the Council at the next quarterly meeting. The members of this committee are the President and Vice-President (automatic) and five members. Although not a constitutional requirement in 1977 President Eric Fitzroy requested that one of the country delegates be included on the committee and this system survived until 1993, the position in that period being held by Mr Bryan O'Leary. This provision no longer exists. At all meetings of the Council, the Executive and Sub-committees the Executive Director is obliged to attend and keep minutes of the proceedings. He is expected to double as the Secretary and the Treasurer and to liaison with the media as required.

Although in the life of the Association many delegates and officers have performed with outstanding performances only two have been accorded the award of Life Membership, in recognition of 'Outstanding service to golf in South Australia.' They are Mr E.H. Fitzroy (1978) and Mr H.C. (Bay) McDonald (1994). But in 2000 the Federal Government decided to recognise the year by the one-off institution of the Australian Sports Medal for sports people who had rendered exemplary service to their clubs, not necessarily as champions. It almost appeared to be a conciliatory move as it enabled at least 12 present

and former members of the Association Councillors and officials to be honoured. And when we add the Group recipients we have a grand total of 66.

All elected delegates are expected to participate in the working of the Association and are apportioned in accordance with any particular skills to sub-committees such as : Finance, Junior Development, Planning/Industrial and Turf, Rules of Golf, Handicapping and Course Rating, Country, Match, S.A. Open and Selection. Any decisions made at these sub-committee meetings are treated as recommendations and must be ratified by the full Council at its next meeting. Detail business of the Association is the responsibility of the Executive Director such as correspondence, handling of finance, custody of assets etc. The current incumbent, Mr P. J. Howard who took up the position in 1990, is a permanent employee and assisted by a Secretary/Typiste.

Undoubtedly the most important acquisition made by the Association was the purchase, in 1983, of premises to be used as its official location in a very accessible position only three kilometres from the centre of Adelaide and on a main outlet. It was acquired for a very competitive price and did require some rehabilitation and interior alterations. Split-system reverse cycle air-conditioning was installed and the acquisition of some first grade furniture (a large conference table to accommodate the twelve comfortable chairs) at a bargain price. These premises now allow for comfortable working and ample space for the storage of records and memorabilia. Besides the Director's and Reception offices there are other rooms more than adequate to accommodate the offices of the Editor of the S. A. Golfer magazine and the Junior Development Officer.

The role of the country representatives is simply to ensure that the rights and interests of country golfers are not disadvantaged. Actually there would be few avenues for discrimination in any case, and there is some compensation for the country golfer for his seeming lack of playing facilities in that he pays less in affiliation fees than his metropolitan counter-part. In this he has an advantage over his inter-State colleagues where fees are common or even higher. It has been encouraging to note over the last 20 years the number of country clubs that have changed over to watered fairways and grass greens despite the difficulty in obtaining a sufficient water supply sometimes achieved by the availability of sewage effluent, a typical case being that of Port Augusta. However it says much for the enthusiasm of these golfers because there is still a heavy burden on the willing workers of the club.

Over the years the Association has been responsible for the introduction of various competitions and championships and one that was inaugurated in 1927 has assumed an important place in inter-Club competition. This is the Simpson Cup named after Mr Fred N. Simpson who although not a golfer was a member of the syndicate which owned the land on which the Kooyonga Golf Club had been established. When the club bought the land Mr Simpson decided that he wished to sever any further connection with the club and agreed that rather than accept cash he would donate a perpetual trophy to the club. He took out a 100 Pound debenture with the club and directed that the annual

interest be used to provide mementoes for members of the winning side. He was a member of the family established as a leader in the tinned plate, galvanised iron and white goods industry in South Australia. It will be of interest that the Simpson Desert, that rather arid parched area north of Lake Eyre and extending into the Northern Territory and South-West Queensland, was named after a brother of Fred, Alfred Allen Simpson who in 1927 was President of the Geographical Society of SA and was responsible for the first airplane flight over the area. The Association in 1928 in accepting the trophy decided that the Cup would be for annual competition between the several city clubs but it was not until 1946 that other clubs took advantage of the provision when Glenelg and Grange joined the fray.

Since then other metropolitan clubs have been contenders, with some success using various formats. Today Pennants are played between the twelve Group I and Group II clubs in two divisions of six teams playing qualifying rounds leading to semi-finals and finals. The winner receives the Simpson Cup.

The Association also has the conduct of various Championships chief amongst which would be the State Singles Championship, contested annually, in recent years commencing with a 72-hole qualifying stroke competition usually at two venues. The leading score at this point receives the SA Medal and with the other top 15 scores are drawn for match play the winner of the final named as the State Champion. The Men's and Mixed Foursomes are played over 36 holes while the Junior Championship is a stroke competition played over 72 holes.

There are other minor annual events such as the Seniors Amateur Championship and the Senior Cup and the annual Country Championships and handicap events are controlled during September on metropolitan courses. There are two other Country contests handled exclusively by the Association, that is the annual Interstate Country Series which commenced in October 1989 played alternately on South Australian and Victorian courses; also a similar Junior event between the two states.

But a very important event from the point of view of Australian golf is the June Holiday SAGA Invitational at which two top amateurs from each State compete with a supporting group from local clubs in a three-day 72hole event, held each year at Royal Adelaide. It was initiated in 1985, with the blessing of the Australian Golf Union, by the then President of the SAGA, Mr John Crosby and Mr Bay McDonald, State Team Manager with the two-fold aim of exposing Australia's best amateurs to the Australian selectors charged with the task of deciding on the complement of teams for events such as the Eisenhower Cup. It also provides valuable experience for the rest of the field of local players competing with the best in the land. It is significant that many of the top four place getters in the last 18 years have continued on to be very successful professional golfers.

Another similar event with an interstate flavour is the annual SA Junior Masters also played at Royal Adelaide in January of each year. As in the Invitational, each State is asked to send its best two juniors and here again

the best thirty or so local players have the opportunity of playing with Australia's best on one of Australia's best championship courses. This event was instigated in 1998 by SAGA Vice-President and Chairman of the Junior Committee Mr M. S. Jones in the hope that local players would benefit by the strong competition that undoubtedly would be offered by the inter-State contingent. In the first event there was a runaway winner (by Queensland's Adam Scott) - there was a margin at the finish of 13 strokes and Scott is now a world renowned professional.

After the death of Mr Jones in 1999 the SAGA Council agreed to call the trophy for this event 'The Malcolm Jones Cup.'

Although not a single tournament, the Vardon Trophy competition, which was commenced in 1974, is one in which the State's leading players take a keen interest. The format is a series of 36-hole stroke tournaments at different clubs that have the responsibility of arranging the competition of the day and any trophy to go with it. The entrants are amateur golfers with a handicap of four or less which places it in the elite class and to qualify for the overall trophy entrants must play a minimum number of rounds. Altogether there are usually twelve or more tournaments and on occasion selected country clubs have staged an event when four rounds are played over the weekend. The competition is named after the famous Harry Vardon who in the late 1890s and early 1900s won the British Open six times and the US title once. He was the originator of the famous 'Vardon Grip.' The event was first named by American professionals for the lowest scoring average. Similar events by this and other names are conducted in the other Australian States. From 1981 a Junior Vardon was added and now many of the events are combined with the senior events.

The organisation and the running of the annual South Australian Open Championship must not be overlooked. It was first contested in 1928 and until the late 1980s was the sole responsibility of the Association. But then Mr Bob Tuohy, a former State champion and professional who had commenced a golf tournament organisation business offered to handle the complete arrangements, including the obtaining of sponsorships, for a retainer. Since then his business has expanded to take in the whole of Australia. There is still a deal of participation for the Association charged with finding sufficient marshals, scorers, referees, etc for the four days of the meeting and not to be forgotten the contribution of the ladies as markers. These are all unpaid volunteers from metropolitan clubs without whose efforts the event could not be run.

Junior golf, its promotion, coaching and organisation is an important sector of the Association's objectives. Although in its early days when the realisation was felt that the future of golf in South Australia could well be in the hands of current juniors who would in time become seniors, it was probably left to individual officials and players to provide guidance for the young brigade. Eventually the Council realised the importance of the issue and the organisation of events and coaching was handed to a sub-committee, first in

1960. In later years a system was devised when all District Clubs were invited to appoint a Junior Co-ordinator whose task was to encourage the juniors in his district to become involved in coaching programmes and local competitions. To assist in a more practical manner, after a period of occasional professional sessions Mr Nick McCormack, a competent professional instructor was appointed in April 1992 as Junior Golf Co-ordinator for the Association on a part time basis. As such he is the official coach of the Junior Squad.

The official journal of the Association is the bi-monthly magazine The SA GOLFER. In its early days it was handled by the Messenger Press at Port Adelaide, its main contributor a member of the staff until the paper was bought by the Advertiser in the late 1970s but it was less than a great success. Mr Neil Stephens who was familiar with the publication bought the rights and undertook to produce the magazine but late in 1992 he found the cumulative losses too great and ceased publication to the dismay of the Council that then decided to sponsor its future production. But things did not improve until March 1994 when a scheme was devised where all affiliated male golfers would be debited with a \$2-00 capitation to be included in their affiliation payment. By this means every affiliated golfer would receive a magazine every two months. Mr Stephens was retained as editor and was able to introduce colour until his retirement, after 19 years with the magazine, in March 1999. He was succeeded by Mr Peter Gilchrist who aided by modern technology regularly produces a very high quality journal of South Australian golfing activities.

Every organisation that employs and caters for the activities of people in controlled situations can only operate efficiently if governed by a set of rules, commonly called a Constitution which initially is prepared as soon as possible after the formation of the group. It lays down the procedure to be followed in all its projected operations, such as events, responsibilities, control of finances and elections of people to supervise particular functions. As mentioned early in this treatise, an initial Constitution was prepared by the pro tem committee in 1904 but unfortunately we have been unable to locate a copy of this instrument and indeed later versions. As local conditions inevitably change this usually results over time for the necessity to vary procedures of operation and sometimes numbers and duties of officers. The Constitution of the Association has been treated in this manner on a number of occasions: in the 1950s it was thoroughly revised, one version being adopted in March 1955, but in the next 18 months subjected to at least another four further amendments particularly in the nomenclature of the various clubs and divisions such as Group numbering.

Then in 1980 under the Chairmanship of President John Crosby a sub-committee recommended a complete overhaul of it until 1995 when the latest and most impressive instrument was prepared by a special sub-committee.