

THE HISTORY OF THE ROCHESTER GOLF CLUB.

The club was first formed in 1910, with Mr E.E.Kelly, manager of the Bank of NSW, Rochester, as first president. He held that position for many years. Other foundation members were Dr Lease, Messrs H.W.Raleigh, John Duggan & Patrick Fitzgerald. Albert (Bert) Wills recalls caddying for players in the early years, when the golf course was situated in priory paddock at the rear of the current Rochester hospital. Bert's earliest memories of the 6 hole course being an L shape running down to the Campaspe River past "Piggy" Williams stile then into Lou Sugden's paddock towards Mr Morton's place. The course was extended to 9 holes then to 18 holes after the First World War.

Bert & his mates would caddy for threepence or sometimes sixpence especially if you were lucky enough to carry for Mr Jack Hart. The kids would often sell "lost balls" back to the unsuspecting players who had lost the ball from the previous Saturday. A.G. Fuller, G.L.Roberts, George Clayton & Bob Brown were other regular players from a small membership base of only 5 or 6 as the sport was limited to business & professional men in the town.

The course was regularly mown by sheep and Paddy Egan's 3 cows. Working bees were held in the evening where some parts of the course were mowed by hand mower. The course was dotted with lots of trees mainly grey box gums with many being cut down by Andy Howley and used as boundary fence posts. Some can still be seen today.

Bruce Fuller, son of A.G. Fuller, started playing at the age of 4 on his doctor's orders, for a childhood ailment. Both Bruce and his father became single figure players. Bruce recalls golf balls being quite expensive at the time, at around 2/6d, so many opted for the cheaper "flotter" ball, which needed 2 or 3 times more club to go the same distance as the normal ball.

A clubhouse appeared at some stage, which Bruce fondly remembered as a great social place with sponges, meringues, brandy snaps and a host of delicacies for those in attendance. The original clubhouse still stands, situated in Pascoe St, next to the St Joseph's tennis court. The first tee was located between the clubhouse and the main gates to the hospital at the very end of Mackay St. Most players had a driver and 4 or 5 irons stored in a small canvas bag. Bert Wills recalls one chain smoking player using his cigarette butt as a tee as the ground was normally very hard.

While G.L.Roberts was president, Mr Ernest Wood, the professional of Kingston Heath Golf Club visited Rochester and coached its members for several years. On the 1st of January 1933, during Mr A.G. Fuller's presidency, the club secured a lease on the Rochester Jockey Club property on the northern edge of town, to construct a golf course in and around the racecourse.

Dr. J.S.Gorman was instrumental in setting up the course. Dr Gorman and his wife Dr Grant were hard workers, propagating seeds by their fireplace and planting many hundreds of trees & shrubs, along the boundary fences, the northern end of the new course and along Echuca Road. Dr Gorman transformed the plain paddock into avenues of trees and a sanctuary for birds and, of course, numerous golfers. Dr Gorman was the first life member of the Rochester Golf Club.

During these, and later years, many forceful personalities including; G.L.Roberts, A.G. Fuller, G. Lucas, Dr L.W.Nott, A.McKibbin, A. Armstrong, R.Brown, Father S.K.Anderson, J.A.Doyle and Sergeant E.(Ted) Babidge held senior positions on the committee. All worked tirelessly for the benefit of the game. Mr Peter Ross & Mr G.L. Lambert were instrumental in introducing judicious grazing of the links. During the 1950's the club purchased its first 3 gang mower & tractor, vastly improving the playing surface.

On the 1st of September 1952 the Trustees of the public tennis courts and the golf club formed an agreement to allow access for the golfers to use the tennis clubhouse on payment of 6 pounds per annum. This agreement was signed by Thomas C. Parsons & J.A. Doyle.

Late in 1954 the golf club obtained legal opinion from Blake & Riggal, solicitors of William St, Melbourne regarding its lease of the land being used as a golf course. The Rochester Jockey Club was about to grant a new Trotting Club use of the property to build a trotting track. The track was to run through the middle of the course interfering with the fairways and causing general disruption of normal golfing events. The proposed trotting track was never constructed.

Bob & Bill Briggs were single-figure golfers who enjoyed competitive golf and playing for "a few shillings on the side". Looking at their Saturday results in the local press, they would have won more than they lost. Bill Briggs Sr, father of Bob & Bill Jr was awarded a life membership during the 60's. Bill Brigg's daughter Raylene became very competent golfer and is still playing today.

Life Member Laurie Jackel started playing in 1960 on the invitation of Robert Briggs Jr. His first lesson was how to hit the ball off the hard clay pan, as grass cover was very sparse, a technique that he still employs today.

Cec Parsons moved into Rochester from Lockington in 1966. Ron Sharp encouraged him to attend to the annual general meeting where he was elected president - a position he held for many years. Cec and Laurie, with the help of Roger Mitchell, designed a new watering system which was made up of new irrigation channels and pipes fed from a water wheel situated in the far south west corner of the property near Diggora Rd. The course was flood irrigated during those first years, but many low spots meant not all of the course received the same coverage.

Club member Bill Reid, then Rochester Shire engineer, organized excess soil to be carted and dumped on site and gradually many low spots and gullies were filled in. The course consequently received a more even distribution when irrigation occurred during autumn.

Laurie Jackel's employment took him to many golf courses around Victoria. On some of those trips he was fortunate to pick up advice on grasses, machinery maintenance and spare parts for the club's mower. The original Massey Ferguson towed a 3 gang mower and then 2 more were added to make a 5 gang, which saved time and improved cutting. The original tractor was sold in the 90's after the club moved to its current location on Black Culvert Road. The club also purchased a Fordson tractor

which powered a Kaye rotary slasher, used manly to slash the entire course during late summer and early autumn, as the course was closed from October onwards.

Cec & Laurie remember paying around 2 shillings for Spalding Topflite & Dunlop 64 golf balls. When these popular balls went to 3 or 4 shillings a lot of players purchased rocket balls for only 2 shillings. John Hocken, one of Rochester's finest golfers only used the hard rocket ball. At one stage John played to a handicap of +1. Other good golfers were G.L. Roberts, Bill Dick, Lloyd Wellman, the Briggs brothers, Bruce Fuller, John McMahon, Tim Quinlan, Ivor Thompson & the Gledhill brothers, Philip & Brian.

Brian Gledhill won the first of many club championships' at 15 years of age. Ron Sharp, Laurie Jackel, Ron Gledhill, Ivor Thompson & Cec Parsons dedicated many years of great service to the club and we should be eternally grateful for. The Racecourse Reserve golf course design remained the same from 1933 until the 1970's, when the small tricky 18th was relocated to run parallel to the 10th. John Hocken designed a new built up 9th scrape which he sowed with grass, and watered from the town water supply. The green developed flat weed and John was advised to spray with amatrol, unfortunately this also killed all the grass cover. The green was then returned to a sloping sand green, the fore runner of most of the new sand greens seen throughout country Victoria.

Lady golfers, known as Associates were not encouraged to play on any other day except their allocated day. They provided substantial afternoon tea between the 2 nines. Vera Speer & Pat Andrews became great characters of the club with Pat winning a record number of lady championships, which will never be beaten. Loris Hill, Betty Brown & Marg Hill were regular players. The "Corop Crew" would arrive most Saturday evenings, especially during 'special play days' and tournaments, with much fun and laughter emanating from around the huge log fire.

During the 1960's golf became very popular mainly because of Peter Thompson success at The British Open. Fields increased from under 10 to over 20. Ces Parsons & Laurie Jackel remember severe frosts causing unrepairable damage to the outside running rail that carried water to some of the tees inside the course proper.

The Rochester Jockey Club & the Rochester Golf Club, over many years, endured a strained relationship, brought on by many factors including the restriction of planting trees over 1 metre tall, the running rail interfering with general play and in the latter days, horse training during play days.

The opportunity to relocate the Rochester Golf Club to its Black Culvert Road site was a Godsend. Finally the club could be its own master without restrictions placed upon it by the Jockey Club. Since the Racecourse layout continually struggled to handle wet years, often causing play to be abandoned until the course drained, the opportunity to move to the sandy country to the South of Rochester was welcomed by the golf members.

So began the modern era of the Rochester Golf Club.

During 1972 & 1973 the R.G.C. had several meetings with the then Rochester Shire & Rural Finance Commission. President Bill Reid presided over many golf club

special meetings where the club reaffirmed its decision to move to 150 acres of land on Black Culvert Rd, south of Rochester.

Approximately 100 acres was situated on the corner of Black Culvert & Kerlin RD, with the other 40 acres fronting Black Culvert RD, across the main supply channel on the north. This land was deemed too sandy for dairy & was not to be used for any other agriculture.

At a special meeting held on 28/11/1973, Tim Quinlan moved & Ron Sharp seconded the motion that;

“Rochester Shire Council be assured of the Golf Clubs determination to proceed with the establishment of a new golf course & the club reaffirms its decision of the 25th of October 1972 to abide by the conditions adopted by Council and the Council again be requested to conclude the purchase of the land through the Minister of Land as rapidly as possible” the motion was carried.

Inward correspondence from the Minutes of 13/02/1974, received from the Rochester Shire Council advising the club that the offer of land (151 acres) at a price of \$8,000, had been accepted and requesting the initial deposit of \$3,000 be forward immediately.

The Shire also congratulated the club for its initiative and progress thinking in planning for a new golf course, and wishing every success in the project.

The R.G.C. leased the land over the next 10 years to various farmers, with the proceeds going into a special fund, as per the Shires conditions.

In 1983, President John Myers, Laurie Jackel & Clive Luscombe meet with the Shire to discuss selling 40 acres of surplus land to fund the development of Black Culvert Rd, golf course. The Shire agreed to sell the land and up to \$40,000 was to go to the club with any excess going to the Shire.

Golf course architect, Mr Dick Pendlebury visited the land for the first time on Friday 11th of February 1983, his plans were approved on 11/05/1983.

After another wet winter, on the 10/08/1983, Ross Lees moved and Ivor Thompson seconded a motion “The Rochester Golf Club move to the new course in 1984 and all members be informed”.

“YOU COULD GROW LOLLIES IN THIS SOIL”

The committee took several new members out to inspect the Black culvert Rd. site, all being very impressed with the quality of the sandy loan soil.

Kevin Dobson was so taken by the soil’s consistency, after running his fingers through the dirt; he told the gathering “you could grow lollies in this soil”.

In May 1983, Ross Lees using his own equipment sowed the course for the first time with Wimmera rye grass & O’Connor strawberry clover. 1983 proved to be a great growing season with good winter rains, unfortunately the strawberry clover proved to be a problem to cut especially if the grass was slightly damp. Ron Gledhill & Ross Lees slashed the course in preparation for laying of the irrigation system.

Lady member, Barbara Lawford’s husband, Jim Lawford was instrumental in gaining the services of Victorian Irrigation Supplies to map out & design the new watering system.

Jim Lawford, Ron Gledhill, Trevor Miles, Laurie Jackel, Ces Parson's, Ross Lees, Joe Brooks with the help of many others including most of the Rural Finance Farmers were the back bone of a dedicated team who worked tirelessly over the summer of 1983-84 to lay the many kilometres of water pipe and install the bayonet sprinkler housing

In 1984 the tractor shed was completed, once again with volunteer labour, this shed was to become our clubhouse for 2 seasons. The club purchased a large glass fronted wood burning fire, which was dourly installed in the middle of the shed.

The efficiency of this unit became obvious not long after it was installed when all the doors we shut and large logs were burnt for the 4 hours of play, only to find that the players couldn't touch the walls, or the main metal doors because of the radiant heat. Suffice to say all the after game hospitality was enjoyed out in the cool air for the rest of the evening.

Members of the V.G.A & V.L.G.U. were invited to rate the course for general play days and were astounded to learn that our opening was to be within 4 months.

The club was lucky enough to secure a 100megalitre of water right when purchasing the property. Jim Lawford provided a diesel powered pump to supply water to the sprinklers, as the power was yet to be connected to our main pump. In early March 1984 the sprinklers were tested for the first time, after the initial fixing of various leaks and blow outs the system worked extremely well, with the various summer grasses relishing the ideal growing season.

Tree planting under the watch full eye of Trevor Mills started in 1983, all group leaders had a diagram of each hole with coloured pegs noting each tee, 200meter distance markers, and dogleg's & edge of fairways. Bar B Que lunch and a few beers always followed these very enjoyable day's.

Hog weed and Bindi eye became a problem early on, both were sprayed on a regular basis with only Bindi still with us today, especially after heavy summer rains.

Ross Lees with Doug King's mini grader formed all the scrapes into a standard format.

In February 1984 all the scrapes were rolled for the final time, Pyramid white sand was spread, this proved to be ideal until heavy rains turned the sand very gluggy and hard to shift. These sands were eventually replaced with Axedale river sand and then local sifted sand.

In 1986 Peter Anderson contacted Mark & Peter Ward from Ward Bros, who with Michael Palmer were instrumental in forming all the mounds, built up tees and scrapes. Ward Bros worked every summer, for over ten years to transpose the course from a flat open paddock to a more interesting undulating and challenging sand scrape course you see today.

Ross Lees continued his work until the stock market crash in 87, caused him "to get a real job". The club is indebted to many people who gave volunteer hours, but with Ross's expertise, machinery ,dedication and passion the Rochester Golf Club would never had achieved the recognition it receives today.