The Australian Golf Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview No. 3

Edgar Oakman

This is Carol McKirdy interviewing Edgar Oakman on April 22nd 2013 at Bowral NSW for the Australian Golf Heritage Society Oral History Project. The ultimate aim of this Oral History Project is to support and contribute to the Australian Golf Heritage Society Museum collection.

Documentation beyond the existing methods will assist the Australian Golf Heritage Society to better identify the significance of collection objects, and guide preservation needs. Beginning with the most significant objects and all new acquisitions, the main aim will be to focus on evidence of provenance.

Translating memory into written formats, and linking such information against multiple sources of evidence, will follow. These recordings may be used in exhibitions in the future.

Carol McKirdy (CM): Could you please tell me your full name, and spell it.

Edgar Oakman (EO): Edgar Wallace Oakman [spells full name]

CM: And when and where were you born?

EO: 28th August 1930.

CM: And whereabouts?

EO: I was born at Epping.

CM: Is that in NSW?

EO: Suburb of NSW.

CM: What were your parents' names?

EO: My parent's names was Leslie - my dad was Leslie John Oakman, my mum was Jean - I don't know her middle name - Jean Stephenson from Crookwell.

CM: You mother was born in Crookwell, do you know when?

EO: No. Approximately 1890. Approximately.

CM: And what about your dad?

EO: Dad was born at Goulburn, 1888 I think. I'm pretty sure it was 1888.

CM: Do you know anything about when your parents met and married, and where?

EO: No. No indication whatsoever.

CM: Do you know anything about your grandparents?

EO: No – I was very young when my nanna passed away at Turramurra in 1939. I can remember her because she was a very little lady, and always wore a black dress.

CM: What was your mother's occupation before she got married?

EO: She lived on a property, and I think she . . . basically . . . I think they helped out on the property at Goulburn.

CM: And what about your dad?

EO: My dad . . . I'm not too sure. Never learnt a great deal about my dad's early life.

CM: Okay. Could you please give me the names of your brothers and sisters.

EO: Oh boy – this . . .

CM: As best you can.

EO: I was one of eleven, the oldest was a brother Bruce, the second was a sister Jean, the third was a brother Max, the fourth was a brother Jim, the fifth was a brother Bernard, the seventh I think was a brother Lloyd, umm, the eighth was a sister Lila, umm, I'm just losing track of it now for a moment, then myself, then Shirley, then my younger brother Clifford. I think there's eleven there all told.

CM: Very close. Can you please give me a brief overview of your professional career, and interest in golf until the present day.

EO: My professional career started at – I left high school during the war years, umm, and I got interested in golf because I used to caddy at Pymble Golf Club when I was eight years of age, umm, Kel Nagle worked there at that particular time, and when I left school, umm, work was not available and I used to go over the golf club and caddy and scout balls.

This was in the Depression years, and from there, Kel Nagle was quite interested in me and we used to play a bit of golf together although I was much younger than he, but – umm – he advised me to stick with golf and make a career out of it. There was a chappie at Avondale Golf Club in Sydney – Pymble, behind the P.L.C. – and there was a gentleman there by the name of Keith Clark, who was the son of Carnegie Clark from Rose Bay, who basically introduced golf to Australia. He was a brilliant golfer from Carnoustie – Keith was his son.

Keith was looking for an apprentice at Avondale Golf Club because he couldn't be there all the time. I lived at Turramurra and was only one mile away from Avondale, so that really – it was just wonderful to think that I could get a job in something that I was interested in, and Keith was a great boss, and he taught me a great deal.

They had a golf factory at Rose Bay, making some of the best golf clubs by hand In Australia. Of course Carnegie Clark introduced golf club making to Australia, and when he was the pro at Rose Bay, he had six professionals working for him at the bench with vices and everything, and everything was made by hand. So they had created a good impression with Australian golfers because they made some of the better golf clubs, and it became so popular that Keith had to resign from Avondale and spend a great deal more time at Rose Bay, in the factory, because business was booming.

When he did that, I no longer was required at Avondale Golf Club. And Keith suggested, he said, would you like to come out to Rose Bay and get involved in the factory? I didn't really, but I didn't have any options. I still had a position with the Clarks at Rose Bay, so I went out and it was a real problem because I lived at Turramurra. I used to have to walk a mile from my home to the station, get a train from Turramurra to Wynyard, and from Wynyard I used to walk up to King Street and I used to get on the tram and ride all the way out to Rose Bay, and then coming back of an evening the same thing was required.

I was there for seven years. I was still very keen to become a professional, but the brought in a rule at that particular time that anybody who worked for a manufacturer making golf clubs such as Dunlops or Slazengers, or East Bros. could not become professionals, because they would have been inundated with all the fellows. You had to spend your time at a golf course . . . a registered golf course, with a registered pro. Well, I was there for seven and a half years, still trying to get out and become a professional.

Now, Jimmy McInnes took over the job at Royal Sydney Golf Club from Jimmy Adams who went back to England. Jimmy Adams didn't like the Australian conditions, and his contract was up after a couple of years and he made his way back to the U.K.. Jimmy McInnes at that time was pro at Killara Golf Club and someone approached him to come to Rose Bay for an interview.

Anyway, he got the job, and when he that job, David Mercer who worked for Jimmy at Killara transferred to Rose Bay but he only had three more months of his time to complete, then he would have become a professional, which meant there was an opening for me.

And I rushed over and I had a few words with Jim. I told him I'd appreciate very much if he might consider me as an employee. I was a good tradesman; I could make golf clubs, and I could play golf. So he said "We'll give you a trial run", and after the first week he said "You've got the job."

I was so keen, but I was very methodical – I'm a Virgo funnily enough, and I've got to have everything nice and tidy and clean, and that was really appreciated by Jim because it was a big job.

There was about 700 sets of golf clubs that the members used to keep in the pro shop, and maintain them, and every time they used them naturally they wanted them cleaned, and that required quite a lot of work. But Jim had a book . . . , he had to have a bookkeeper, another trainee professional, and two other people to keep the clubs in spick and span order.

And from there – let me think – I spent my two years there at Rose Bay, and my first tournament was at Rose Bay Golf Club – the Royal Sydney Cup – and you wouldn't want to know, I went out and I won it with Billy McWilliam. I shot 73-72, and that really helped. I got my name in the paper.

From there – I was very, very happy with Jimmy because I was earning a great wage. I think I was getting £24 a week, which was better than the average. And I loved the conditions. I had a little flat at Bondi, in Campbell Parade, and I could walk to work, and play golf, and I could walk home. I could play the first three holes, and then I only had a two minute walk from the fifth hole at Rose Bay to my little flat at Bondi in Campbell Parade. So those conditions were just wonderful.

From there, Moss Vale Golf Club in the Southern Highlands. Their pro had just resigned, Geoff Gough, and I was . . . I loved the Southern Highlands very much, I've met my wife here, and when the job came up, I got on the train and come up to Moss Vale for an interview, and I got the job.

Just digressing a wee bit, while I was at Rose Bay too, I was beaten by a stroke for the NSW Close Championships at Goulburn, and I won a pro purse at Goulburn – they used to call it the Goulburn 500. It was worth £150, but in those days it was quite a considerable amount of money, funnily enough. Today, it wouldn't buy you chips, would it?

So, from there, I transferred from Jimmy McInnes to Moss Vale Golf Club being a professional. Well, it was a disaster. From the time I started, the retainer was only £5 a week. The membership of the club . . . where we used to have probably 120 players at Royal Sydney Golf Club, Moss Vale used to have twenty. And I had a pro shop full of gear that I'd bought from sporties (?) in Sydney, and there was just . . . it wasn't possible to make money from those sort of numbers.

I got permission to transfer some of my time between Bundanoon and a club here in Bowral also. Like it was a big guest house, but they used to have people that wanted tuition and that enabled me to get some extra money from those two positions. But the job just became worse, and I put in my resignation, and they said "Look, would you like to take over the catering to make some more money"? and I said "Look, I didn't come up here as a caterer, I came up here as a pro."

But I love the area, and I said "Look, I'll give it a go." And from that point, it still wasn't possible to make a living, and I had just got married at that point and had a three month old baby. Then the rains came, and it rained for seven continuous months at Moss Vale Golf Club and consequently – having that much rain – they couldn't get out and mow the fairways, and consequently the fairways grew to about six or eight inches high.

And Dormie House closed. It was a very big guest house next to Moss Vale Golf Club – they closed down. The Baxters – Mr and Mrs Baxter – they had to sack their staff and close down because there was no golfers coming up. Consequently, there was no meals and there was no catering.

And I had a nervous breakdown. I found myself crying. I was in bed with my wife one night, and I just started crying, for no particular reason except that I was frustrated, and not very happy in the position I was in, and with a little baby there . . .

Now, from that, words spreads around, and Jim Eve, who was secretary of the PGA, came up to Moss Vale and he came over to the golf club – he rung to say he was coming, I did expect him – and when he came up, he said "I believe everything's . . . you're not very happy, everything's not going your way," and I said "Well, it's a disaster."

He said "I've just got a request from a club in New Guinea at Rabaul Golf Club. They need a guy that doesn't drink – particularly doesn't drink – because they want him to be the golf club professional, look after 15 native on the course," they had a lovely little golf course at ????????? airstrip, "and manage the bar."

So he had to be the professional, look after the course, and manage the bar. He said "It sounds good, but do you think you could handle it?" I said "Well there's only one way, is to get up there and see how things go."

So they . . . I didn't have the money, the club paid my £70 it cost QANTAS to fly from Sydney to Moresby, then over to Rabaul. Anyway, the club paid the £70. I was up there for a fortnight, and I rung my wife to say "Pack your gear." It was just a great job, and I felt I could handle it.

They said the most important thing you've got to do for us was showing 17½% in the bar. And they explained to me, with a bottle of whisky, if you sold 26 nips out of a bottle of whisky, you'd show

47% profit, but the club was only showing 17% . . . 17½%. A lot of the club committee members all had a key to the store room, and you can imagine what happened. So Dudley Jones said we do expect to show at least 40% profit if it's managed correctly.

So I changed all the locks with everything. I had just that one key, and I was the only one that could get into the store room. Anyway, after a period of about nine months, the annual meeting was coming up at the golf club, and Dudley Jones, who was the president, he explained to me why they should show this percentage. He said it's terribly important that we've got to trade because of what . . . gang mowers to renew, we've got 16 mowers . . . see you had to cut the greens every day in Rabaul because of the rain, the prodigious growth. You had to have a lot of equipment problems, and this would alleviate that.

So after the nine months was up, there was an annual meeting coming up and Dudley Jones put a lovely letter on the notice board to the effect that due to Edgar Oakman now being now our professional/manager/curator, we are showing 42½%. Well that was really, really something.

And my wife loved it. She got on with the natives; you had to be on-side with the natives. If you didn't you'd be in big trouble because you relied on their ability to physically work because it was very demanding; 96 degrees, two degrees off the equator, very hot all the time.

We just got on very well with everyone, particularly the natives. They showed a lot of respect to me – the members – and where I was not making any money in Moss Vale, at Rabaul I was banking £32 every Friday into my bank account, so you could imagine how I felt. And from there, I was servicing New Ireland, there was a course at New Ireland, there was one at Booker Passage (??????????????), and one at Guadalcanal down on the Solomons.

And QANTAS used to fly me down there for nothing. Jim Perry, he was the chief pilot, he'd put me on a plane, didn't require a ticket, and I'd fly down to Guadalcanal, spend eight hours there . . . get down there, spend eight hours teaching, and come back home again. New Ireland was the same. And from there I got orders for golf equipment, and golf balls, and a combination of everything, so the whole thing gelled.

But sadly, I wasn't a drinker, and because of that I was losing weight. I came . . . I spent two years, and after a period of two years, you're given three months leave. You require it too, because you want to, sort of, come south and spend some time under normal conditions.

And after a period of four years, I was eight stone three, I think, and a German doctor up there, he said "Edgar, I think you'd better get yourself back to Australia. New Guinea doesn't agree with you." But four years was quite a long time, and my daughter was growing up, and we had chool problems and a combination of other things.

But, from there, I came back to Sydney, and at that particular time, there was very little work available in Sydney for pros. There was just a recession on, there was a credit squeeze, and things were not good.

So Jim Eve rung me up again, and he said "There's a guy in New Zealand that's just rung me up to say St Clair Golf Club in Dunedin require a professional. And if you know New Zealand, Dunedin – it gets awfully cold down there. Anyway, I was a little frustrated again, and Jim Eve said "Well, jump on a plane and get yourself over there and see what it's like."

So I went to Dunedin, but after having been there a short period about three months . . . it was bitterly cold. I used to have a field of about 80 to 90, but it was a funny set-up, and I did speak to Jim on the phone funnily enough, and I wrote him a couple of letters to let him know how I was getting along.

I explained to him that I wasn't very happy, and I wasn't prepared to bring my wife and daughter over. It was very hard to get your hands on a New Zealand pound, I can assure you. So my wife and daughter – I had built a home at Peakhurst at that time – and I stayed there for a period of nine months without Joan and my daughter, and Katoomba Golf Club in the Blue Mountains, they wanted the services of a pro.

They'd never had one, and Leura Golf Club had one, and they were showing a great deal more interest, and Jim Eve said "Katoomba Golf Club's available." He said "I'll put a word in for you.", and I got an interview, and luckily I got the job. So that enabled me – I had the job before I left New Zealand – they said the job's yours. Anyway, I came back to Sydney, went to Katoomba, and I was there for a period of – I think ten years, which I enjoyed very, very much. Loved the mountains, absolutely loved the mountains. I used to spend five days at the business, working the job, one day in the garden at home, and one day – we'd get in the car of a morning about 6:30, Joan and I, and we'd just go – discover the mountains. There's so many beautiful places, but you have to walk everywhere. And we discovered places that a lot of people . . . bushwalking was just starting to lose favour. People had motor cars and they were riding rather . . . Where the guest houses in Katoomba pre-war used to have, probably, a thousand people at any one time, and they would get out and walk. They would walk out of the Narrow Neck . . . so many beautiful places to go, and I love Katoomba.

Then a job came available at Nelson Bay, and my wife had a sister at Nelson Bay. She had some flats there. And she said "You know, we're due for a change, we'll try Nelson Bay." Geoff Elliott, president, come up to Katoomba prior to this and explained this, and he said "We're going to get a professional – would you like to come up?"

I had a good reputation for one reason. I didn't drink and I didn't socialise with the members, because you've really got a problem if you socialise with some and not others. I didn't drink and I didn't socialise, but I was a good pro. I was there from eight o'clock in the morning until dark, and I was reliable and I could play golf. Anyway he said "Come to Nelson Bay. It's a good course, big numbers."

Anyway, I resigned from Katoomba and went to Nelson Bay. But after a period of about four years, we just missed the mountains so much, and Wentworth Falls Golf Club was not real popular because it had a funny little old clubhouse which was a private home, but too small, no amenities, but the course was quite good.

Now, Wentworth Falls had a president, he was a bank manager. I just forget his name, he was killed in that big rail crash at Auburn. Was it at Auburn?

CM: Granville, was it Granville?

EO: Granville. He was killed in the Granville . . . but he encouraged them to dump the old clubhouse, spend some money, make a splash of it, build a beautiful clubhouse, and they could improve the course. Well the clubhouse was outstanding. It had everything. It had a little billiard room, and it was sitting on a hill, and it was just a lovely sort of environment. And they had everything that opened

and shut: hot and cold showers, locker room. And they had a Chinese family, Mrs. Ho and her daughter and two sons. Well they were great caterers, and at that particular point in time, Chinese, everyone was Chinese crazy. They used to have three sittings every Saturday and Sunday night, they were so popular, and they did so very well.

Anyway, I went to Wentworth Falls, loved the job, best job I've ever had really. Five days a week at the golf club, one in the garden at home, one get in the car and just go. We used to go to Mudgee, and Orange, and Bathurst and all over the place. But we spent a great deal of time just walking the tracks. We just . . . we both loved the bush and what it offered, you know. It was a good break away.

The days were pretty long. We used to walk (work?) from daylight to dusk really. And with daylight saving too, you'd have equipment out, buggies and golf clubs, and you'd have to wait until they came in. But I was there for 14½ years. Loved it.

And my wife, coming from Bowral, had horses, always had a desire to have horses. So we had a lovely garden at Wentworth Falls too, it was outstanding. It was just a magical garden. WE put about eight ton of stone in it. It was a terraced garden, it had three levels. Still there – a place called Wycherley. Now, from Wycherley you could see the Harbour Bridge in Sydney. It was right up the top of Blaxland Rd.

It's named Blaxland Rd because William (sic), Blaxland and Lawson walked the same road, or the same ridge, that the road is on today. It's called Blaxland Rd, and our house was right at the top of Blaxland Rd. And I was I think about 14½ years there. I met a mate, he was just a magical man with stone, and I knew the three agents in the town, the real estate agents, and to get the stone we required, anyone who owned a block of land and wanted it cleared for foundations for a home to go on wanted it cleared, and in the clearing process, there was a lot of rock available wasn't there.

So we were able to get all the stone locally, and we needed a lot of stone to terrace and stabilise the garden. And I'm a bit keen on Japanese style gardens where you prune everything and keep everything in proportion so the property . . . you can't put a tree in and allow it to grow, and grow and grow and grow, because if you say "Stop" they don't know, they don't hear, they just keep growing. And it was just a magical garden.

Anyway, we had an offer from a couple which we didn't take any notice of at the time. I was walking the dog one evening, and you wouldn't want to know what happened, I passed a real estate agent. And in the photo there was just the most lovely property. I'm just digressing a bit now.

When we lived at Katoomba and Wentworth Falls, we used to go down on the river at a place called Secret Place because it really was secret. It was just a lovely spot. We used to spend a great deal of time there. When my daughter was young, she used to have school friends, and we used to go down there quite a lot and have a little picnic and walk along the river. One of the lasses that used to go with my daughter came up to Nelson Bay once and said to me when she was much older and married with a couple of kids, she said to me "Didn't we used to have lovely times down at Secret Place." And that was really something.

Anyway, I walked past the real estate agents, and here's the photograph of Secret Place. I came home, and I thought about it, and I said to Joanie "Go down to Sproule's, and have a look what's in the front window."

Well she went down, and we were able to go down, we got access to the property, and it was just magic. It was 100 acres, and we could run some horses, and Joanie just loved horses. So we sold

Wycherley and went down to Tilga – the name of the property was Tilga – it was only 100 acres. It was too mountainous to have sheep . . . or not big enough anyway. But sadly, we had five years of drought, and with animals, you've got to feed them, look after them every second day to make sure they're maintained, they have broken a limb or fallen down a hole or whatever.

So from that point, we'd had enough of six years down at Tilga – we still used to go to Secret Place which was still lovely – but we decided at that point to go back to Wentworth Falls, which we did. We then stayed at Wentworth Falls for 4 ½ years, and one day when I was doing the garden, my wife said to me "Would you consider going back to Bowral?" and I said "Well, you know . . ."

She just always loved Bowral, and had a lot of school friends still here Renie Smith and Sylvia Holborough, and they had a reunion here, and 44 women from the primary school came back to the reunion. I think it was about 37 years after or forty years after – I forget which. She came back to the reunion and made a lot of connections, so we decided to sell out at Wentworth Falls and came back to . . .

We bought in Braeside Avenue in Bowral, and sadly, my wife passed away three or four years ago, so that's basically my story.

CM: A remarkable story.

EO: Been very lucky really, I have.

CM: How old were you in 1947 when you did start out?

EO: Seventeen.

CM: And you retired . . .

EO: Kel Nagle, he rung up Keith and said we've got a guy up here, Keith rung Kel Nagle actually and said "Kel, are there any young guys up there that are looking for a job?" And Kel said "I'll send you a guy down, he can play golf." And I could play golf.

I had a 73 at Pymble when I was thirteen, as a caddy.

CM: Did you play in any other tournaments, other than the ones you mentioned?

EO: Yeah, I played in tournaments at Rabaul – the New Britain Open. Won the New Britain Open in 58, 59, 60, 61.

CM: What sort of purse was there for the prize?

EO: Oh, something paltry. I think about . . . it was still pounds then, wasn't it? When did decimal currency . . . yes, it was still pounds then. I think about £250, which was yeah . . . yeah. It was put up by the brewery funnily enough, the brewery put the money up. They wanted us to put a unit in to sell their beer.

CM: And when you were working as a golf club professional, when you actually were doing golf club work, I know you managed the bar in . . .

EO: Rabaul

CM: . . . in Rabaul, but what sort of jobs did you do as a golf pro – you did . . .

EO: Well you maintained the course, and that was terribly important because the greens . . . being very, very . . . it used to rain about 300 inches per year, and the heat, so the grass . . . You'd cut the grass of a morning at eight o'clock and by midday it would be half and inch long, and by four o'clock it would be an inch long. The heat factor you see.

CM: Different in Australia, was it?

EO: Beg yours?

CM: Was it different in Australia with the grass?

EO: Oh, entirely different, and a different grass. Funny enough, we introduced a grass up there. From Queensland, Queensland Blue Couch which was just wonderful grass for greens – no good for fairways, but great for greens. But I enjoyed it because I improved the course so much with introducing bunkers and establishing new tees, and changing it a wee bit and improving it.

I shot a 62 at Bowral, I'm sorry, at Rabaul! One Saturday – I remember – I played with the local chemist – I just had one of those days where everything went in the hole. Now that particular place now is under two metres of pumice dust. We lived very near a volcano – Vulcan – and it blew up.

But my wife and I lived at the golf course, we had a house there, it was rent free. They gave you a house, and a house boy, and a cook boy, and a wash boy. Sadly, they were exploited terribly I felt. They were given five and fourpence a week, which was so sad. Anyway, that's history now.

Levers had a lot of control over . . . they used to employ 200,000 natives for all their plantations, all their coconut plantations for making soap. And they just had it tied up. We weren't allowed to give them a rise or anything, just . . . wouldn't matter how bright or brilliant they were, you couldn't give them a rise, which was so sad.

Because you could train them, you could train them to do anything. They had the ability, it was just a matter of you spending the time. And once you learned Pidgin English and you could talk to them in their language, you were home and made, particularly if you were fair to them. They knew the difference between being called a black bastard and a European who treated them properly. And they used that expression quite a lot - "You black bastard" – and any native who was spoken to in that manner, they would mark that European, and they would then mark his car while he was in at the movies. So you needed their assistance to survive up there – I realised that very early, and I was on very good terms with them.

I was invited back to Rabaul in 1970 by the golf club to come and play in the New Britain Open, because I'd won it four years in a row, and when I was up there I went and visited six of the natives that used to work with the club, and Tiopa – when I went to his village – he saw me coming, and he started to cry.

Old Tiopa, you could trust him to do anything. If you wanted the greens cut early, he'd come down with the truck to the boong, he'd get on the early truck, the six o'clock truck, and he'd be out there cutting the greens at quarter to seven, just on daylight. Great worker.

CM: Did the role of a golf professional change in Australia from when you started to when you finished?

EO: Oh dramatically, dramatically.

CM: Could you tell me how please?

EO: Beg yours?

CM: Could you tell me how please?

EO: Attitude. The attitude. Yes. Professionals, when they played at Rose Bay Golf Club in one tournament, were not allowed in the clubhouse. Gary Player's wife wasn't allowed in the clubhouse. And this has come in in the mid 60's - even then they were very snooty.

Jimmy Adams was a pro in England, and when Fred Popplewell – the old gentleman who retired, he was 60, he retired – someone went to Royal Mid Surrey and saw Jim Adams. Now he left Australia because his wife walked through, from the front door, through the clubhouse, through the dining room down to the pro shop to see her hubby. He was reprimanded, and his wife was told not to make entry to the clubhouse. So it was just an attitude, and the pros were looked down as second class citizens really. Yeah. A real attitude towards . . . wasn't very conducive to good relationships. But sadly that's all gone now, and some of the pros can become members of the club.

But we knew our place, and had to stay there. I was a caddy at Pymble as a young guy, and we were put in a little compound. And that was at the end of the Depression – 1938 – and there was probably half a dozen forty year old men in there. Weren't allowed out until we got a job. But professionals were not . . . they were . . . told their place. Yeah. But attitudes have changed in many respects, to many things socially, haven't they. Not just golf professionals. Tradesman's entrance.

CM: Could you tell me about your collection? Your famous collection.

EO: My golf club?

CM: Your golf . . . your golf collection.

EO: Yeah. You mean where I got it from?

CM: Yeah – anything you can remember about it.

EO: Oh, there's so many. I think I gave Tommy over 100 clubs.

CM: Tom Moore?

EO: Beg yours?

CM: Tom Moore you mean?

EO: I gave the establishment . . . yeah . . . the museum. Well Tommy was . . . he had his eye on them, and he knew that I had them see. And that was the only logical place for them to go, but acquiring them no – there was just too many. Funnily enough, the best one, and the oldest one, and the one that had more character, and more meaning, because it was a one off was made in . . . by Auchterlonie in Scotland, I picked up for ten shillings.

CM: Where did you get it?

EO: I got it at an auction at Springwood. Someone told me they'd been to the . . . they had a look at the auction prior to the auction, and there was a couple of old golf clubs there. Well, I went down to Springwood from Katoomba, which was about 20 mile, and I waited and bidded (sic) my time, and then I put my hand up. I was the only one really required who understood the significance of it. And

it really was significant because it was an old, long, elongated, very, very good condition. It hadn't been used a great deal, it was intact, and it was just a great golf club.

CM: Do you remember the year that you bought it at auction?

EO: I was at Katoomba, so it would have been – ah – probably mid-sixties, yeah, definitely mid-sixties. I can remember bringing it home and looking at it and it required a little bit of attention, but I just put linseed oil on the timber, and waxed the binding, and it still looked very original, and it was if no one had tampered with it in any way, or tried to . . .

See, with an old object you must not try and do it up. The older it looks, the better it looks – like a piece of furniture. You can't do an old antique up, you've got to do it down (laughs). You know what I mean? It's like an old motor car, you can't do an old motor car up, you've got to do it in that era. And a lot of people did that to old clubs, and they tried to make old ones . . . they put them on the buff, and they were never, ever designed for buffing up. They were just designed . . . you kept them oiled to stop the rust, and you linseed oiled the timber, and you made sure the grip was sound. You could rewind a grip you see - you could take it off and rewind it, and that made it more secure and, ah . . .

Anything old appealed to me because I realised the guy that started with an anvil and a hammer and he made a golf club out of a piece of steel that long – fashioned it into a golf club. And there were never two the same, where today they just use a gun and inject mold them now – it goes in molten. Every one was made with a hammer and a tool, and they hand forged them.

CM: Where do you think he made it?

EO: Beg yours?

CM: Where do you think he made it?

EO: Somewhere . . . probably Carnoustie. A lot of the clubs were made at Carnoustie.

CM: Is that in Scotland?

EO: In Scotland yes, up on ahh – not far from St Andrews, up near Dundee. They were all made . . . all the pros had the ability to make golf clubs. They knew what was required because they were pros. They knew how to hit a ball low, and how to hit it high. And see, if you had a golfer who hit the ball to the right, you could make it so it was toed in, and it didn't go to the right – it went straight. You called it toed-in, or laying off on the sole. And if a guy hit a ball very badly to the left, you could make a club not straight, but like that so it didn't accentuate as much on the left, you see? And all these things came into play.

I was so interested, and there were so many of them. You know, the Forgans, the Auchterlonies, oh it goes on and on and on and on. And most of them have got . . . pipe brand Stewart was another beautiful brand. Carnegie Clark made some beautiful golf clubs here at Rose Bay. He had six guys working for him. See there were no Slazengers or Dunlops, there were just the pros. And they were just flat out. Good tradesmen, too.

CM: Were there any other golf clubs that stand out from the collection that you gave?

EO: Yes there were. There was, there was a guy from South Australia, I know . . . the name's on the tip of my tongue, I just can't place it . . . he won an exhibition in England, and there was a big exhibition in England, and he sent two clubs over and won first prize. Yeah.

Carnegie Clark knew a great deal about golf clubs, and the timber used for golf clubs. He used to buy the best, and make some of the best clubs, and the most expensive at the time.

Big difference between a lady and a gentleman. A ladies shaft had to be lighter, much more flexible, thinner grips because their hands were smaller. Big men he had much thicker grips, heavier, much stiffer shaft. All those things come into play. And most clubs were made – tailor made – for the customer.

If a lady came in, or a junior came in, or a big guy come in, they knew how to make the clubs to suit that person. See, clubs weren't matched. You bought a driver, a brassie, a spoon, then you had the irons. The long irons were from two iron right through to the eight iron. And niblicks, mashies, driving irons. And a lot of them had the name stamped on the club. All hand made – yeah - very, very interesting.

And that's where I really became . . . I appreciated the significance of them because - when Fred Popplewell resigned at Rose Bay - there were lots of clubs that were in the pro shop that belonged to people that had died, and they no longer required them because steel shafts had come in. No one wanted the old ones.

CM: What year would this have been?

EO: Nineteen . . . precisely?

CM: Or approximately.

EO: Ah . . . just bear with me for a moment. I can remember when Tom Pop . . . he was the brother of the pro at Pymble, the pro at Pymble was . . . sorry, was Tom Pop, and the pro at Rose Bay was Fred Popplewell. He was Australian Open champion, a very good golfer, too.

I would say mid-fifties, mid-fifties, fifty-six, just before Jimmy Adams came out from England. Fifty-six, fifty-seven. I'm pretty sure that's very close to that particular time.

CM: Did you buy those old golf clubs?

EO: They burnt them! They burnt them! A lot of them were burnt. No one required . . . no one 'realised the significance of what they were doing. But there were a lot of other golf clubs, but sadly, a lot of them were burnt. 46:09.

Clark saw a lot of them because Tom . . . Fred Popplewell brought some of them over, and the ones he brought over were very different. They had bamboo shafts, and there were some rutters and different clubs that were made . . .

The rutter's an interesting club. I bought a photograph - not a photograph, a lithograph. Do you know what a lithograph is? It's a painting about 18 inches by about a foot in size. I went to an auction and there was this lithograph of a painting, and it showed four women on the first tee at an old place in England. Tommy – I gave it to Tommy Moore, the lithograph, it's in the museum today.

I bought that solely because in the far distance in the lithograph was a horse and cart barely discernible. You could determine it because there was a little square which was the cart, and a little

animal in front which was the horse. And when they had these vegetable gardens there, they used to go to the beaches and load up the cart with seaweed. It was a great fertiliser for the vegetables.

Now, coming back from the beach the carts were very heavy, and along the sandy fairways, when they drove the horse and cart over the fairway at right angles to the tee they used to leave a big rut, like the heavily . . . you know what a rut is? Well, if a ball got in a rut, you couldn't get it out because it was just a narrow strip, but it was . . .see it was depressed, the ball would go down . . . so they made a special club to fit the rutter! I gave Tommy four of them. Great.

CM: And they were from England?

EO: Oh yes, yes.

CM: Did that sort of thig happen in Australia? At coastal courses?

EO: No, ah no. As I say, I bought it because I realised the significance of the horse. See that club there? That club was made because it could get the ball out of the rut where no other club could. See, they were very heavy, like the sand iron. But they were so shaped, that they fitted the rut, but the other ones were longer and they didn't. So that's the significance of that, that particular (unintelligible), yeah.

CM: Would those sorts of clubs ever have been used in Australia?

EO: Oh yes, yes.

CM: So when would golfers have used those?

EO: Well they would have used those prior to the sand iron. See a sand iron is heavy. It's got to hit down in the sand, displace it, where you couldn't use a normal club because they were too sharp, and the club would go down like a spade, where the rutter would actually skid (demonstrates with hands). Yes – there you go. That was prior to the sand iron.

CM: Any other sorts of clubs that you remember in particular that . . . from you collection?

EO: There were clubs that were made . . . there's a shot in golf, instead of hitting the ball with the club head, your timing was out and you used to use . . . you used to hit it with the shaft, and . . . that used to call it a socket.

They then made a club that was reverse of the standard club. And the socket was out of alignment, and you couldn't possibly have a socket because of the design of the club. Yes – quite odd. Very odd looking visibly, it was back to front in other words. But you couldn't socket it.

And there were special driving clubs . . . yeah.

CM: When did you start your collection?

EO: Oh gee . . . ummm. Tom Popplewell was at Pymble. I used to scout balls for him because I had very sharp eyes.

See, during the war, golf clubs, you couldn't get . . . golf balls, you couldn't get golf balls. Now . . . remind me to tell you a story about golf balls too, it goes on and on and on . . . When he gave a lesson, I had a little old bag, a canvas bag, and in the bag was 25 balls. When he gave a lesson to a pupil, I had to bring back 25 balls . . . right? What was this leading up too . . . ?

CM: You were telling me about golf balls . . .

EO: Yes.

CM: . . . and when you started your collection.

EO: Well he gave me a little club, and I could chip the balls – rather than pick them up – I'd have a little flag on the fair(way) and I'd chip the balls, then I'd have them all together by the time he was finished. I would put them in a bag, and I had to bring back 25 every time. If I lost one, I had to go down and stay there 'til I found it.

Another story alluding to golf balls. At Rose Bay Golf Club, prior to it being a golf club – this is the situation that Royal Sydney now has as the Royal Sydney Golf Club – was a big Chinese market garden. Massive – used to supply a lot of Sydney markets.

Now, if you've ever seen a Chinese market garden, they always introduced flax. New Zealand flax. It stands about six foot high the leaf - vertically - straight up out of the ground. Now, where you have water and flax, you have a source . . . the Chinese used to do their . . . all their vegetables up in little baskets. Now, how did they tie the baskets up? With the flax.

If you cut a length of flax, you could make – like – a string out of it. Follow? Now, when they then purchased the land from the Chinese . . . ummm . . . they then built a golf course. And they had an 18 hole golf course for the men, and they had . . . and the ladies, and they had a nine-hole short course.

Until you progressed from the short course, you couldn't get on the long course. You had to reach a standard of golf, you see. Now on the second tee at Rose Bay on the short course, was adjacent to this great . . . ahh . . . section of flax. Now a lot of people early . . . in the early years . . . hit their golf balls into the flax . . . and very, very hard to find. Very hard to actually get in the flax.

Well one day, I gave a lesson to someone and they hit a couple of balls on the edge of the flax, and when I'd finished the lesson, I went over with my club and started to hit the ball, a couple of balls that went into the flax, and the couple that came out weren't my modern golf balls.

They had funny designs on them! And the first couple I saw I picked up and I couldn't believe it. I'd never seen a maple leaf design, and I'd never seen a shamrock design. I realised there was a lot of balls. I went down there and picked up – I would say – 80, 90 balls. And they'd been there for, for 50 years. In the flax, didn't deteriorate, hadn't been used.

And that's the array of balls I've given Tommy. I gave him . . . must have given him about 60. Some of the very old balls, he'd never seen some of them before, Tom.

CM: Could you identify them from the patterns, and the markings?

EO: Oh yes. Well Tom's got a lass working for him, in conjunction with the heritage group, and I spent a couple of hours with her once, and I went through every ball with her. The make, the era; and they were extremely interesting because, see, some of the very wealthy people from Rose Bay used to travel around the world by ship, you know, they were very wealthy and they had the means. And they would have purchased balls, they would have purchased balls from – probably – Scotland, England, America, Canada, on their way. And they brought them back. That's the only . . . there's no other source. You couldn't . . . the pros couldn't buy balls from overseas.

So that was interesting wasn't it? That's how they came there. These wealthy people brought the balls back with them, and they gradually lost one or two at a time, and over the period of years, that's how I acquired them.

CM: What years . . . what do you think the oldest ball was that you had?

EO: Just after the featherie.

CM: Did you get any featheries ever?

EO: No, no. Never . . . I never . . . I was . . . they were about 30 years before my time, I think. I think they came out about 1914. But I never . . . they were very precious then, and a lot of them disintegrated. If you didn't hit the ball properly, and had a sharp iron, sometimes you broke the casing and the feathers came out, and they weren't repairable.

There was a real . . . you had to be a specialist to be able to . . . I believe, if you had a top hat and filled it with feathers, you had to get that . . . all those feathers in that little ball. You gradually force it in, force it in, force it in, force it in. And that top hat, that was the right amount of feathers to make a ball. See, a ball had to be a specific size – 1.62 inches in diameter, and 1.62 ounces weight wise.

CM: Those balls, they would have been in Australia wouldn't they, up until about 1914, coming from England?

EO: Oh yes.

CM: Were they ever made in Australia?

EO: I think Clark's could make balls. He introduced . . .

CM: That's the featheries.

EO: They were featheries, yes.

CM: What about the Haskell ball?

EO: Well that was something like . . . it was just like . . . another . . . it was just something unbelievable. It was so good. The Haskell ball was a wound ball. There was a sack of liquid lead in the middle about as big as a marble, and they were wound, and wound, and wound with a thread, very fine, and that give them the ability to sort of – how should I put it? You had to compress the ball to make it go – follow? But it always retained its shape, because it would come back into shape. And they, gradually the Yanks then improved on it. I don't know a great deal about the Haskell ball.

CM: Did you ever collect any?

EO: Hmm?

CM: Did you ever collect any? Did you ever collect any Haskell balls?

EO: Ever see any?

CM: Or collect them?

EO: No, no. Not really. They were very . . . they become . . . they made them by mass production, see. So they didn't have any fascination, they were all the same.

CM: Did you have tees in your collection?

EO: Tees? Well, during the war, and prior to the war - when I was about eight – I do remember we had to tee the balls up for the member. And, there was, on a tee, there was a little box. Half of it was water, and half of it was sand. And when the ball got dirty, you put the ball in the water, and you cleaned it in the sand. And then you washed it, you see. Well the sand was also used, you got a little piece of sand, and put the ball on top, before they used plastic tees and wooden tees. Yeah, that was prior to it.

A lot of . . . a really good golfer didn't use a tee. They would just hit the turf with a club and make a little divot, and they'd sit the ball on the top of the divot. And they'd hit it from there. Some of the better golfers never used tees. Yeah.

CM: Even today?

EO: Ah well, there's a . . . Laura, an American . . . sorry English professional, Laura Davies, she just comes up, gets the driver and goes whack into the turf, and raises a divot, and sits the ball and then whacks it. From the old school, she's a traditionalist. She loves everything old. She plays the same way, she can play without tees. No problem.

Do you play golf?

CM: Everyone in my family plays golf, but I don't.

EO: Never mind.

CM: There's time for it – the garage is full of golf clubs.

The tees that were the original ones for the non-traditionalists, did you ever collect any of those and give them?

EO: Yes, I gave Tommy a few. I gave him a couple of boxes of tees, and they were . . . He would have sorted them out. They used to . . . GK Whisky used to make a special. It was made of steel, it was about two inches in an oval shape, and on that was attached a cord, a string to the tee.

So when you put your tee down, you then attached this to the metal, this metal thing. So when you hit it, the tee wouldn't fly away. It would stay in position because of the little metal weight. I gave her some of those. They were G.K. Whisky. I can see them today, red and white they were. G.K. Whisky. And the tee was permanently attached. There was a little hole in the tee. See, sometimes you'd hit, and the tee would fly off. Well you wouldn't . . . the grass was a bit thick, you wouldn't worry too long.

Well see, the Yanks . . . Tiger Woods, they just put . . . don't even pick up the tee. They just leave it in the ground.

CM: Was G.K. Whisky an Australian brand?

EO: I think it was peculiar to Australia.

There were others. I gave Tom a long one – I forget what it was. And it was a keeper too. You couldn't lose the tee. You could use the tee eighteen times, and it would just stay there. See, you can hit a ball cleanly off a tee, and the tee'll stay in the ground. Then other times it won't – it will fly off.

CM: So were these ones that were keepers, were they much more expensive? The ones that you . . . to buy?

EO: Oh, it would have been to buy, but you didn't need many. Follow? They were permanently . . . there was a little hole in them, and they were permanently attached.

CM: About what year would this have been?

EO: '38, '39' 40. During the war.

CM: And before the war, people were building their sand piles to put the . . .

EO: Ah, I'm not too sure. There wasn't a lot of emphasis put on tees. But I must add . . . I must add something here.

When I was young, we used to go over and caddy for certain guys that wanted caddies. You had to walk the 18 holes with a bag on your shoulder with about eight or ten clubs in it, and when you returned the clubs to the pro shop, you were given a ticket for one and nine pence, and the guy that you caddied for gave you sixpence, so you made two and threepence for each time you went around.

But you had to return the clubs to the pro shop before you got paid. You couldn't go round, and come in after three or four holes, and say "Give me the ticket". You had to complete it. Now, I used to caddy in the morning and in the afternoon, and sometimes I could take home to Mum, five shillings. I was one of eleven kids. My Dad was a policeman, so things were pretty tight. Right?

One day, Tom Popplewell said "There's some Americans coming." There's a ship in the harbour, in the Sydney Harbour, and Killara Golf Club and Pymble Golf Club have contacted the Navy, the American Navy, and they've explained to them if anyone on board plays golf, they're very welcome to come to Killara or Pymble Golf Club. We have shoes, a certain amount of shoes for them with spikes, and we've got golf clubs and golf balls.

This Sunday, this group came up. There was about eight of them. And one of them was an American negro, he was about six foot. I was lucky enough to caddy for him. He was the best golfer I'd ever seen.

He hit the 11th at Pymble in two, which was about five hundred and sixty yards long. Now no one ever – locally – had ever gotten anywhere near the 11th at Pymble in two. This guy cantered, got on the green in two.

But when he came in, he gave me a packet of gum . . . a carton of gum, and a packet of Lucky Strike cigarettes. Now I was about 12 at the time. Well, the Yanks came into the war in '41, and they were at Guadalcanal in '42. Anyway, you know what he then did? He pulled out his wallet, and he gave me a ten shilling note!

Now that, that blew me away, even as a young kid of 12. That really . . . ten shillings where I'd been getting two and threepence! This guy gave . . . I remember grabbing the ten shilling note, putting my hands around it. I ran all the way from Mona Vale Road at Pymble to Kuringai Avenue Turramurra, to Mum.

When I got home, I opened the door and said "Mum, look what the man gave me!" She immediately got on the phone, and rang up Tom Popplewell. She said "Mr. Popplewell, Edgar's just came home.

Now, he's got a ten shilling note. Where did he get it?" And Tom Pop explained this Yank. So, it was a changing scene from then on.

And that was the first time I'd ever seen a big Yankee golf ball. They had their own golf balls. An American golf ball was one point . . . ours was 1.62, and theirs was 1.82. It was just a bigger ball.

CM: Was this fellow a professional, or just a good player?

EO: No, just a good player. I didn't even know his name. But he was a negro, and he used to put his hand around me walking up the fairway, around my shoulder. They were special . . . the Yanks were so friendly – oh boy – and they were so smart.

They had their own laundries! And dry cleaning! And they used to come up, and everything was pressed. No wonder the girls went for them. Poor old Yankee digger couldn't get near, couldn't get to first base. That was a real . . . that was something. Ten shillings! See, you could buy a loaf of bread for four shillings, pint of milk was threepence. Ten shillings!

CM: With the golf bags – were they in your collection?

EO: I picked them up also at different places. Things were thrown out, people didn't realise the significance of that era. Little Sunday bags.

CM: What was a 'Sunday bag'?

EO: Well, they used them on a Sunday. They didn't use as many clubs, and they didn't need a caddy. They were small and they'd only put maybe four or five clubs in them. They weren't big enough to accommodate a lot of clubs.

CM: How many of those did you give to the Museum?

EO: I gave Tommy two very old ones; one was made by Plotkin. I'd say about probably the '30s, somewhere in the '30s. I just picked them up by chance because people were throwing them out. And Plotkin . . . there's a name still on the bag. He was probably one of the better . . . He used to copy anything that came in from America.

CM: He was an Australian manufacturer?

EO: He used to . . . hmm?

CM: Was he an Australian manufacturer?

EO: Yes, he was Australian. He used to make handbags, overnight bags, and also some very good . . . I can remember Keith Clark gave me a bag from Plotkin for a Christmas present when I was at Rose Bay. I was stuck there for seven years, and I hated it because I wanted to get out on that golf course, the fresh air.

I was working in a terrible environment. We had a lot of sandpapering to do, and no extractors. Spraying, circular, Duco – no extractors, no masks, no nothing. Before Labour and Industry started to tidy the production lines up.

CM: Any other interesting bags that you collected?

EO: No, they'd become so numerous, and bags were just bags. You know.

CM: Would the Sunday bags have been made of leather?

EO: No, they were all made of canvas, they were too small. Very light, see. Canvas bags were much lighter than a . . . if you had a big bag, and you had fourteen clubs, you could carry two, but you couldn't carry three or four. With a Sunday bag, you could carry four.

CM: And the caddy would carry around four?

EO: I had no trouble carrying four. Two on each shoulder, and you'd walk straight down the fairway and give each one the club that they required. You knew the distance. You know. They used to . . . Dick Hadfield used to say to me "What do you think Edgar, five iron or six iron?" And it was always safer to be short rather than through, so I used to say "Six iron."

CM: What about golf buggies?

EO: Here's an interesting story. When I went to Avondale, there was a very nice guy there, but he was very flamboyant, bit of a show pony. He – one day – flew to America. Hadn't seen him for about three months. He must have been over there on business, I just forget his name funnily enough. Nice guy, very friendly.

He came back with the first BagBoy we had ever seen. That was the first one, Avondale Golf Club. He came back with the first set of nylon rainwear. Prior to that, they were heavy rubberised raincoats. So that was my first introduction to the first buggy, because prior to that buggies just weren't heard of, everyone had caddies. See, the buggy replaced the caddy. Because a lot of guys wouldn't caddy.

It replaced . . . they just put their clubs - wouldn't matter how heavy it was – on a buggy, and this buggy used to fold up. You used to fold it. The wheels used to come in, and the handle used to go down, and used to fold up.

CM: Did you ever collect one of them?

EO: No. no. Not really. They didn't have any appeal, no significance. Tommy may have one or two, I'm not sure. But the BagBoy was the first one that I had ever seen. And they made buggies in Australia, but they couldn't compete with the BagBoy. They were made of aluminium, very light. Lovely big wheels, a wider wheel to which used to ride the turf better. Some of the earlier ones were . . . they used to go . . . on a sandy course, they would make a little rut, yeah if you got in a loose, sandy soil.

But I do remember quite clearly seeing that first buggy this guy bought and he showed . . . he showed it off on the putting green just outside Avondale, outside the bar, and everyone came over to have a look at it.

And the rainwear, that was something else. It was weightless! It was so light. And you could put a hose on it. All these things – see the Yanks were very inventive. So many of them. See, there was about 220 million Yanks during the war, so they were . . . there was a market place out there, and they could invent things.

They used to have think tanks. They'd get in a room and say "How can we improve this? How can we improve this?" Make a bigger wheel so it rides the turf; you know, make it of lighter material; make it so it folds up.

CM: Do you think the Yanks had more impact on golf in Australia than Scotland?

EO: Very much so, yeah.

CM: Why's that?

EO: There were more of them, yeah. And they were very inventive. See the Scottish are very traditional. At Rose Bay, Carnegie Clark Senior – who was the guy that introduced golf to Australia, and club-making – and had the six guys working for him at the pro shop, his son threw a vice at me because I tried to change the stain.

He would just brush the strain on, and when the . . . the stain, and when the wood came out, there was nothing nice to look at. And I realised that if you rubbed the stain in by hand, you got the beautiful patterns of the wood – you know – and you could see it. And one day, I said to Carnie "Why don't you change?" He threw a vice at me! Just missed me too. In a fit of temper. He said "You bloody work here – I'm the boss!" They were remarks. He's dead and gone now, but he was very, very hard to work for.

Strangely enough, Keith was the other way. Keith, he was the guy from Avondale, and they were like chalk and cheese.

CM: Father and son?

EO: Carnie was a nice guy, but he was . . .

CM: Father and son, were they – Keith and . . . ?

EO: Keith was the younger son, and Carnegie was . . . Carnie too. He was the son, the first son of the dad. His name was Carnegie, and the first son was named Carnegie, Carnegie Junior. Junior. And he was pretty toey.

Strangely enough, going to Rose Bay . . . A lot of the Rose Bay guys used to fly to America. The always brought the most modern clubs back with them, particularly MacGregors. Von Nida, Kel Nagle, Peter Thomson – all of them – Bruce Crampton, Bruce Devlin, all very good Australian pros, always came back with MacGregor golf clubs. Why? They were the best.

They had a beautiful shaft, a Tourney shaft, and they had the most beautiful shapes. Deep face drivers, medium face drivers, shallow face drivers – you could get anything from MacGregors. I got a club, with permission from the owner, and I took it over to Carnegie Clark, and I said "You haven't changed in 30 years" and they were losing market place see. Slazengers and Dunlops were copying.

I said "You've got to go to another . . . you've got to change. You're too traditional." But that was inborn in him see, young Carnie. It was part of his persona. He wouldn't change. And Keith and him had an argument down at the pub that night – time for change – and brought another club over and they copied it. Not in every respect, but they made a change to the inlay, and a change to the plate, and the whole thing had more appeal.

And they used to rub the stain in by hand, much lighter stains, and you could see the grain of the timber through the stains. Some of the persimmon woods from America, from Tennessee, had the most beautiful grain. And then from that point, they started to gain a little bit of market place. Yeah.

He never apologised to me, but I'd more or less said to him years prior to this "You've got to change. You've got to change."

CM: Did you ever collect any golf clothing?

EO: No. There was nothing in particular, no. No everyone . . . The Von, von Nida was a great, ah . . . he was very modern, and he was a great dresser. Two-tone shoes, beautiful slacks, lovely shirts or jumpers, lovely berets or a hat. And everyone used to watch The Von. He was a . . . he was something else. Where Nagle was very traditional, low key; Peter Thomson was - ahh – very low key, nothing startling, just very average dressers, but The Von, he was always . . . he was something to see. People would take photographs of him all the time.

He came up and played up at Rabaul. We gave exhibitions up there, yeah. "What are you doing up here, Edgar?" he'd say "What are you doing up here?". I've got a photograph of myself with The Von playing an exhibition there somewhere.

CM: Just going back to the balls, were they . . . did you have any balls from the guttie era?

EO: Gutta percha? The guttie?

CM: Yeah, the guttie.

EO: You know how the guttie came about?

CM: A little bit, but could you tell me more?

EO: Well, there was a very keen golfer in Scotland. He had a brother I think, that was a priest, or something to do with the church. He was in Italy. Now he had a very small statuette of a religious . . . particular religious . . . very significant. And he wanted to give it . . . his brother in Scotland a present.

Now to protect this particular . . . what would you call it . . . a small statuette. Small statuette, about a foot high. He thought "How can I protect this all the way over to Scotland? It's going to get broken." And someone said "Why don't you get some of the gutta percha from the tree, and encase it in that?" And it couldn't be damaged because it was sort of rubberised.

When the guy got the statuette in Scotland, he got a little piece of it and started to fashion it in his hand, and he found it was pliable. Then he made one about the size of a golf ball, about the size of a featherie, took it out and hit it. And it became airborne, and from that, is where the rubber ball basically came from.

Gutta percha was prior to the rubber ball. See, there was the featherie, the gutta percha – I gave Tom a gutta percha – one, yeah.

CM: Is that all you had in your collection, one?

EO: Just one. Very rare – yeah. Someone gave me three or four. In it, was this gutta percha. They didn't realise the significance – they would probably have thrown it in the trash can. But everyone did that – they just threw it away. And I gave it to Tom, he's still got it.

CM: What do you think would be the story behind the gutta percha that you gave to the Museum? What age do you think it would be? What year, where would it have been made?

EO: It was before the Haskell, just prior to that – yes. You see, they went from featherie, to gutta percha, to Haskell. Then they tidied it . . . the Yanks tidied it up and . . . better windings, just modernised it until the solid ball came on the market place, which has ruined everything.

CM: Why is that?

EO: Well it travels such a . . . See, a golf course was made of par threes, par fours, and par fives. Well, the three – the par three – was designed to be hit in one stroke. The par four was designed to be hit in two strokes. And the par five was designed to be hit in three. Well, the rubber ball, you could only hit it so far. You couldn't hit it to the par four. Or the five. You needed two strokes to the par four, three to the par five.

When they brought in the molded ball, you needed an iron to get to the par three, you could hit the par four in one, and you could hit the par five in two. Well, the whole thing became a joke. Follow?

Why can you hit a par five that was designed years ago as three strokes required to get there, and all they want is to make a ball that makes it obsolete. That's why they're hitting 64s and 62s. The ball's got that capability and the modern, the modern golf club, the peripheral weighted club hits the ball so much straighter, because it's got peripheral weight and a shallow section in the middle. If you can middle it, the ball must go dead straight.

It's very hard to hook a ball, or slice a ball with a modern golf club against the old one. It just goes straight.

CM: Do you think – in general terms then – that golfers of a higher standard in the past were generally better?

EO: Well, in the Masters in America, Bobby Jones and another guy designed that course that no par five could be hit in two. It needed three strokes. And they put a little creek in front of them. Now, they're making it now with a wood and an iron. The same hole.

CM: Was there anything else in your collection that you gave to Tom?

EO: I gave him a great deal of magazines. I acquired two very . . . pre-war golf magazines, and they were so informative. And they were American – I forget the name of them, but he's got them. I gave him a lot of modern ones too, but I had a big collection of golf books. They were of the modern era, very few were pre-war. But those two . . . they didn't have magazines on golf. In America they did, but they didn't have much here in Australia except one. Spalding's used to put it out – 'Golf In Australia' they called it. Yeah. Other than that, nothing of much significance. Two common, you could buy them by the hundreds of thousands, they were on a . . . yeah.

But great articles in them too, by great . . . great students of the game. Jonesy from America, and a couple of other pros that were just magicians at teaching, and they could explain it very clearly, and very simply.

Where today, it's so complex. Sam Snead used to say there's a ball and a club, you just hit it. He said it's just like putting your fork in a piece of steak. The steak's on the plate, so you put the fork in it. You'd put the ball down, and you just hit it. That's how good an athlete he was, yeah. He had such a wonderful eye, and just a natural. You just hit it with your right hand if you're a right hander, and hit it with your left hand if you're a left hander. Great. Went and saw him in Melbourne, couldn't believe that I could see him in the flesh. Oh, great athlete. Magical athlete. So flexible.

CM: And what about your teaching? Did you follow that simple sort of principle yourself?

EO: Sure did! Well there's a theory. The modern pros have got wrapped up into so much scientific . . . there's an old saying, 'Analysis breeds paralysis'. And if you analyse it too much, you'll finish up

with not being able to take it back, and through. I've always been one . . . I've seen von Nida, Bobby Locke, a lot of the Yanks.

Bobby Locke was a freak. He came out here when he was British Open champion, and played at Rose Bay Golf Club in an exhibition when I was working in the, in the bloody factory. I should have been on the golf course.

Anyway, Bobby Locke gave an exhibition with The Von, and Tom Popplewell, and Davidson – a very good amateur. I forget his name. He was a tailor by trade, but a great player! And I asked for the afternoon off to go and watch, and they gave it to me.

He was a great player, and he had a funny theory about golf. He said "If you ask me to hit a ball straight, I find it very, very hard." He said "But you ask me to hook a ball, I'll hook it 100 times out of 100." He said "I don't try to hit it straight." He said "I hook it. I aim out there and the ball comes back." But he said "If I tried to hit it straight all day, one would go there, one would go there, and one would go there, but when I hook it . . . ". Does that make sense?

CM: Yes it makes sense. So he would hook it, and it would curve and get to where he wanted it . . .

EO: Exactly!

CM: . . . but when he tried straight, it would go to the left or the right.

EO: Because there was no effort involved in hooking – he could hook all day. If someone at an exhibition said that "Bobby, would you hit a ball straight?", he said "Well, that's the hardest shot I've ever played."

Dead straight, you've got to be precisely at the right angle, to get the right thrust on it. As you hit down, the ball spins up. And it didn't have to have any sideplay on it to hook, or fade. He said "I can hook a hundred out of a hundred", he said "But if I hit ten, I might be lucky to hit on straight."

CM: Can I presume then that when all sorts of gadgets came into Australia, you weren't interested in them for your teaching?

EO: No, there was no gadgets really. I mean hitting a golf ball's quite simple if you understand to do anything – properly – you must see it mentally. Upstairs, in your head. You can't do something if you can't see it. You've got to see prior to doing it to be able to do it, surely.

So the art of teaching from my point of view, I had to paint a picture of the golf swing first. The things that one did to get a result, and the things that were just a fallacy. You had to do certain specific things.

You had to keep your head steady to form a hub. You had to keep your left arm straight to create the arc, and you had to use your right hand to get the terrific thrust that was required to be able to hit a good golf shot. But you had to paint that picture, and then you did it physically so the pupil could see the reason for doing it. If you kept your head steady, and your left arm straight, the club was always brought back to the point where it was taken away from. And that was the most important thing for me.

I had a lot of success in teaching. I taught people to use their hands, because that's the way you hold a golf club – with your hands. And all your feelings toward a swing must be transferred into the

hands. And the hands must be parallel – one faces the target, and the other faces across the target – and they must be kept under control at all times. If you vary those planes, you vary the club.

So consequently, I tried to build a picture by doing it physically first, showing them how to get a result so that you could hit a ball by lifting your head and looking at it. The left arm being firm, the head being kept steady, you brought the club back to the same place most every time, as long as you played within your own capability.

You can't bash a golf ball. You've got to hit it, and you hit it with your right hand if you're right handed, and you hit it with your left hand if you're left handed.

CM: Has membership of the Professional Golf Association changed over time – over the time you've been involved with golf – and what are your thoughts on the Professional Golf Association as a professional body in Australia.

EO: Oh well it's . . . I haven't been involved since I retired from Wentworth Falls Golf Club. I don't know a great deal about it, but they've had some very nice guys like Tommy. Tommy's done so much – he's done enough for ten guys. Neville Wilson, different guys, I think they . . . they had different presidents about every two or three years. They all weighed in there and lent their expertise to making a better PGA.

See, Carnegie Clark started the PGA in the pro shop at Rose Bay. Yes, amazing, isn't it? He got together all the pros – there was Tom Popplewell, Fred Popplewell, but Carnegie Clark was the spokesperson. He realised how important they had to become a stronger body to represent themselves at tournaments, because tournaments were very, very important, and they had a very big tournament at Rose Bay called - I think – the Sun 500.

It was worth £500. That was an amazing amount of money in those days. That was very early in the piece – that was before the First World War. Five hundred pounds! The Sun 500! Yeah.

I was in, always in country clubs – I never had a city club, you see. I was at Avondale for a very short period of time. Then I went from there to Moss Vale, Moss Vale to New Guinea, New Guinea to New Zealand, New Zealand to Katoomba. From Katoomba to Nelson Bay, and Nelson Bay to Wentworth Falls. They were all country clubs, not . . .

So I missed out. Had I been a local, I would have gone to all the meetings because I was an interested person in what was going on. And I'm so sad to think that I can't get involved with Tom, because I live so far away. I find it very hard to get there. But if I lived there, I'd have a key to the front door! I'd be in there – yeah – lending my expertise. Yeah – because I'm one of the few left of my era.

There's not many. There's Tommy, myself, and – well I was before David Mercer and Alec – Neville Wilson's not at all well, so we're disappearing. We're a disappearing tribe. We were a tribe.

CM: Have you maintained your interest in golf since retiring?

EO: Oh, very much so. I never miss reading about . . . oh, very much. I don't go along with the modern . . . the amount they're being paid is obscene I think. So sad to think you can hit a golf ball and earn . . . look at Greg Norman. He's worth a hundred million bucks. You know – crazy.

But that's America. That's the way they do things in the States, so good luck to them! Part of the scene isn't it – like everything's commercialised. Nearly everything's commercialised today, isn't it?

Give a golf lesson - $50. We used to get five shillings. Fifty bucks for a golf lesson – I teach them for free

CM: Do you still teach golf?

EO: Yeah. Got two guys now. One thought he was a left-hander, he's a right hander. I said "Why do you think you're a left-hander?", he said "Because I am." And I knew he wasn't. I said "Here's my whippersnapper." So the first thing he did, he grabbed it with his right hand. I said "Isn't that funny. You just picked up my whippersnapper, but you didn't use your left hand." "Didn't I?" I said "You picked it up with your right. Why?" He said "I think I'm stronger." I said "Well you're a right-hander!"

So straight away, I gave him a set of right-handed golf clubs, and he gave me his left. He's a right-hander, and plays golf right-handed. Richard, my neighbour – great neighbour. He still laughs. He says "Well all those years I played left-handed, and I wasn't left handed." And he's hit shots better right-handed. He says "I've never hit a shot like that if I'm playing left handed." So there you go – it's interesting, isn't it?

CM: Do you still play golf yourself?

EO: I got cancer of the neck, and they cut away a lot of my neck muscle near my . . . underneath, just underneath my ear, and they've upset my . . . with the radio . . . I had six weeks of radiation after my problem with my neck. Caused by the sun, funnily enough. Ultraviolet rays. Didn't wear a hat when I was young. I had lots of hair, and went to New Guinea and never wore a hat. Never realised the importance of protection.

And from that, I had – as I say – a lot of muscle removed in my neck, and I find it very hard to pivot. Plus, when the radiation was effecting me, they got very close to my middle ear, which is your balancing ear, and I can't sort of balance.

When you play golf, you need good balance to transfer your weight. And I've lost all that. I can play an iron shot, but having played well I find it very hard to accept it now. I look at it, and I can't hit it like I used to.

But I had . . . well, you know, I've been blessed. I've had so many great years, and I only had this about ten years ago was I was about 70. I'm 83 now, so . . .

Up 'til I was 70, yes I would still, I used to go over in the park and hit a few balls, and I could still do . . . I'd hit 'em low, I'd hit 'em high, hit 'em left, hit 'em right. Still do it. And I felt it was all with my hands.

And the guy that was beaten by Scotty in the Masters, he's from South America. And a lot of the modern pros – the younger ones – have been taught a different method. Not to use your hands very much. That guy that got beaten by Scotty, that's all he did – was using his hands beautifully.

He'd just take it back, and just go whack, and the others were trying to be mechanical. How can you be mechanical when you're not a mechanic, you're a human. You've got to . . . because when you pick up a club, and choose a club – maybe you're looking for a driver, okay – you want a driver.

See, The Von, and Nagle, and Thomson used to go to America, and look in all the old second hand club shops, looking for MacGregor drivers. And they'd pick one up, and straight away they'd feel it was suitable to them. The shaft was nice and firm . . . so they picked it up with their hands, didn't they?

So what do the hands do? They feel it, don't they? And when you swing a club back, you've got to know exactly where the club is in relation to the ball. You don't feel it through your big toe, or your left ear, you feel it through both your hands.

So I teach people they can only use an 8 iron to start with. They're not able to use anything more powerful because they can't control it, so you throttle 'em right back to taws, and you build it up from miniature.

You gradually . . . as they get better, you build it up. And they just fall into a slot after a while – "Yeah, I can do that. Sure I can."

That's my theory. I see the simplicity of it because all the great players I've ever seen . . . The greatest player I thought was The Von – he could do the most amazing things with a golf ball, with any club. Little feller, about eight and a half stone, nine stone, but very, very strong in the hands. He'd grab your hand, and you'd say "That's enough." He used to be so strong.

And he was a very . . . very much a handy player. Some of the Yanks that I saw that came out to play in the Lakes Cup that played . . . they always come to Rose Bay and gave an exhibition first. There was Clayton Heafner, there was . . . ahh . . . so many. I can't quite think of them at the present time, but they all used their hands beautifully. Yeah.

CM: Did your daughter take up golf?

EO: No. She played basketball at school, but never really interested. It didn't grab her. I gave her one lesson. It didn't appeal to her, so . . . fair enough.

CM: It's often said that golf is a funny game. Why is that?

EO: Well it's contrary to natural instincts, see. To hit a ball high, you've got to hit down on it. You've got to hit down to make it go up. To make it go left, you've got to hit right. And to make it go right, you've got to hit left. But the funniest one is to make it go up, you've got to hit down.

See, if you try to hit a ball by picking it cleanly off the turf, you're not hitting it with the face of the club. You're hitting it with the leading edge which has no angle to create spin. See, golf is like an aeroplane – it's got to have aerodynamics.

And that's why the dimples are there. The dimples grab the atmosphere, and that's what gives it the . . . the thrust. They call it thrust. Okay, to get a ball up, you've got to hit down to create the thrust to get it up. So that's pretty contrary.

Does that fairly . . . does that simplify it for you?

CM: Yes, that's ummm . . .

EO: If you've got a pupil that can't get the ball up, you've got to say to them "You must hit the ball with a descending blow." It's the descending blow that imparts the angle that creates the thrust to get it up. Yeah.

CM: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

EO: Oh, not really. I could go on for ever I suppose, but a lot of it's not pertinent. You know. The game's changing dramatically. The cost, sadly . . . the youngsters can't . . . see, a top grade golf ball is

$8 . . . how can a junior . . . ? And the green fees are twenty bucks or something. How can they afford that sort of money to go out and play golf?

When I was at . . . Moss Vale had juniors. I had 20 juniors at Katoomba. They weren't even charged! The members would allow them to be members for $2 a year. Well, you got a lot of juniors. And they all turned out good golfers. And they all sent me Christmas cards. You know, so it was a good relationship.

And I taught them like I did anybody else. You know – get out and enjoy it. It's a good game. Keeps you busy for four hours. You meet different people. You could play with someone at six years of age, or ninety-six . . . if they can walk round.

Girls, boys, ladies, gents . . . yeah.

CM: Well, thank you very much.

EO: You're more than welcome, pet. It's been nice spending time with you, because the questions you've given me I've been able to answer . . . I hope.

CM: You've answered them brilliantly. In fact, I'd like very much to be able to do another interview – I hope that we can. And thank you so much for giving me your time, and the Australia Golf Heritage Society . . .

EO: It's very lovely for you to come up all the way from the city, to come up here. I'm sorry to think . . . I could have gone down possibly, but I'm not real great in the motor car any more. I walk everywhere now. I find that I've got to pick my . . . I don't get near the Cumberland Highway, I try and duck it. But to get to Tom's is a bit of a . . . to get from here to Tom is an hour and a quarter, and it's a bit of a struggle. But I'll get there . . .

CM: Well, thank you very much, and this is the finish of the third in the series for the Australian Golf Heritage Society Oral History Project.

EO: You're more than welcome. I hope they enjoy it.

CM: They certainly will.

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