# The Australian Golf Heritage Society

# Oral History Project

## Interview No. 1

## Tom Moore

This is Carol McKirdy interviewing Tom Moore on March 15th 2013 at North Rocks 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.

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

**Tom Moore (TM):** Thomas Andrew Moore (spells name).

**CM:** Could you tell me when, and where you were born, Tom?

**TM:** Quirindi, NSW on the 7th of January 1931.

**CM**: And what were your parents' names?

**TM:** My father's names was Cecil Andrew Moore, and my mother's maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Cobbett.

**CM:** Where was your mother born, and when?

**TM:** My mother was born in the Southern Highlands, about 1892.

**CM:** And what about your Dad?

**TM:** He was born in Quirindi, about 1900. Perhaps 1895 – something like that.

**CM:** Where did your parents meet and marry?

**TM:** In Quirindi. And they were married at Green Point at Gosford, in the garden of an old home called Kenmare, which is now a heritage listed cottage.

**CM:** Do you know anything about your grandparents – their names, dates, place of birth, occupation, education, anything like that?

**TM:** Very little. My grandfather was John Augustus Moore, who was a saddler, and he worked for the Australian Agricultural Company based in Quirindi. He was married twice, and his second wife

was Eliza Hill. He died about 1913, I . . . somewhere about there. My grandmother died about 1936-37 in Quirindi.

**CM:** Do you know anything about your mother's occupation before marriage? Or your father's occupation?

**TM:** Yes! My mother was a milliner in Quirindi, and my father was a stock and station agent and auctioneer.

**CM:** Could you give me the names of your brothers and sisters, please?

**TM:** Right. I have . . . there were four children Jean Elizabeth, and then came John Stephen, another one was Nancy Victoria, but she only lasted a couple of weeks. And I was the last child, born in 1931.

**CM:** Do you come from a golfing family at all?

**TM:** Not at all.

**CM:** Not even just to hit around?

**TM:** No.

**CM:** Can you please give me a brief overview of your professional career, and interest in golf until the present day? I'll be asking specific questions, but can you just let us know - generally overall - your life in golf?

**TM:** I started as a caddy when I was about 12 years old, at the Killara Golf Club. I did that top earn some money, we were a pretty impoverished family. One of the other caddies encouraged me to hit a golf ball – which I did – and I was enraptured by the . . . from the first day, and went on from there.

I became a junior member at the Asquith Golf Club, and from there I became a trainee professional golfer, and ultimately joined the Professional Golfers Association in 1953. I went to work for Bert Oldfield in his sports store in Hunter St, Sydney, and from there – in 1954 – I was married on the 10th of April, and I left Oldfields in the June.

I contacted the Professional Golfers Association to see if there were any jobs available, and they sent me to a new course at North Rocks that was being developed by a Dr. Wearn. I got the job there as professional, and stayed for 23½ years.

When I left there, I went on to the Auburn Municipal Golf Course, which is a council run affair at Auburn, and stayed there another 20 years.

My playing career's not very extensive, although I did win the Royal Sydney Cup in 1957, and the NSW Foursomes Championship with Frank Phillips in 1963. I concentrated more on teaching golf, and selling golfing equipment at the Muirfield club.

So, I retired from Auburn in about 1995, I think. So I've been retired since, and I'm now actively run the Golf Museum for the Australian Golf Heritage Society, on an honorary basis.

**CM:** Thank you. You were 12 years old – which would have been about 1943 . . .

**TM:** Yes

**CM:** . . . when you first became a caddy. Can you tell me a little more about that? The sorts of people you were a caddy for, what it was like, your role as a very young fellow doing that sort of work?

 

**TM:** I was probably very impressionable because the members there were the leaders of the judiciary and business community. One of the people I caddied for was Jimmy Bancks, who drew 'Ginger Meggs'; and another was Dan Dwyer, who was 2IC to Blamey during the war; and another one was – I knew I was going to forget his name – he's Australia's oldest Olympic winner, and a swashbuckling type of bloke. He was head of Johnson & Johnson.

But all in all, the members were very respectful of the caddies. They didn't talk down to them; they respected them for the ability to carry the clubs, and be attentive and look after them. Particularly find the golf balls, because – during the war – there were no golf balls made. All the rubber was used for the war effort. So a caddies ability to keep his eye on the ball, and not lose any was very important.

But they played in great spirit. They really enjoyed playing golf amongst themselves, and if one of the members lost a golf ball, and another member – while searching – found one, there was never a moment's question that that lost ball was given to the player who'd lost his. And as far as the rules were concerned, if a question arose about the Rules of Golf, it was always resolved so that nobody got an advantage over anyone else.

And this has stood me in great stead ever since. If you apply that rule of advantage, you will find you won't go far wrong.

**CM:** You also became an accountant. Can you tell me about that?

**TM:** Well, when I left school I was sent off to business college to learn accountancy, typing, and shorthand. And I did that for nearly twelve months. And then I was sent to the Australian Glass Manufacturers factory at Waterloo, where I worked in the office and . . . ahh . . . whilst I was studying accountancy. But I didn't like the indoor life

And I continued playing golf of course, and when the opportunity arose for me to become a trainee professional I was very quick to grab it, and I left the glassworks.

**CM:** Would that have been – say - in 1947/1948?

**TM:** Ah well, I was nineteen I think. That would make it – 1950, was it?

**CM:** You became a junior member at Asquith Golf Club in about 1948, I think you said?

**TM:** Might have been a little bit earlier, but I thought I was 16, which would make it '47 wouldn't it? But around that time.

**CM:** And that's when you really began your life as a professional in golf? Or heading towards.

**TM:** Well . . . ahh . . . I was an amateur. I was heading towards there, yes.

**CM:** What was it like in that time? Was the difference between amateurs and professionals as pronounced as it is in the modern era?

**TM:** It was worse. The golf professionals were looked down upon as glorified caddies. Caddies who could play. They were nearly always called by their surname, so I was always called 'Moore'. A lot of golf professionals objected to this, they thought it was demeaning.

But I found it quite okay, I sort of knew my place in the world, and I never objected to that. But no, the amateur was king. He was the dominant force in golf, because there was no . . . there were no

 

tournament golf professionals. That is, all golf professionals had jobs at clubs and there were no tournament players only, earning their living from actually playing. You were dependent on the amateurs. The papers – the newspapers – wrote up the amateur game much like they write up the rugby league today, and professionals got very scant publicity.

It wasn't until the 1930s that Norm Von Nida came along, and he decided that he was going to be a player, although he made probably more money out of betting on racehorses than he did golf. But he was never at a golf club, and . . .

So he set the scene, and the manufacturers of golf clubs realised that golf needed a boost and they encouraged overseas champions to come to Australia and do exhibition matches throughout the country. And they really fired the game up, and made it popular. That was in the thirties, and then of course the war came, which disrupted everything for five years, and not much . . . not much golf went on during the war.

I was lucky at Killara, there was still some people who played but the course maintenance was scant, and the courses suffered, but they carried on until the war's end.

**CM:** You got your professional's position, and can you tell me a little bit more about that please?

**TM:** Oh yes. The person I was interviewed by was the president of the golf club, and he told me that Muirfield Golf Club had about 100 members, and that they would soon have 200, where they could apply for a liquor licence and poker machine, and could really kick on. So the first thing I did was check the books, and of these 100 members, only about 17 were financial.

And the club was, it was . . . it was bankrupt. There was no question, it was bankrupt. But we were on good terms with the bailiff, and every time he came around, we were able to talk him out of closing us down. And then in '56, television struck. And golf took off. It's been going full bore ever since.

The game was always a winter game. It stopped about the last weekend in November, and commenced on the first weekend in March, so I would take a job in a golf factory over the summer months working the five days in the factory, and then just the weekends at the golf club. So there was some golf played at the weekends by hardy golfers. Didn't matter whether the first weekend in March was in a heatwave – that's when golf started.

Golf on television, it then became a year round sport.

**CM:** Also about this time, you had the exhibition players coming from USA, or United Kingdom?

**TM:** We did. We had some US players come out. We also had some British players come out. And they really spurred the game on.

**CM:** Did they get paid well for their exhibitions?

**TM:** I wouldn't say huge amounts, but they were certainly paid more than average. But what happened was – on exhibitions – generally there was a collection of the crowd, which contributed to their income.

**CM:** Is it about this time as well that the change came that the touring professional could make a reasonable living?

 

**TM:** Not in Australia so much. That didn't occur until '54, perhaps about when Peter Thomson won the British Open. We . . . our top players were very active up in the Philippines, and . . . ummm . . . in the Far East because . . . they had to go to England or Scotland or America to make . . . to make any money really. But they did, and it grew from there.

**CM:** Can you tell me what the role of a golf club professional was in the 1950s and 1960s? Could you describe your work in a typical week in the winter months when they were playing.

**TM:** Yes. He was one of the low employees on the totem, I'll tell you. He was a contracted employee virtually, and he would receive a small stipend for being the pro, and he would receive free rent on any building or shop that he operated from.

So, on Monday mornings, I would give lessons, perhaps all day Monday. Tuesdays I might have off and, with the family, go out somewhere. Wednesday I would be back at the shop, teaching in the morning and playing with the members in the afternoon. Of course – all the time – selling them equipment, and encouraging them to play better golf, and selling them shoes and apparel and so on.

But he was very much under the thumb of the ruling committee of the club, and if there was a good committee in who respected him, things were good. If there was a ruling committee that suspected he was making more money than he should, that was very difficult for him.

The shop was open seven days, and he would employ trainees to look after the shop when he wasn't present. So, it was a seven day a week job. The only day we were actually closed was Christmas Day.

**CM:** It was a teaching role . . .

**TM:** Yes.

**CM:** . . . a helping role to the amateurs in that particular club . . .

**TM:** Yes.

**CM:** . . . and also a role where you were selling all of the sorts of equipment that a golfer needs.

**TM:** Yes.

**CM:** Were you ever involved with making any sort of equipment?

**TM:** Oh yes. I learned the art of club making and assembling, and I could encourage people to buy clubs that suited them by actually making them to fit, like a tailor. And that was a very important part.

**CM:** What sort of things did you make?

**TM:** Well golf clubs consist largely of wood headed clubs, and iron headed clubs. Two types. So I would be able to take a rough block of wood, and turn it into a playable club, and the irons would come finished, and they would only need to be assembled.

**CM:** Did you use persimmon wood?

**TM:** Ah! Persimmon was the . . . was the best wood, although it became evident at one stage persimmon was going to run out because it had to be grown, and sawn, and milled, and then matured, and the golf was . . . worldwide golf was using up a lot of the persimmon, so they went on

 

to what is called laminated which is like a series of layers compressed . . . series of layers of wood compressed under great pressure and they made golf clubs . . . golf woods out of them.

Later, they tried plastic type woods, they tried aluminium alloys, and then of course the space race came in in the sixties, and that got them on to titanium. We could always make a club, a wood shaped club out of metal, but it'd be too heavy. Titanium was light, and durable, and strong.

Aluminium alloys, some of them were quite good, but others – if the alloy wasn't quite right – would shatter very quickly. So, they tried everything.

**CM:** And with the persimmon, was it grown in Australia?

**TM:** No. It is the fruit, and the best persimmon comes from the southern states of America. No Australian timber that I know of is really suitable because they're all too brittle. They're very hard, but they dry out and become brittle and crack easily. So persimmon's the one to go.

**CM:** And when do you think you stopped making, or stopped working with persimmon?

**TM:** Probably around the '70s I would say, right up in to the '70s, yeah. The best woods were always made of persimmon.

**CM:** Do you think some of those would have survived to this day?

**TM:** Oh, absolutely. I've got a shed full of them.

**CM:** So how long were you at Muirfield Golf Club?

**TM:** Twenty three and a half years it worked out.

**CM:** And did you play in competitions there as well at that time?

**TM:** Yes, I did. I played in a lot of local competitions. Professional events, and professional/amateur events, and during that time I went overseas and tried my luck at the pinnacle of golf, the British Open Championship. I played in New Zealand.

So I played in all states virtually, and a little bit of overseas stuff. But I was heavily involved at the club, and you can't really do both.

**CM:** Do you think – at this stage – that Australia was very influenced by the golf that was coming from the home of golf, from Scotland and . . . or more America?

**TM:** More America. The Americans were very active in promoting tournament golf. They learned very early to promote it for charities and so they . . . through tax breaks, they were able to raise much more money. This then created the avenue for more and better players, and they became the kings of golf. No doubt.

**CM:** Your next club professional position was at Auburn Municipal Golf Club course where you also stayed over twenty years. Had the role of club professional changed in the '70s and '80s?

**TM:** Not a lot. They were still under the control of the local committee - the club committee - which unfortunately changed almost yearly when they had an annual election.

That's why I left Muirfield. I got into ?????? with the committee and I could . . . I felt I wasn't getting a fair deal so I left, and eventually got the position at Auburn, where it was under the control of the local council. They were far better to deal with, because they were professional workers.

 

The Town Clerk, he was king! He was on a salary at that time of about $120,000 a year. So when I eventually started earning $80,000 a year, they said "That's not much.", you should be earning more than that. Whereas in a club situation, we had situations where a club professional doing well might buy himself a Ferrari, and this was not on because the average member couldn't afford a Ferrari. And in some cases, they were told to get rid of them. So that was the deal then.

Just the other day I recalled . . . recalled that when I eventually resigned, the president called me and said, "Look, I'm going to tell you three things. Firstly, you're 46 – you'll never get another job." Thank you. He said "Secondly, any success . . . any financial success that you've had is due to the club, not you." Thank you. "And thirdly," he said, "we don't want a personality as a golf professional, we just want a golf professional that we can tell what to do." So I was happy to leave that situation.

But at Auburn, you're dealing with the Town Clerk, you didn't have . . . he was a permanent position, you didn't have all these committees to carry on with, and he was a professional worker. He understood professional standards and conduct and so on.

They were very supportive, so it was a different situation altogether. They had a club there called the Rosnay Club, and virtually there was the council, then there was me, then there was the club. They had to kowtow to me in effect, so it was a different situation altogether.

**CM:** Was that in the background? Through the week, were you still teaching and selling and still making equipment?

**TM:** By that time, most of the equipment was made in factories, and . . . may have been some assembly, but no real working of timber and so on. But teaching – yes, and selling, organising the play of players on the club, collecting the green fees. And the council really didn't care if you weren't personally present, as long as the place was operating. So it was very happy.

**CM:** As a club professional, you were a trained professional as an accountant. Was that normally the case with club professionals? Did they have other background careers as well?

**TM:** Very few, because generally the club professionals started when they were 13, 14, 15, after . . . immediately after they left school, and I had that gap between when I left school and when I commenced the traineeship.

So I've always been interested in accountancy; I've always kept my own books, and only relied on an accountant to actually file the tax returns. I was a great help. Typing of course – I can still touch type, and I've lost most of the shorthand unfortunately.

But one of the things we did at the business school was precis writing. A lot of people look at me when I say precis writing, but we had to read a chapter of a book, and bring it down to a paragraph. And that's very good exercise when you're writing, and writing letters and so on, and reports. I found that very helpful.

**CM:** Did you ever notice . . . it seems interesting that some of the club professionals would've started out about 13 or 14 - Australia had very different employment starting dates in the period. Did they have sufficient golf expertise - in your opinion - to be able to be club professionals, training people?

**TM:** No. No, they would have to do four or five years before they . . . Some of them got jobs at 18, but that was about the youngest. They were . . . they were qualified having passed the tests, but they still had a lot to learn.

 

**CM:** Did you find that there were any differences with club professionals like yourself who . . . you were actually a winner at different competitions, so you had very, very high level of golf expertise. Did some of these fellows . . . did you ever find that some of your colleagues did not?

**TM:** Yes, very much so.

**CM:** Did that cause problems for the game in Australia? In your opinion?

**TM:** Ah, no. No. They would have been in the minority. We really became professionals because we were passionate about the game - and if you weren't passionate, you didn't last. They didn't really effect the game in that way. Clubs would get rid of them very quickly if they weren't . . . passionate.

**CM:** Was there ever any caddying done for the amateurs, as you had explained when you were a very young boy?

**TM:** No, caddying virtually disappeared after the war, which is a shame, because the training a caddy gets is – I believe – is second to none for a young bloke. He has to learn to carry clubs and shut up most of the time. Shut up and keep up. This is very good discipline for kids. So, no.

And of course, the money wasn't then . . . it became apparent that kids could go and borrow money from mum or dad. When you think about it, a game of golf was probably four hours or something like that, and the pay wasn't an hourly rate, so kids just wouldn't do it.

**CM:** That sort of activity died out?

**TM:** Yes it did.

**CM:** Can you tell me what sort of changes occurred during your career in golf teaching and training?

**TM:** Well yes, because photographic equipment improved and filming improved, which showed up quite a lot of defects in a golf swing that the eye couldn't possibly pick up. So, as science progressed and they then were able to test golf clubs in . . . under computer, or mechanical means, they became scientific instruments in a way.

The golf ball improved out of sight, too, and golf professionals had to really study the game, study the swing, and physical attributes to become . . . to become good at it.

**CM:** Was there support for you with instruction manuals and new technology such as records, were there . . .

**TM:** Yes. They were coming out all the time. People were writing their stories about how they improved their game, and professors and doctors and all that sort of thing wrote about physical movement. You had to read them all really.

**CM:** What were the most popular ways that people could get information about improving their game?

**TM:** Books. Books and magazines.

**CM:** Did they have cigarette card advice, as they used to have for other activities?

**TM:** Oh yes. Cigarette cards were very popular in the '30s. They featured, usually sets of fifty and the idea of course – for smokers – you would try and buy a complete set. They would feature how to play; they would feature the rules of golf; or they would just feature photographs of famous players.

 

But they didn't stop at golf. There was ships, and planes, and trains. I remember military uniforms and that sort of thing, so cigarette cards were very, very popular, and golf was just one of them.

**CM:** Did you make use of filming people? Videoing?

**TM:** No. No I didn't, no. That was probably just coming in as I was, sort of, getting out. There was . . . I never used it anyway.

**CM:** Did you ever use any of the new sorts of gizmos and gadgets that were becoming more prevalent in our society because of the improvements in using plastics and new materials?

**TM:** No, I never did, although I never found any that were really that good. So I rejected pretty much all of them.

**CM:** You used the old fashioned . . .

**TM:** Watching, and explaining, and getting people to hit balls. Yes.

**CM:** Relationship between trainer and student.

**TM:** That's right, yes.

**CM:** What sort of people did you give advice to?

**TM:** Oh, all sorts. All sorts. People who would listen to you, people who wouldn't listen to you, people who thought they knew better. Kids of course, a lot of kids I started off. I taught golf to Betty Cuthbert, the Olympic runner – a lovely, lovely lady. Other Olympic sportsmen, cricketers . . . some of the cricketers I helped.

Really, they came from every strata. Solicitors, doctors, dentists, whatever.

**CM:** Did you ever get the opportunity to train and advise touring professionals?

**TM:** Yes. Yes, I was pretty much instrumental in getting Jack Newton started, and watched him for several years, and I claim that I helped him along the way quite a lot.

**CM:** Have there been changes in conditions for professional golfers from the time you started out as a golf professional to the time you finished in about 2000, apart from the change you mentioned – the change in attitude? Anything else that you've noticed a change in?

**TM:** Well, in the '70s, I became a member of the committee of the PGA. We did a survey, and found that less than 50% of golf professionals at clubs had a contract, a written contract. So we commenced to set out in detail what a club should do, and what a professional should do, and have it as a written article.

We claimed that there were minimum standards of pay. This worked very well. A club would apply to the PGA for a professional and we would circulate the club to our members, but first we would find out how much they were prepared to offer. And if the offer wasn't up to the basics, then we wouldn't . . . not only wouldn't we advertise, we would advertise that it was not . . . not approved.

And this went along quite well until a public servant lobbed in one day with a suitcase, and he said "I'm here from the government, I'm here to help." And he was from the Unfair Trading, or whatever it was in those days, and he said "What do you think you blokes are doing?"

 

And we tried to explain that we weren't going to send clubs . . . ah, professionals . . . we weren't going to send club professionals out into the country – particularly – where they would starve to death.

"Well" he said, "you can appeal against this, but you won't win, and for every day that you continue on this you'll be fined about . . . " I think it was about $2,500, so we had to stop that style of thing.

But we achieved quite a bit be negotiations. We achieved the setting up of a provident fund for professionals that which they could pay into and the club could contribute, so that when he left, he would have something for his old age.

**CM:** What about the interactions between the playing professionals and the club professionals, as playing professionals started to move into very big money and very big publicity?

**TM:** Well they looked down on the club professionals. They sort of said – oh you know – these blokes can't play, we're they players, we're the kings . . . and in fact, some club professionals were very good players, and they – at one stage – objected to them actually participating, and said "No = they're not eligible to participate."

Ultimately, they broke away and became a section of their own, and now you have to . . . you can qualify in both camps if you go through the camps . . .go through the training. So you can actually be a member of both.

**CM:** So when you say 'a member of both', can you specify that please?

**TM:** Club professionals go through a qualifying school, and they get a ticket if they qualify. That doesn't make them eligible to get into the field of a big tournament, but it enables them to qualify to get into the field. The club professional, he . . . his chances of playing in big tournaments . . . the hurdles put up are such that it is very difficult for him to do it.

To be a tournament professional really you have to be on . . . at it all the time. So, I found that I would play in a tournament at – say – Canberra, and on Sunday night I'd finish the tournament there, and then on Monday morning it was back at the club, teaching and it . . . it's not good for your game. Professional golf at that level is a very selfish game.

**CM:** I'd like to know a few changes that you're aware of that have occurred in golf equipment and technology. With clubs, you mentioned hickory shafts and then where . . . where did it go to from there in Australia?

**TM:** Right! Steel shafts were invented before the turn of the last century and they were suppressed by the golf professionals largely, who saw it as a threat to their livelihood making hickory shafted clubs. So they were banned for many years up until the late '20s, when the Americans said "Oh, blow this – we're going to go to steel shafts." Eventually the Brits and the rest of the world followed about 1930.

Now, being wood, they were subject to the climate. They got wet, they bent, they had different flexes in them, and what you did – in those days – you, over a period of time, you collected a set of clubs from one or another. And they might have different names on the back, but they would all have the same feel of the hickory shaft.

 

Well, with steel, which were drawn tubes, they could become very specific so that every shaft was identical. This meant you didn't have to go and search around for clubs, you could buy a set of clubs 'off the rack' as it were.

**CM:** Is that when matched sets of clubs came in?

**TM:** Yes. Pretty much, yes. There was . . .

**CM:** Has it stayed that way?

**TM:** Yes. There were some matching sets of hickories, where specific people would do the searching for you and create a set, but not a lot, and they've continued on from there. You might notice on the steel shafts there are little bumps on the way up, and by positioning these bumps at different . . . in different stages, you can control the flex of the club. This is great advantage, because when you pick the club up, you know exactly what it's going to do. That was the big jump forward.

**CM:** In about 1930. And then, what was the next big change that you noticed?

**TM:** The balls continued to improve. Manufacturers were working on the specifics of the golf ball, until now it's a precision instrument, the golf ball. They can make a ball that will go almost for ever, but it is limited in the distance that it will go.

**CM:** Is such a ball legal in all different tournaments over the world?

**TM:** There is a specification for tournament balls, that's where the big money is. For club golf, not so much. Generally speaking the ball is controlled, specifically to a certain standard.

**CM:** What was the first sort of ball that you would have been looking at as a 12 year old?

**TM:** They were what we call wound golf balls. They had a central core – it was sometimes a little sack of white lead. That was wound around with strips of rubber, and then a case was put on it to enclose it. So, when I started, that was the ball that was in use.

Broadly speaking, the best golf balls are still made the same way, with a central core, a rubber winding, and a cover. The general golf ball now is just a central core and a cover, which is pretty good but these top ball are specific – they cost a lot of money.

**CM:** The war effected the golf balls because the rubber was used for the war effort.

**TM:** That's right. As I say, the covers were made of balata, and they were very easily cut, so you could get a golf ball with a big gash in it . . . in the cover, but the central part was perfect.

So a fellow in Sydney got the idea of recovering them, and he was able to do that and kept the ball . . . kept the game going during the war. You would send in two golf balls with a cut and you would get . . . he would recover them and he would give you one back for ten cents. That went on through the war, and after the war. He made a fortune getting old golf balls and recovering them for not so good golfers.

**CM:** Ten cents? So ten pence, 10p?

**TM:** Ten pence, yes.

**CM:** So quite a lot of money . . .

**TM:** Ah, yes.

 

**CM:** . . . for a golf ball at that time.

**TM:** A new one would have been thirty-five cents. Right? If you could get it.

**CM:** Was anyone ever playing with the very old-fashioned types of balls? Made from the . . .

**TM:** No.

**CM:** No.

**TM:** Maybe a few traditionalists were playing social games with the old balls, but not in competition. In golf, you use the absolute best equipment that you can afford. It's too hard a game, they are too many variables, to be under a handicap.

**CM:** And that's the same today as all the time that you've been involved with golf. People will aim for the best they can afford.

**TM:** Ooh yes, absolutely.

**CM:** Just a comparison. What would a top notch ball cost in the 1950s, and what would it . . . and what would the price be today?

**TM:** Ah! The balls went to five shillings . . . fifty pence, fifty cents, and then they went to seventy five pence, and then they eventually got to a dollar. Now that was about 1970, they were a dollar. And today, you can still but a box of fifteen very good golf balls for $15. So manufacture has just exploded, and the production's just taken off, so they're much cheaper.

**CM:** When . . . in the 1950s, 1960s were balls made for different circumstances such as practice ranges, and just for practice, balls just for people playing, and different balls for people in tournaments?

**TM:** No. What happened was the balls were manufactured and they were subject to a test, and the very good ones went that way, and the not so good ones went that way, and they were sold as slightly cheaper. So they were branded as slightly cheaper. There were virtually no such thing as a practice range, and your practice balls were your old, used balls.

**CM:** You were talking about hickory shafts, then through to steel shafts and matched sets – what was the next thing in the development of the shaft?

**TM:** Graphite. They started making shafts out of woven graphite, which were incredibly strong and very flexible. You could control the flex of them, but they were light. Steel was slightly heavier, so they . . . graphite took off, and the best shafts now would be graphite, although some of the top players . . . nearly all the top players use a form of lightweight steel.

They find the lightweight steel shaft is more consistent. The graphite is slightly variable, so they can't risk having a variable shaft.

**CM:** But with the change overall from wood to steel and graphite, it changed the role of the club professional who could easily have been making . . . it's now a manufacturer's role is it, almost entirely?

**TM:** Yes, yes. A few professionals still assemble clubs from finished products by gluing them together, but that's about as far as it goes.

 

**CM:** And did the old names - the woods and irons – stay consistent?

**TM:** No. No, they old names went out, and numbers came in, and clubs were numbered, and you could . . . So the names disappeared really.

Perhaps a couple remain. The driver, which is the longest club in your bag which should hit the ball furthest, that's remained as the driver. And the putter, which is the one you eventually put the ball in the hole with, that's remained. So both ends . . . either end's remained, but the middle's numbers.

**CM:** Have golf bags changed over the years that you've known golf?

**TM:** Oh absolutely. They . . . in the early days, most players carried five clubs so they didn't need a very big bag. And some might have had ten clubs which was . . . that was a big set. Fourteen was the maximum.

But then came the idea of buggies, or wheely things. Golf bags became bigger so that you could carry cardigans, and rain wear, and socks, and spare balls, and whatever. And of course the best golf bags were made of leather in those days, the cheaper ones were made of leather and canvas, but then leather became very expensive. At one stage there, they were making them out of kangaroo hide, and kangaroo fur, but that of course became politically incorrect, didn't it.

**CM:** What about . . . what year about was that? What era?

**TM:** That was well into the '60s, up to the '70s I would think. I got a club the other day with a kangaroo fur cover on it, which would be most frowned upon now.

**CM:** Tees - have they changed?

**TM:** Oh yes! In the old days . . .

**CM:** When you say old days, can you . . .

**TM:** I'll say pre-war. Up to the . . . up to '39. On every tee, there was a . . . two buckets – one with sand, and one with water. And the idea was that you'd take a little bit of water and a little bit of sand, and you'd build a mound. You could do this with your fingers, or you could carry round a little thing like an eggcup, fill it with sand, and then put it on the ground to put your tee on.

The tees as we know them today only appeared about the middle '30s, and they were made of plas . . . originally . . . the forerunners of plastic and wood. Nowadays, the buckets have disappeared from the golf course, so . . .

**CM:** Did you ever sell the little egg shaped, type?

**TM:** No I didn't. They were gone before my time. Tees – as I said – come in mid '30s. By the time I got there, they were well and truly . . .

And of course a caddy in the early days would have known how high his employer wanted the tee. He would build the sand accordingly, lower or higher, and now with a tee that you press into the ground, it's very easy to organise the height.

**CM:** Has the role of caddies changed?

**TM:** Yes. Jack Nicklaus started it really when he – before a tournament – would walk the course, and measure it by pacing, the different salient points to a creek, or a mound, and so on. And that has

 

become, now, the role of the caddy. He would go out first and walk the course, but this has been replaced in general terms by these rangefinders, and you can get a rangefinder now which will say you've got 250 metres to go. If you walk forward a metre it'll change to 249, so . . .

But the caddy today, he's a real asset, and top players get top players, and top caddies get big money. The caddy for Tiger Woods was a New Zealander, and he was . . . his earnings were the largest of any sportsman in New Zealand. And he didn't play the game.

So a caddy today is a real asset, and he travels round the world with his boss.

**CM:** Would a caddy generally be a good golfer?

**TM:** No. Maybe he would, but maybe not. So . . . but he'd certainly have a lot of knowledge of his golfer's ability.

**CM:** And earns a lot more than you earned as a 12 year old.

**TM:** Yes. They get . . . sometimes get 5% of the prize money. So, caddy wins . . . the pro wins a million dollars, he's on 5% of that. And of course, the top players have their own executive jets, and he'd fly with the boss around. It's big time.

**CM:** What about golfing clothes?

**TM:** Oh yes. The original clothing was plus fours, which is a pair of trousers measured to the knee, plus four inches. And they were held up with long socks because golf course were played in open fields. Golf was played in open fields – there were no set golf courses as such with . . .

In the early days, they were mown by sheep – they had a flock of sheep wandering around to keep the grass cropped. Then became mowers and so on.

But to keep your trousers up from flapping around in the wet grass, these were very good. But eventually, they got onto slacks, and trousers, and lightweight stuff. They played in . . . of course, in Scotland they needed heavy . . . heavy, warm clothes and coats, but eventually got onto lighter weight stuff.

Now, particularly with the girls, it's such a colourful . . . it's a beautiful colourful scene.

**CM:** I haven't asked you about females in golf – how has that changed?

**TM:** Oh, a great deal. A great deal. Up until the war – you could say – females were tolerated. That was about the best of it. They joined clubs as associate members, they didn't get a vote, they paid a lower fee, and they were only allowed to play, probably, one day a week. They were very much downtrodden.

But - through their own efforts – and of course, clubs realised there was a big financial gain to have ladies there because some, some ladies are quite wealthy and spent money in the club. So today, they're treated as equals, although in lots of clubs they still pay a lower fee, and don't get a vote. But in other clubs they are treated equally, get votes, but they . . . and some of them, some clubs . . . make them pay equivalent amounts.

**CM:** Has golf course design changed over the years that you've known golf?

**TM:** Absolutely. Golf is generally played along the ground. When I say that, you were able to bounce the ball along the ground onto the green, and then into the hole. Where with modern equipment

 

and modern golf balls now, it's what I call aerial golf, and that enables players to hit the ball much higher, and so they put water, quite often in the front of the green, so that you've got to carry, got to get the ball up into the air to get on to the green.

So, golf courses have subtly changed to where you've got to fly the ball onto the green, whereas in the early days you could run it on.

**CM:** And your time – when you were 12, 13, 14 – was it a game along the ground?

**TM:** Yes, very much so. Though you still got it into the air, but you could run it along the ground, if you wanted to.

CM: What about the sort of grass that's being used in the courses?

TM: Well, of course, when they started building courses here, they tried to copy the Scottish courses and the Scottish grasses, but you could imagine what happened to them in the weather.

And Melbourne of course is beautifully situated where it . . . you can grow grass there of any sort. So our best golf courses are in Melbourne. They have a year round climate for these grasses, and now they are developing grasses for . . . horses for courses, and they refer to grass type Tifdwarf 234, or Tifdwarf 256. So you study the climate, and you buy the grass to suit the climate. The amount of water they need, and what have you.

**CM:** What about greenkeepers?

**TM:** Oh well, they're . . . they're professors now. They have to understand growth, they have to understand humidity, and climate, and pesticides, and of course, the boosters, the grass boosters to make the grass grow at different times of the year, and how much water is needed. So they are, they're real experts now.

**CM:** Were they when you started out?

**TM:** No.

**CM:** Were they in the clubs?

**TM:** They were, but they were glorified workers really who roamed around in tractors mowing the greens, and fertilised the greens twice a year, and kept them cut. But they were largely labourers.

**CM:** The home of golf is Scotland. The . . . do we get most of our influences overall from Scotland and the United Kingdom – which is our heritage after Aboriginal people – or from the United States?

**TM:** No. The United States claim now with 300 million people that they are the gurus. They have the money to develop the clubs and balls, and they have the population to produce the champions. So they reckon they're the top notchers.

Britain lagged . . . lagged behind a bit, with more tradition. But the Yanks threw tradition sort of out . . . out . . . out the window.

**CM:** Has membership of the Professional Golfers Association changed over time, and what are your thoughts on it as a professional body?

TM: Well, now we're a recognised international body, and it's due to a progression where we demand that entrants have more knowledge, and they go through a very rigorous training period.

 

Whereas in my day, you could have – at fourteen - attached yourself to a golf club as a golf pro sweeping the floors and come up earlier. If the pro was a good worker and good professional, he would rub off on the trainee, but if he was no good then those trainees went and sort of became, you know, they proliferated, and that wouldn't work.

You've got to have a central body with an educational program, so all golf professionals coming through now . . . I think about, only about a third of the trainees who start get through, so they become members of the PGA.

**CM:** What are your thoughts on the PGA and Golf Australia?

**TM:** Well, for years we argued. They said – you know – "We'll tell you what to do," and we said "Well, thank you very much, but we're an association and we'll run our own business, thank you." So we had a lot of fights with them, and ultimately they came to the conclusion that we – the top players and the professionals from the clubs – were very important to the game.

And so now we really work together. I think ultimately they will probably amalgamate. The Federal Government is always saying "Look, there are too many avenues, there are too many committees, there are too many groups. Get yourself into one group, we'll give you x amount of millions, and you can decide how to split it up."

Otherwise you've got all these groups going to the Government cap in hand, and it's not a good scene.

**CM:** You have maintained your interest in golf since retiring through your voluntary work with the Australian Golf Heritage Society Museum. What else have you done with golf since retiring?

**TM:** Well, I still keep up by playing. I play probably two or three times a week, and I still try to improve. I'm still buying golf clubs if I think it's an improvement. And I'm interest . . . I am interested in course layout although I don't really do anything of it, but if I'm asked, I've got an opinion on golf course outlines and architecture.

I'm still interested in helping people with their golf. I don't teach officially as such very much. I might get an odd person who wants a specific lesson, but if I'm playing with people I try to help them along, and spot the errors in their swing and so on, and try and get them to play better.

**CM:** Do you attend tournaments?

**TM:** Of yes, yeah.

**CM:** What do you do at those?

**TM:** Oh well, with the Australian Golf Heritage, we take a tent, and put on a display of old clubs and history, and try to interest people in the history of the game, because too many people just don't view the history as very important. So we try to reverse that.

**CM:** Do you have much to do with the tour . . . with the tournament professionals when you are at these tournaments? Are they interested in the history?

**TM:** Some are, and some aren't. Very few really are, but some of them are. Yeah.

**CM:** It is often said that golf is a funny game – why is that?

 

**TM:** Funny peculiar, because you can never be certain of what's going to happen. Nobody can tell you that they are going to hit a ball in a specific way, and get a specific result. And they can try, but that ball and those clubs sometimes do funny things. But not expected. So it's funny peculiar, not funny ha-ha.

**CM:** What is your definition of a fine golfer? Not just playing, but as a person.

**TM:** Some of the . . . some of the best players in the world are most objectionable people, but some have a balance of lifestyles and show themselves to be part of the community. So it varies a lot, but a really good player should take an interest in the whole game, not just his own, and in the history of the game, and help his brother professionals, and help golfers throughout the world, because the more golfers there are, the more interest there'll be, and the more money there'll be. So it's in his interest. But unfortunately, some of them are not nice people.

We have . . . I've mentioned Norm Von Nida. He was quite a controversial little character, and he was a showpony as we call them, and he would virtually do anything for publicity, but underneath it all, he was a really nice bloke. But as soon as a newspaperman or someone said something, he would fly into him, and make out that it was . . . he was in a rage, but underneath it all, it was all a show. So this is how it goes.

**CM:** Who's been your favourite, or is your favourite golfer?

**TM:** Well, I'd say Norm Von Nida would have to be one of them . . . one of them because he was a child virtually of the Depression, he came up the hard way as you might say. He just by sheer force of ability and he forced his way into the top of golf, and I respect him for that.

But Kel Nagle is another one who's just a lovely, lovely person. I've never heard Kel say anything nasty about anyone or anything. He's just a lovely, lovely fellow. And they were also great players too.

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

**TM:** No, I think you've covered it pretty well. I've had a lovely life through golf, and I must admit that you don't get this way unless you've got a very good woman behind you. We're coming up to 59 years of marriage, and people say "Where did you go wrong?".

That's . . . that's virtually covered my life in golf, but there's a lot of, a lot of other things in my life too. I was a Boy Scout in my youth, and hey were some of the happiest days of my life, being out camping and hiking and so on. And I still go bushwalking when I get the chance.

I'm interested in the politics of the country, There's a lot more to golf . . . a lot more to life than just golf.

**CM:** Did you have children?

**TM:** Of course. We've had two boys and a girl, and now we've got eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchildren . . . one great-granddaughter. So I'm very interested in them. One of our granddaughters got married not long ago, so life goes by, doesn't it.

**CM:** Any golfers amongst them?

**TM:** They can all play golf, but they choose not to. They all know how to do it, but they don't particularly. Maybe some of them will come round in the future, I don't know. I've seen that they . . .

 

that they know how to do it, but I've never . . . I've never . . . I've never pushed them or insisted on them playing because I've seen too much of that. Parents interfering, and . . . not a good scene.

**CM:** Will we finish the interview now. Thank you very much. This is the first in the interview series for the Australian Golf Heritage Society. It's been marvellous for you to give us the enormous wealth of information that you have. Thank you.

**TM:** Thank you.

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**Transcription by The Australian Golf Heritage Society – January 2016**

 