

ETHNICITY AND CLASS AT THE BRISBANE GOLF CLUB

MURRAY PHILLIPS
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Following a meeting held at the Brisbane A.M.P. Chambers in early November, 1896, a group of sporting enthusiasts formed the Brisbane Golf Club (B.G.C.), the city's only golfing organisation for a quarter of a century.¹ It was established in the outer suburb of Chelmer, with the original holes nestled on the picturesque banks of the Brisbane River.² Eight years after its inception, the club outgrew these pioneer links and moved to its present location at Yeerongpilly, where an eighteen hole course was designed. The following account of the city's oldest golfing institution will not attempt to investigate all components of the club's ninety year history but will be restricted to highlighting two salient features. First, the relevance of those members with Scottish heritage will be examined to assess, in an Australian context, the commonly held belief that "the Scots in exile showed a particularly strong inclination... to play golf".³ Second, an appraisal will be conducted of the association of the wealthier classes with the game, in order to evaluate the extent to which the English trait of "class bound" leisure was applicable at the B.G.C.⁴

One of the most outstanding features of Australia's golfing heritage rests with the assumption that a host of Scottish devotees promoted the game. Golf's introduction into the country, as Bill Mandle has asserted, demonstrated this characteristic: "It began, spasmodically and primitively, in the 1820s, brought to Van Diemen's Land by, inevitably, a Scot."⁵ This occurrence was not an isolated event. The pattern was repeated many times in other places. In Melbourne, it owed much to a migrant from Fife, the Honourable James Graham⁶ And in Queensland, it was a family of Scots, the Ivory's, who laid out a few holes at their Eidsvold cattle station.⁷ What also emerged from these early golfing ventures, besides the Scottish involvement, was the ephemeral character of the game. Not one of the above attempts was successful in firmly entrenching the game as a colonial pastime. It was not until the late-nineteenth century

that the first permanent club, the Australian, was established at Moore Park, Sydney.¹⁰ The founding of this club again emphasised the influence of the Scots. The credit for generating interest in the game was attributed to the officers of a Scottish regiment. While on leave these officers displayed their golfing talents and, after returning to their duties, bequeathed their clubs and gutta-percha balls to their Sydney golfing friends.¹¹

Based on this recorded Caledonian influence on golf's introduction into the colonies, an attempt to assess the impact of the Scots amongst pioneering Brisbane golfers will be undertaken. The influence of the Scots was certainly recognised by contemporary reports. A local newspaper identified the Scottish patronage common to other Australian ventures when it indicated that early membership included "a few players who had played over the famous St Andrews ground."¹² One of these members was Matthew Laird. Born at Port Glasgow in 1857, he won a host of golf championships at Troun County, Ayrshire, before migrating to Brisbane in the 1880s and testing his sporting ability on the local course.¹³ Another golfer of similar origins was Norman Bell, who was born at Paisley in 1873. After two decades of experience on the Scottish moors, he moved to Queensland and soon earned the reputation as a "ding dong" golfer on the Brisbane links.¹⁴ Add to these men a cluster of almost two dozen golfers who were also joint members of the prominent Scottish associations - the Queensland Scottish Association, the Caledonian Society and Burns Club and the Scottish Rifle Club - and a definite pattern of Caledonian involvement was discernible amongst the B.G.C. membership. The President confirmed these sentiments, albeit somewhat hyperbolically, when he propounded, before making the selection for a traditional club match, that his main problem "was to find a golfer who was not a Scotch [sic]."¹⁵ It is, however, quite surprising that very few of these playing Scots were involved at the organisational level of the game. In the club's first decade, only three committee members were of Caledonian origin. The first was Mr. A. McIntosh, who was responsible for securing a loan of 150 pounds for the first club residence at Chelmer. As well as being a playing member and the first Vice-President of the club, he was the general manager of the Royal Bank of Queensland - a position, no doubt, that assisted in obtaining the overdraft for the clubhouse.¹⁶ The next person to serve in the capacity of Vice-President was of a similar

background. Sir Hugh Muir Nelson was born in Kilmarnock, Scotland, in 1835 and at the age of eighteen travelled to Queensland where he adopted the popular game of his homeland. This man, who was lauded "as a splendid specimen of the Sons of Scotia", joined the B.G.C. a year after its foundation and his knowledge of the game apparently benefited members for half a decade.¹⁷ The remaining Scottish committee-man was John Macdonald. Like Nelson, he joined the club in 1897 and, in addition to managing the Queensland Wool Firm, he assisted in the organisation of club affairs for six years.¹⁸ Perhaps the reason for such a small contribution from the Scots was that while they formed a distinct ethnic group within the club they were, in reality, only a minority. The majority of members were, in fact, locally born. The remainder were a mixture of Scots along with some English, Irish, Welsh and New Zealand golfers.¹⁹

One critical feature of the game attributed to the Scots, however, was the provision of a number of men who possessed the expertise necessary for the development of the game: the professionals. Since the employment of the first professional, in 1900, the club has engaged at least two golfers who learned their trade in Scotland. One such professional was John Young who was born in 1885 at the game's traditional home, St Andrews. He was a player and teacher of some distinction, combining his success at state and national level with his golfing skills in order to help the club's members for the years immediately after World War I.²⁰ In this respect the B.G.C. followed the practice established by many other Australian clubs who hired the likes of Carnegie Clark, Walter Clark, James Scott, James Herd Scott and Daniel Soutar - all professionals of Caledonian heritage.²¹ Indeed, one of this group of imported professionals, Carnegie Clark, played a crucial part at the B.G.C. Clark arrived in Australia from the Scottish township of Carnoustie. He became famous as a player, teacher, club member and course architect. His contribution to the club was his design of the first course at Yeerongpilly in 1904. This layout remained virtually unchanged for almost three decades until another famous Scottish architect, Dr. A.Mackenzie, was commissioned to extend the course.²²

From the available evidence the Scots at the B.G.C. should be seen as an influential minority group throughout the formative years of the game's establishment. There were those golfers who had

played in their homeland and, through a desire to rekindle their cultural ties or just to relish their chosen pastime, had supplied motivation and enthusiasm for the local aspirants. Also, there were a few who guided the growth of the club by taking on positions of responsibility. Finally, but equally important, there were the professionals, whose expertise in golfing knowledge was imperative for both the development of skill acquisition and the construction of the challenging courses at the club. None of these features, however, remained as permanent characteristics. As the game attracted a larger local following, golfers from the Scottish links became less common on the Brisbane greens. Furthermore, as golfers from nations other than Scotland acquired their trade in tuition and course architecture, the Caledonian contribution in golfing expertise also dwindled. Events at the B.G.C. certainly exemplified this trend. Following the Scottish professional, John Young, the club then employed a young, locally-born golfer, Mick Stafford, who established an Australian record by serving the club for a half-century from 1921.²³ The same pattern was evident in matters concerning course architecture. In 1927, for instance, the club rejected the advice of the renowned Scottish course designer, Dr A. Mackenzie, and adopted recommendations suggested by a long-time local member.²⁴ Today the separation process is almost complete. The only remaining Scottish trait is the rules, as dictated by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, which have guided players since the inception of the B.G.C.

One conspicuous feature that follows from this examination of the Caledonian heritage is the association of prominent Scots with the game. For example, besides the "epitome of Scottish manliness", Sir H.M. Nelson, other notable Scottish golfers were the Governor of the State, Sir William MacGregor, and the two Premiers, William Kidston and Sir William Forgan-Smith.²⁵ Their patronage provides a glimpse of the genre of person attracted to the club. For this full picture to develop, the club's status within golfing circles and the socio-economic background of its members need to be analysed. The prestige associated with Brisbane's senior golfing institution was earned by its continuing role in the state's golfing affairs: for three decades it conducted the State's championship and, furthermore, was solely responsible for the formation of the ruling body of golf - the Queensland Golf Association.²⁶ Members attempted to

gain formal recognition of the club's service to the game by applying for the Royal Charter (a title earned from application to Imperial authorities) on no less than five occasions.²⁷ While it was unsuccessful on each bid (for no apparent reason), it was the only local club for a quarter of a century and, as such, attracted the opulent clientele that patronised the game. An examination of the occupations of the members reinforces this notion (see Table below).²⁸

Table 1: Occupations of the Members of the B.G.C. (%).

Occupations	1896-1906 (n = 260)	1907-1917 (n = 297)
Professional	42	33
Administrative	28	19
Clerical	0	0
Sales	2	3
Farmers	8	7
Miners	0	0
Transport and Communication	1	0
Tradesmen Production	0	1
Service, Sport and Recreation	0	0
Armed Services	4	3
Occupation not adequately stated	15	34

The records from the first twenty years reveal the majority of golfers were drawn from the professional and administrative vocations as well as from the pastoral industry. According to Brisbane's economic structure, these sportsmen came from the middle-class and also from the elite,²⁹ as indicated by the preponderance of bank managers, leading medical practitioners and members of the Legislative Council. The involvement of the city's upper echelons was also buttressed by the fact that, during the club's first decade, over half of the golfers possessed dual membership with the aristocratic and exclusive Queensland Club.³⁰ A brief inspection of the backgrounds and careers of some of these early members demonstrates the middle and upper-class involvement as well as the element of elitism within the club.

One such early prominent member was Lord Lamington, who was born in 1860 in London. His schooling followed an orthodox upper-class pattern: from Eton he graduated to Oxford. With this sound educational background he earned the reputation as a writer and historian-grapher who had "enriched the English language",³¹ In 1895 this talented author was gazetted Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Her Majesty's forces in the colony of Queensland. Shortly after his arrival, he undertook a decisive responsibility in the establishment of the B.G.C.. Lamington was the President in the foundation year and held this position for four years until his departure to England. He also initiated one of the oldest competitions, the Lamington Cup, which he himself captured in 1900. His contribution to the evolution of golf in Brisbane was recognised with a life membership in the first decade of the twentieth century, and from 1899 to the present day his portrait has hung proudly in the foyer of the B.G.C.³²

Another golfing zealot was the Lieutenant-Governor of Queensland, Sir Samuel Griffith. He was born in Wales in 1845 but migrated to Australia and was educated at the University of Sydney. By 1867, Griffiths had been called to the Queensland Bar and a decade later was appointed a Queen's Council, where he earned the reputation of being a man with "courage, determination and a quiet persistence".³³ He also showed these attributes in his political career. For several years he was Leader of the Opposition and was later chosen as Premier in 1883. After a successful decade in the political arena, Griffith returned to his original profession and was

appointed Chief Justice. Perhaps his greatest achievement was his contribution to the organisation of Australia's constitution at the turn of the century. Along with his "intelligent and cultivated mind" he also subscribed to the Victorian ideal of a healthy attitude towards sporting participation.³⁴ Griffith enjoyed golf as his leisure pursuit. He was a dignitary at the official opening in 1896 and also became a member in that year. His interest in the game was not limited to displaying his prowess on the links but extended to the official capacities of President and Vice-President at the B.G.C..³⁵

Equally as notable as Sir Samuel Griffith was another member, Justin Fox Freenlaw Foxtton. He was born near Melbourne in 1849 and was educated at the exclusive Melbourne Grammar School. Almost three decades later Foxtton moved to Brisbane where he entered the Legislative Assembly and became renowned as "a politician of the highest credit and purest motives".³⁶ Foxtton also excelled in the military world, achieving the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and earning a reputation of proficiency in the field. Besides these commitments he also found time for leisure. The B.G.C. was only six months old when "one of Queensland's best known public men" applied for membership.³⁷ Shortly after, Foxtton was elected as Vice-President and he served the club in this capacity for seven years until 1904.³⁸

Probably one of the club's most interesting early patrons was Adolf Feez. He was born in 1860 at Rockhampton but moved south to be educated at the renowned King's College, Parramatta. Following this education, Feez trained in the legal profession and was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Queensland in 1884. While he was successful in his profession, Feez was also acclaimed for his contribution to sport, being portrayed as the most "enthusiastic athlete in Queensland."³⁹ His interests in sports were remarkable. As well as representing Queensland in rugby union football, he initiated polo in the state and started the Brisbane Hunt Club, which he helped to keep prominent for eight years.⁴⁰ This sporting zest was further highlighted by his involvement at the B.G.C.. For over a quarter of a century his "enthusiasm" was evident as he assumed the positions of Vice-President and Trustee along with being elected Captain in 1916.⁴¹

While the profiles of these men provide an insight into the game's patronage, a further examination of the presence of such individuals at the B.G.C. reveals social and economic barriers to wider membership. First, there was the matter of finance. The wealthier classes could afford to play; the working classes could not. Financial demands of membership, for example, were equivalent at the time to a fortnight's wage for both unskilled workers and skilled tradesmen.⁴² Moreover, these expenses were compounded by the purchase of equipment and dress. As Stoddart, in his analysis of Australian sport, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, has averred, a set of golf clubs was "a financial outlay of considerable proportions relative to the average salary of wage" and, for this reason, many played sports like "football where the outlay was minimal rather than golf where the costs were prohibitive".⁴³ As well as these economic restrictions there were also social barriers. A system of controlled entry - nomination of members, recommendation by the committee, election by members, along with a "black ball" system - ensured that only those considered suitable gained access to the club.⁴⁴ Working class participation was also inhibited by the lack of availability of leisure time. At best, the worker's free time was limited to Saturday afternoons, Sundays and public holidays,⁴⁵ whereas professionals and executives could, within the demands of their businesses, take time off whenever they pleased. A combination of these factors resulted in golf at the Brisbane Club being enjoyed exclusively by the wealthier sector of the city's society, therefore, reinforcing the British notion of "class bound" leisure. In fact, this trend continued for almost three decades as the second club in Brisbane, the Queensland Golf Club (1921), and the Indooroopilly Golf Club (1926) both retained restrictive membership procedures that duplicated those at the B.G.C.. These exclusive clubs, whose positions were accentuated by their constituent membership of the Queensland Golf Council, added support to the concept that some forms of leisure, in this case golf at these institutions, "were impenetrable for those outside the class in question".⁴⁶

From these findings, then, can it be assumed that the game only existed for the wealthier classes of Brisbane? If Scotland, "where free golf had been enjoyed for centuries by everyone", and the late-nineteenth-century artisan golf movement in England were

any sort of archetypes, this would appear unlikely.⁴⁷ A cursory overview of other golfing institutions in Brisbane supports these Scottish and English precedents. The pattern that transpired from this synopsis suggests that the structure of golfing institutions took on the form of a hierarchy. In Brisbane, the pinnacle of this hierarchy was the three constituent clubs, Brisbane, Queensland and Indooroopilly. The spectrum was completed by a series of clubs - Wynnum (1921), Sandgate (1922), Nudgee (1929), Virginia (1930) and Kiperra (1933) - whose membership procedures were less selective and whose playing fees were designed to mitigate the necessary costs of facilities and equipment rather than discriminate against potential golfers. The nadir of this hierarchy, in terms of financial limitations, was the city's public course, Victoria Park (1931), where there were no membership procedures and there was just a small fee necessary for playing rights. In this way, golf in Brisbane supported the Australian trend as it displayed "social stratification [where] the criteria of class and status...applied often quite subtly to produce social distinctions in a game where at least some access to finance [was] required".⁴⁸

In conclusion, the formative years of the B.G.C. embodied two discernible traits: an obvious and crucial role played by those of Scottish extraction and an association of the wealthier sections of Brisbane society with the game. The Caledonian patronage comprised a coterie of players; a few who assisted in the organisational sphere of the game; and, of course, the professionals whose teaching duties were augmented with the responsibility of course construction at the club. So, from this basis, what can be deduced about the original proposition concerning the "Scots in exile" showing a "particularly strong inclination to play golf"? Considering this research depicted a limited sample of Scots and only one golf club in depth, it would be a fallacy to utilise this restricted data to support such a comprehensive statement. Nevertheless, when the B.G.C. is viewed as a case study and these findings are juxtaposed with the input of the Scots in the global diffusion of the game,⁴⁹ this research makes a meaningful contribution. It fortifies, in an Australian context, Sir Charles Tennyson's portrait of golf as "Scotland's contribution to world sport".⁵⁰ What this study also reveals is the need for other investigations to assess the validity of the B.G.C. example as a representative insight into the Caledonian

influence throughout the formative period of the game in Australia. Finally, the Scottish patronage also highlighted another salient feature of the B.G.C.; that was, its exclusive nature. Membership as exemplified by Lord Lamington, Sir Samuel Griffith, Justin Foxton and Adolf Feez, emanated from the wealthier classes. There was limited working class participation in the game during the early decades of the twentieth century and, in this respect, the British trait of "class bound" leisure had been successfully transported to colonial shores. This lack of representation of the lower orders can be understood when the exclusionary practices of the club, which consisted of both social and economic restrictions, and the limited leisure time available for many workers, is considered. Before the formation of less exclusive clubs and the city's public course, the only working class involvement in golf was restricted to those who made the game their livelihood - the young boys who caddied for the members and the professionals.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

Thanks are due to Dr. Ian Jobling, Dr. David Brown and Professor Max Howell for their assistance and guidance.

1. *Queenslander*, August 14, November 1896. The second golf club in Brisbane, the Queensland Golf Club (later to be granted the Royal Charter), was officially opened on August 12, 1921. *Brisbane Courier*, 13 August 1921.
2. *Queenslander*, 14 November 1896.
3. P.C. McIntosh, *Sport in Society* (London, 1968), p.80.
4. For this description of leisure in Britain see H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1980), p.76.
5. W.F. Mandle, "Origins" in *Australian Sport: A Profile* (Canberra, 1985), p.9.
6. D.G. Soutar, *The Australian Golfer* (Sydney, 1906), p.173.
7. T. Smith, *Australian Golf. The First 100 Years* (Sydney, 1982), p. 12.
8. V.M. Branson, *Kooyonga* (Adelaide, 1983), pp.1-2.
9. *The Australian Encyclopaedia* (Sydney, 1965) p.329.

10. Soutar, *op.cit.*, p.160.
11. J. Alenson, *Ten Decades, 1882-1982: a story of events which go to make up the history of The Australian Golf Club* (Sydney, 1982), pp.4-6.
12. *Queenslander*, 19 September 1896.
13. *Queenslanders as we see'em* (Brisbane, 1916), n.p.
14. *Men of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1929), plate 69.
15. *Brisbane Courier*, 17 November 1924.
16. B.G.C., Minute Book, General Meeting 1896; 14th Committee Meeting 1897; General Meeting 1897.
17. *Queensland 1900* (Brisbane, 1901), pp. 5-6; B.G.C., Minute Book, General Meetings 1896-1901.
18. *Queenslanders as we see'em, op.cit.*, n.p.; B.G.C., Minute Books, General Meetings 1900-1905.
19. The ethnicity of the B.G.C. members was derived from sources that dealt with prominent persons of Brisbane such as *Queensland 1900, op.cit.*, *Queenslanders as we see'em, op.cit.*, and *Men of Queensland, op.cit.*
20. M.Maclaren, *The Australian Golfer's Handbook* (Sydney, 1960), p.220; C. Boyce, "Brisbane Golf Club, Yeerongpilly" (unpublished manuscript, 1973), p. 17.
21. Maclaren, *op.cit.*, pp.221-223.
22. Boyce, *op.cit.*, p.6, pp. 33-44.
23. B.G.C., Annual Report 1970, p.2.
24. B.G.C., Annual Report 1927, p.2.
25. B.G.C., Annual Report 1906, p.2; *Men of Queensland, op.cit.*, plate 4.
26. *Queensland Golfer*, March edition 1984, p.5; *Brisbane Courier*, 12 May 1914.
27. The B.G.C. Minute Books from 1896 to 1921 contain these unsuccessful attempts to gain the Royal Charter.
28. The occupations of the B.G.C. members were accrued from the hand-written membership list contained in club records. In circumstances where it was impossible to determine members'

occupations, data was supplemented by the index of the *Post Office Directories* (1895-1917) as well as the occupation section of the Queensland Club membership list and other published sources such as *Queensland 1900*, *op.cit.*, *Queenslanders as we see'em*, *op.cit.*, and *Men of Queensland*, *op.cit.*

29. The economic composition of Brisbane at the turn of the twentieth century can be found in R. Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s* (Brisbane, 1973), p.xxxiii.
30. The Queensland Club was the premier club of Brisbane and was almost entirely composed of graziers, leading businessmen and accepted professionals. Its premises were located in the city centre with its spacious verandahs overlooking Parliament House on one side and the Botanical Gardens on the other.
31. *Queensland 1900*, *op.cit.*, p.1.
32. B.G.C., Minute Books, General Meetings 1896-1900; B.G.C., Honour Board Records, p.6; B.G.C., Minute Book 1903, p.141.
33. *Queensland 1900*, *op.cit.*, p.2.
34. *Ibid.*, pp.2-5.
35. B.G.C., Minute Books, 6th Committee Meeting 1896; General Meetings 1896-1901.
36. *Queensland 1900*, *op.cit.*, p.13.
37. *Ibid.*, p.13.
38. B.G.C., Minute Books, General Meetings 1898-1904.
39. *Queensland 1900*, *op.cit.*, p.160.
40. *Ibid.*, p.160.
41. B.G.C., Minute Books, General Meetings 1902-1925.
42. Lawson, *op.cit.*, p.62.
43. B. Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever* (North Ryde, 1986), p.39.
44. B.G.C., Rule Book 1910, p.7.
45. H. McQueen, *Social Sketches of Australia* (Victoria, 1978), pp.12-13; Lawson, *op.cit.*, pp.63-78.
46. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, p.76.

47. G. Cousins, *Golf in Britain - A Social History from the Beginnings to the Present Day* (London, 1975), p.71; pp.72-73.
48. Stoddart, *op.cit.*, p.51.
49. For the influence of the Scots on the diffusion of golf in England, Canada and America see Cousins, *op.cit.*; G. Redmond, *The Sporting Scots of Nineteenth Century Canada* (Brunswick, 1982); H.B. Graffis, *The P.G.A.: The Official History of the Professional Golfers Association of America* (New York, 1975).
50. C. Tennyson, "They Taught the World to Play", *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 11, No.3, 1959, p.219.