



Heritage

COMMONWEALTH GOLF CLUB Inc.

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Mark Wade
Heritage Committee Convenor

Course Designers at Commonwealth Golf Club

"Australian golfers have long admired the work of Alister Mackenzie, who only spent a few weeks here in 1926 but influenced design in this country for decades to come. Aside from his brilliant work at Royal Melbourne, and the bunkering schemes planned for Victoria and Kingston Heath, he also played a significant role in the layout of Royal Adelaide and New South Wales, which each retain elements of Mackenzie's plan.

Mackenzie remains golf's most revered architectural figure and is also most people's choice as the greatest designer of all time. His finest few courses are superior to any other architects and the genius of his best individual holes, such as 13 at

Augusta and Lahinch, 15 at Kingston Heath, the third at Royal Adelaide and a number at Royal Melbourne, Cypress Point and Crystal Downs, is unsurpassed. Despite this sterling portfolio and a global reputation as golf's greatest, there is one man who, at the very least, can match Mackenzie brilliant hole for brilliant hole – his mentor and one-time business partner, Harry Colt.

Harry Colt

An all-round sportsman and accomplished amateur golfer, Colt was a successful lawyer in 1894 when he walked away from the profession to help establish, design and then manage Rye Golf Club in the south of England. A few years later he moved to Sunningdale Golf Club in London's heathland, where as club secretary he oversaw changes to the original Willie Park Jnr course in response to the introduction of the rubber-cored ball. While at the club he also designed the remarkable Swinley Forest course nearby, and was sent north to Leeds to consult with founding members at the Alwoodley Golf Club. One of the members was a local doctor named Alister Mackenzie, who impressed Colt with his own design plans and later became a partner in Colt's flourishing business.

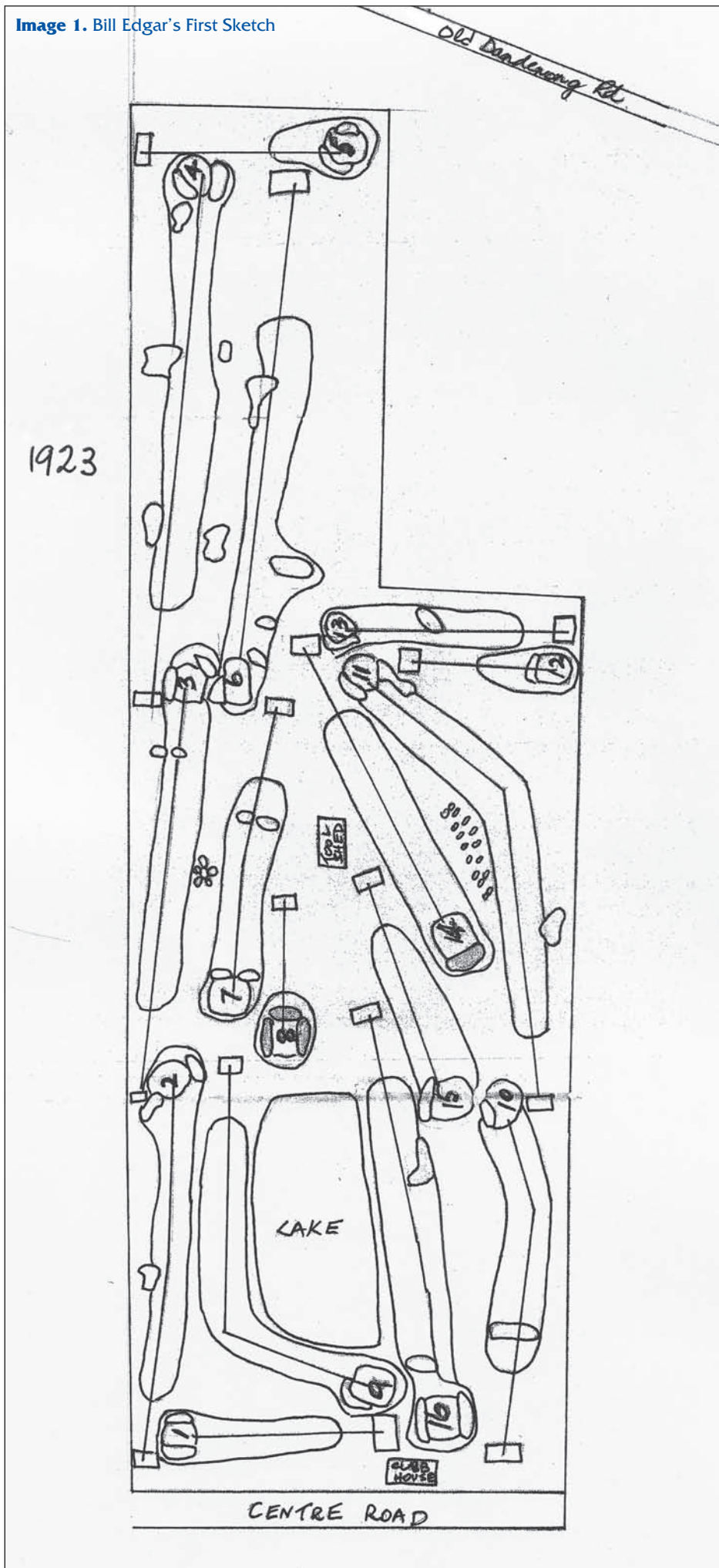
Although personality-wise Mackenzie and Colt were diametrically opposed, they shared similar views on golf design.

Mackenzie's style was clearly more artistic but strategically they arranged their holes in much the same manner. Colt's ability to "find" exceptional par 3s and his use of strategic, rather than penal, fairway bunkering were keys. A comparison between the two men is always interesting. If you limit the judgment to the best four or five courses then Mackenzie probably wins every time, but if you expand the criteria to include their complete portfolios then it's hard to argue that anyone in golf rivals Harry Colt.

As a disciple of the design philosophies of Dr Alister Mackenzie, not to mention an enormous fan of his finest courses, I never expected to uncover a peer architect with a resume of comparable quality, but Colt's output during a 40-year career was truly outstanding.

While we can debate which man was best of all time, what's clear is that these gentlemen not only built the most world-class golf holes, they also made the most profound impression on generations of subsequent course creators". *(with the permission of the magazine, Australian Golf Digest, the above paragraphs have been taken from an article by Darius Oliver in the August 2010 issue, on The 10 Greatest Architects of All Time).*

Image 1. Bill Edgar's First Sketch



Why is this relevant to Commonwealth Golf Club ?

Sam Bennett

CGCs professional from 1920 to early 1924, laid out the initial 16 holes, as shown in Bill Edgar's first sketch (Image 1). Bennett was also a course designer in his own right, being involved with Northern GC and Mordialloc GC (now Woodlands) layouts, as well as designing the layout in East Malvern in 1915 for the then Waverley GC (the fore-runner of Commonwealth GC).

Charles Lane

After Bennett's work, Charles Lane, Captain of CGC, 1923 to 1933, and a low handicap mark golfer, then became the driving force in CGCs course design.

The following is taken from the February 16, 1924 edition of The Australasian:

"I hear excellent reports of the progress being made towards preparing the Commonwealth club's links for its final shape, which promises to be such as to challenge comparison with that of the best in the State..... The yardage of the holes will come out as follows: 1, 300 yards: 2, 390 yards: 3, 503 yards: 4, 175 yards: 5, 469 yards: 6, 298 yards: 7, 129 yards: 8, 404 yards: 9, 344 yards: - 3,012 yards: 10, 390 yards: 11, 125 yards: 12, 420 yards: 13, 510 yards: 14, 425 yards: 15, 375 yards: 16, 251 yards: 17, 465 yards: 18, 413 yards: - 3,374 yards. Total, 6,386 yards".

(Note: thus the order of holes in today's terms is 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17: then 18, a par 3 hole now deleted, old 10, old 11/9, 12, 8, 1, 2, 3.)

In mid-1926 Lane took himself to Britain and later the USA.

The following notes are taken from an article in "The Sporting Globe" of December 18, 1926:

“Lane has just returned from a trip abroad, and during his travels he has concentrated as closely as ever an Australian has done on the study of golf course architecture. Before he went away he was recognised as one of the foremost authorities here on his subject; but consequent on his observations and studies in company with the leading men of the game on the other side, he has added immensely to his knowledge and come back to put his services and extra skill and knowledge in the hands of his club once more.

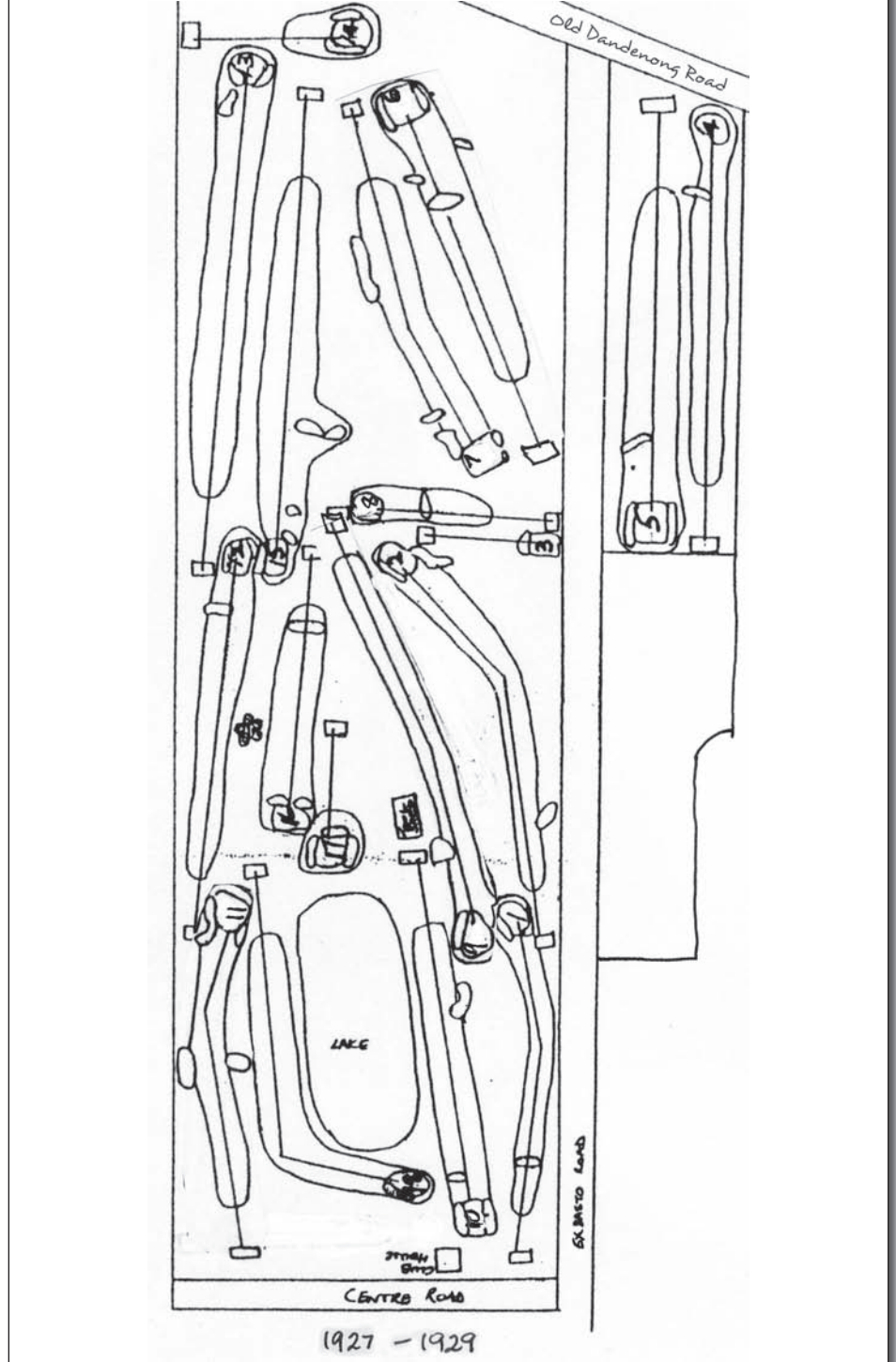
Every golf hole on the sixty or more courses that he studied while he was away has been scrutinised with the single eye of seeing how its best points could be applied at his beloved Commonwealth. The significance of every bunker, of every hummock, of every position of every feature of the holes was closely noted.”

“Probably the most valuable experience that the Commonwealth captain had was two whole weeks’ close and intimate association with Harry Colt, the greatest golf architect in the game. Not only did Lane discuss continuously matters pertaining to course lay-out, but he was daily out with the master doing the actual making of new courses and new holes. Colt was most generous to Lane in the way he gave him assistance, and offered him every facility in obtaining the data he was after.”

In the The Australasian of November 5, 1927:

“Charles Lane, the captain of the Commonwealth club for the last five years, as a golf course architect is known by his works, for he has converted the links of his club, already richly endowed in the important matter of its terrain, from a state of relative insipidity into a round of most engaging features, which give real character to many of its holes.

Image 2. 1927 - 1929 Sketch

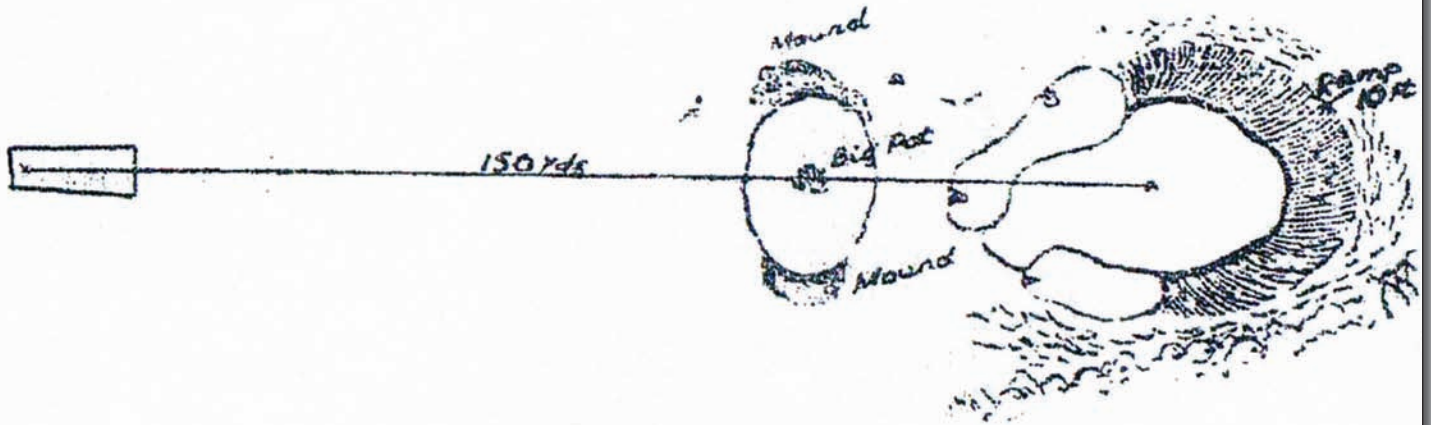


Australia, therefore, has now three well qualified golf course architects who have graduated at headquarters, so to speak, and who, with Alec Russell, form a most valuable adjunct to its golfing resources. They are Charles Lane, S. F. Mann, and H. L. Rymill, who have not only critically noted everything to be seen in the way of links on the other side, but interviewed and compared notes with the leading golf course architects, from H. C. Colt downwards”.

In summary, with reference to the 1923 Edgar sketch and the 1927 to 1929 sketch (Image 2), it is reasonable to assume Lane’s efforts gave us the holes which are the current 2nd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 11th green, 12th, and 15th (changed to run N to S, refer to Jock Young’s article in the November 5, 1930 Sporting Globe (Image 3)) and removed a number of penal bunkers, for example across the start of the now 17th fairway.

Image 3. Jock Young's Article in the Sporting Globe

NOV 5, 1930 SPORTING GLOBE



Plan of new 150 yards hole at Commonwealth to replace the present 15th. This one-shooter will be from a new tee to a new green and in a south-westerly direction.



Image 4. 1931 Course Aerial Photo

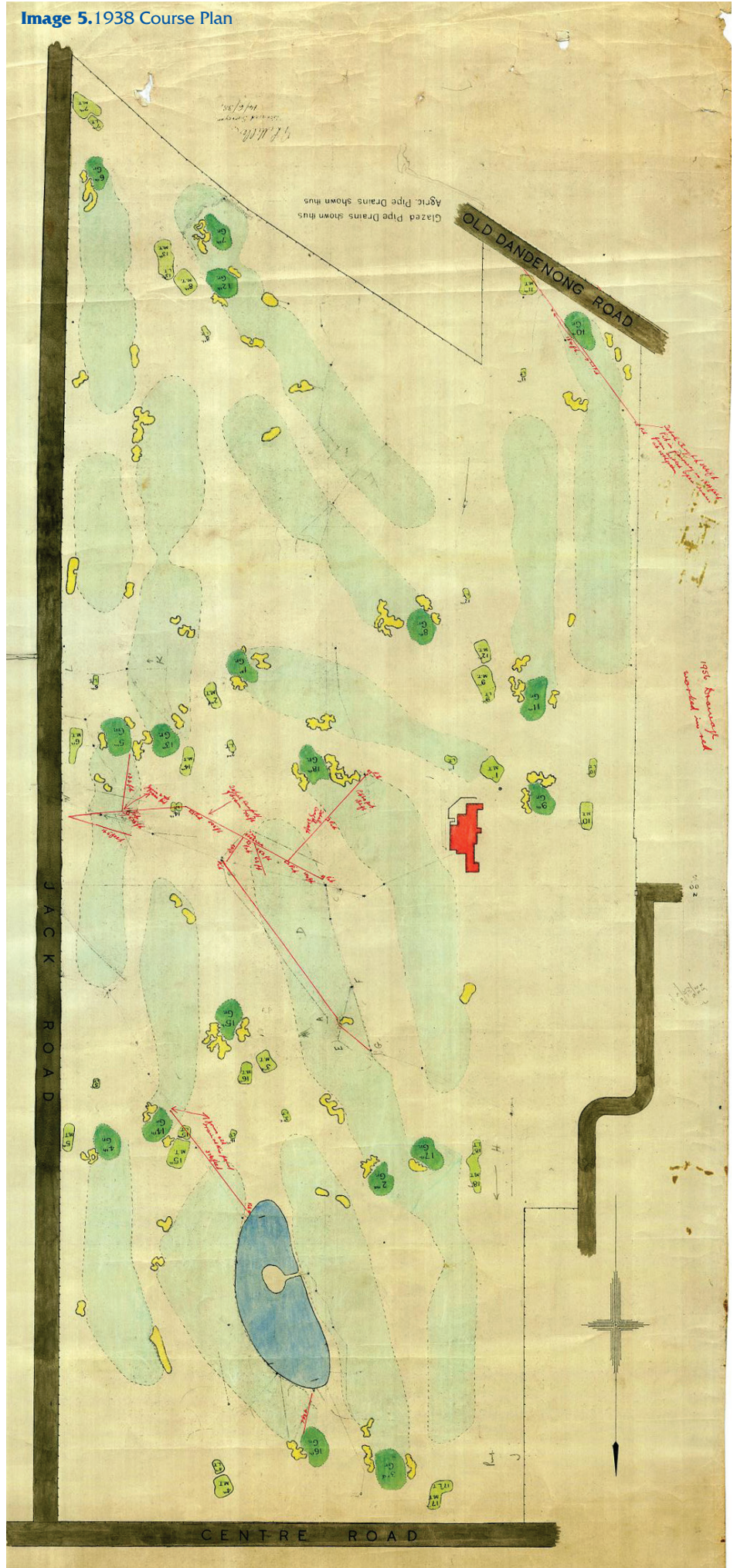
In 1929 when the clubhouse moved from Centre Road to its present location, Lane wrote to the Committee proposing the order of holes as we see today. He mapped out the present 11th green, the current 9th tee, and deleted the par 3 coming from near the present 18th green to where the practice putting green now is. His proposal was adopted, as we can see in the 1931 aerial photo of the course (Image 4).

Then, **Sloan Morpeth**, a top New Zealand and Australian golfer, and well-respected golf administrator for CGC, the Victorian Golf Association and the Australian Golf Union for over 30 years, used the 1929 book by the highly-regarded golf architects Wethered & Simpson, as his bible in carrying out the mid-1930s project at Commonwealth. CGC is fortunate in having Morpeth's original book in our keeping.

"The Architectural Side of Golf: H.N. Wethered & T. Simpson. Herbert Newton Wethered was the father of two famous amateur golfers: Joyce and Roger. Tom Simpson was a golf course architect who has three courses in the top 100 rankings to his credit: he designed Cruden Bay in Scotland, Morfontaine in France and redesigned Ballybunion in Ireland. This book talks about various design philosophies and includes chapters on Hazards, Putting Greens. An important historic work on golf architecture, contains many illustrations done by the authors."

Our records of the Chairman's address to the Annual General Meeting in 1936, show "and thanks particularly to the Manager, Mr. Morpeth who has planned and supervised the work and has designed the new greens". (It is reasonable to assume that Morpeth appears to have implemented the approach recommended by Wethered & Simpson in that "it is not advisable to have two similar greens on the same course", one of the Commonwealth course's features.)

Image 5. 1938 Course Plan



From the 1937 address to the AGM: “Since our last annual meeting your committee has proceeded with the work of re-turfing and reconstructing greens and tees.”

“It is also hoped during the following Summer to tackle those of our fairway bunkers that are considered to be of an unfair or old-fashioned design or which may, without affecting the course as a championship layout, be eliminated altogether. It is the policy of the Committee to eliminate hazards which are of a purely penal character without having any influence on the play of the hole from a strategic point of view. In other words, it is felt that most golfers provide their own difficulties without any help in this direction from the layout”.

From the 1938 address to the AGM: “concurrent with the re-making of the greens has been the re-modelling of all the greenside bunkering. The new bunkering is different from that found in most courses. It is more modern and more scientific.

If there can be such things as good bunkers we now have them at Commonwealth”.

“to sum up, the record of your Committee’s major work on the course this year has been:

- The successful completion of the establishment of 18 new greens.
- A completely new system of greenside bunkering as well as the alteration of many of the fairway bunkers.
- The construction of new teeing grounds.
- The improvement of the rough”.

Thus we can regard “the original course” as that seen on the 1938 course plan shown on previous page (Image 5), and as displayed in the Golf Shop passage. You can note that greenside bunkers were deleted from the 2nd(L), 4th (R), 6th (R), 7th (L), and 16th (L), as were a number of fairway bunkers. More recent modernisation and updating of the course was carried out in the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, under **Kevin Hartley’s** supervision.

In overseeing the installation of new drainage for all the greens, Hartley ensured that the existing greens contours were respected and largely replicated, while extending the length of a number of greens, and softening some slopes on the 8th, 11th, and 16th greens, to provide much greater areas for pin placements. Where fairway or greenside bunkers were added or adjusted, he ensured the new bunkers were in harmony with the existing bunkers. As well, the 1st, 6th, 7th and 12th greens were re-positioned using the available land, to reduce the risk of players being struck by an errant shot.

Conclusion

Commonwealth Golf Club can be proud that the two golf course architects who were the major forces in designing “the original course”, Charles Lane and Sloan Morpeth, were significantly influenced by the recognised best architects of their time, including by Harry Colt, regarded as the best golf course architect of all time.

