

Communiqué 2

Infancy and Adolescence of Golf in Launceston

*To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child.
For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by
the records of history?* (Marcus Tullius Cicero)

Communiqué 1 was distributed in June. It described the emergence of the new Mowbray Golf Club, its move to 'Janefield' and its development from 1934 to the end of that decade. Some readers will have puzzled over the use of the term 'new'. What was the 'old' or 'first' Mowbray Golf Club? This question will be addressed in this communiqué and will place that Club in the context of the first years of organised golf in Launceston.

As with Communiqué 1, in what follows direct quotations are shown in italics, while references are denoted by superscript numbers that match the numbers provided in the list at the end of the document.

The story begins some five or six years before the federation of the colonies to become the Commonwealth of Australia. Data concerning several dimensions give a picture of the context at the time:

- Launceston's population was only 18,022 at the 1901 census,¹ with females outnumbering males at a ratio of 113:100.²
- Motor transport had arrived in the 1890s, but there were few of them, and police did not begin licensing drivers or vehicles until 1909.³
- Trams didn't begin running in Launceston until 1911, with inaugural routes to Kings Bridge, Newstead and Mowbray, extending to Sandhill several months later.⁴
- Economic depression hit Tasmania and much of the world more generally in 1891. This was signalled by the collapse of the Van Diemen's Land Bank on August 3.⁵ In regard to this, a note in *The Tasmanian News* stated *The time has come when Tasmania must borrow more moderately and spend more cautiously, and thus good would come out of the existing depression.*⁶ *
- Flooding occurred frequently in northern Tasmania during these early years. Of particular relevance were the floods on the flats of the North Esk River, including the Hoblers Bridge and St Leonards areas. For example, *The Examiner* reported *At St Leonards ... the North Esk flood had swamped the land in all directions ... From St Leonards to within a short distance of the city the land on either side of the North Esk was submerged, one continuous lake being what was presented to the eye.*⁷ Then, less than a month later, the *Examiner* headlined *A Heavy Downpour: North Esk Again Flooded;*⁸ while the *Daily Telegraph* reported *During the recent floods ... the road near Hoblers Bridge was on more than one occasion completely submerged...*⁹

These factors probably suggest the circumstances at the time weren't highly conducive to playing a sport. Nevertheless, apart from golf, other recreational activities such as

cycling, athletics, tennis, riding, homing, sparring, rowing and sailing, together with music and drama, were mentioned frequently in the local press of the day.

The early history of organised golf in Launceston is quite 'muddled' and it is no easy thing to understand the many changes that occurred. The timeline shown here attempts to clarify matters. Subsequent sections of this communication flesh out each episode.

Timeline 1895 - 1936

- 1895 Launceston GC formed and play began at Lawrence Vale
- 1897 Launceston GC relocated to Newstead
- 1899 Mowbray GC formed and play began at Mowbray Racecourse
- 1900 Mowbray GC changed name to Tasmanian GC
St Leonards GC formed at Tolarno
Launceston GC 'in recess'
- 1901 Tasmania GC moved to new links at Kings Meadows
- 1906 St Leonards GC changed name to Launceston GC
St Leonards GC changed status to 'practice' club
- 1908 Tasmania GC renamed Launceston GC
- 1930 Riverside GC formed with links at Newstead
- 1931 Riverside GC moved to links behind Mowbray Racecourse
- 1934 Riverside GC relocated to West Tamar
New Mowbray GC formed
- 1936 Highfields GC born but died in infancy

Birth of the first Launceston Golf Club

It is within this context that the original Launceston Golf Club emerged. As far as I can determine, the first public statement regarding the introduction of golf to Launceston was made in the Examiner in 1895. It read:

Yesterday afternoon a meeting of those interested in the introduction of the game of golf into the city was held at Oxford Chambers, when it was decided that those present should form themselves into the Launceston Golf Club, with power to add to their number. The Rev. W.H. Webster was appointed secretary and treasurer pro tem, and a working committee was also appointed. The formation of the club was facilitated by the generous action of Mr Edmond King in granting permission for the use of his ground above the South Launceston reservoir, which is very suitable for the purpose.¹⁰

The same newspaper followed up 12 days later with the report that *Several members of the newly formed Launceston Golf Club attended on the ground near the South Launceston (Lawrence Vale) reservoir on Saturday afternoon.*¹¹ Then, again in 1895, the Mercury reported *The Launceston Golf Club is making steady progress. There are now about 20 ladies and gentlemen on the roll...*¹²

The claim made here that Launceston Golf Club was founded in 1895 may come as a surprise to some readers. The current (2017) logo of that club shows the date '1899',¹³ presumably as a statement of the Club's founding date. Similarly, difference was noted in an Examiner article from 1909 where it was stated by the Chairman at the annual meeting of Launceston Golf Club that *The game was started in 1897 on the Lawrence Vale hills behind the reservoir, attaining the dignity of a club the following year with links at Newstead.*¹⁴ Further, an article from 1932 put it that *in 1897 a group founded the Launceston Golf Club at Newstead ...*¹⁵ To add to any confusion, the same publication, on the same day, reported that *The Launceston Golf Club Ltd was established in 1899 and has been in existence for 33 years.*¹⁶ This latter statement is not quite true, given the Club was not incorporated until September 1920. (Fotheringham, J.F. and Wilson, J.W., 1999, *The History of the Launceston Golf Club*, p 56).

The Launceston Golf Club relocated from Lawrence Vale to Newstead

It seems the Lawrence Vale links proved unsuitable. This will come as no surprise to those familiar with the very hilly terrain in the area. Although it was not reported in the press at the time, the Launceston Golf Club relocated to Newstead (a kilometre or so to the east) in 1897¹⁷. Some people referred to these links being the home of 'The Briers Club' (a colloquial term I suppose) due to ... *the prevalence of brier bushes on the course.*¹⁸

Mowbray Golf Club formed

In July 1899, the Mercury announced that *A new club has been formed called the Mowbray Golf Club ... at the Mowbray racecourse.*¹⁹ Furthermore, on that same day the Examiner reported *Now that the Mowbray Club has been fairly started ... through the kind permission of Mr W.C. Grubb they have secured nice links on the Mowbray racecourse ...*²⁰, and just two days later it was announced *The Mowbray Golf Club has arranged for special busses to leave Thompson's Corner (in the suburb now known as Newnham) for the links at 10.45am and 2.15pm tomorrow (Thursday).*²¹

Rapid progress seems to have been made at the Mowbray racecourse since less than one month later *the first series of medal matches in connection with the Mowbray Golf Club ... started this afternoon.*²² Then *A team of 12 players from Mowbray Golf Club visited Longford on Saturday, and were defeated by the local players by 20 holes.*²³ This result was reversed several weeks later when Mowbray defeated Longford by 14 holes in mixed foursomes format.²⁴

The following two aspects of golf at the time are worth noting:

First, golfers, obviously, did not have unrestricted use of the racecourse. For example, it was reported *There will be no play at Mowbray today in consequence of the L.T.C. spring meeting.*²⁵

Second, golf was played 'in season' - for example *the links of the Mowbray Golf Club close this season on Saturday next*²⁶, and *The season of Mowbray Golf Club opens tomorrow*.²⁷

Major changes in the new century

The middle of 1900 saw a number of very significant events in the Launceston golfing scene. These are outlined below.

In May, 1900, it was revealed that *Some alterations have been made in the links at the racecourse since last year, and it is understood further improvements are contemplated*.²⁸ However, circumstances changed rapidly, as foreseen in the following report: *At the end of 1899 Mr L.A. Cuff arrived in Launceston and he advised that improvements be carried out to the Mowbray links ... but permission could not be obtained to erect the necessary bunkers*.²⁹

This fact may have been the catalyst for the events that occurred in succeeding months.

Mowbray Golf Club ready for relocation to Kings Meadows

On 1 June, 1900 a report in the Mercury indicated that *At a special meeting of the Mowbray Golf Club tonight it was stated that new links, 120 acres in extent, would be laid out in proper style at an early date*.³⁰ The Mercury followed up with a report on 25 August that *The adjourned annual meeting of the Mowbray Golf Club was held tonight...It was stated the club's new links at Kings Meadows would be ready for play about the month of November*.³¹

Mowbray Golf Club renamed Tasmanian Golf Club

Then, on 27 August 1900, just two days later, the Examiner revealed that, subsequent to the annual meeting of the Mowbray Golf Club, an extraordinary meeting was held, *at which a number of rules were made. The principal one was the changing of the name of the club, which will in future be the Tasmanian Golf Club*.³² The change was reported also in the Launceston Daily Telegraph.³³ This was followed quickly by a report that *the monthly medal competition in connection with the Tasmanian Golf Club took place at Mowbray on Saturday*.³⁴

The statement above demonstrates that Mowbray Golf Club was the immediate antecedent of Tasmanian Golf Club. Similarly, as we shall see a little later, the Tasmanian Golf Club became the new Launceston Golf Club. Consequently, it is no exaggeration to claim that the old Mowbray Golf Club was, indeed, an antecedent of the new Launceston Golf Club.

Over the next year or so the following statements regarding the Tasmanian Golf Club appeared in the local press.

First, (on 5 September, 1900) *The laying out of the new links for the Tasmanian Golf Club at Kings Meadows has been completed*.³⁵

Second, (on 15 October, 1900) *The first open golf tournament in the colony took place on Saturday over the Mowbray links (still at the Mowbray racecourse) under the auspices of the Tasmanian Golf Club*.³⁶

Third, (on 15 April, 1901) *Some 200 people accepted the invitation of the Tasmanian Golf Club, and attended the opening of the new links on Saturday.*³⁷

Fourth, (on 17 April, 1901) *The new links of the Tasmanian Golf Club will be in order for play. The Tasmanian Club will give up possession of the links at Mowbray at the end of the month.*³⁸

Apart from a couple of references to Mowbray Golf Club's early years, there does not appear to be any further mention in the Tasmanian press of what was to become the new version of the Club until an Examiner article on 10 May, 1934.³⁹

Launceston Golf Club in recess (or non-existent?)

It is worth asking about the existence of Launceston Golf Club. Did it continue to operate in Newstead after Mowbray Golf Club was formed at the Mowbray racecourse links? Or did it lapse for the time being?

I think the answer to this question is clear. The last press report of the era concerning the Launceston Golf Club appeared in the Examiner in 1900. It read: *The first men's 'medal' in conjunction with the Launceston Golf Club, was held on Saturday at the Newstead links.*⁴⁰

It is also clear that Launceston Golf Club was not a foundation member of the Northern Tasmanian Golf Association. The internet site (www.northerngolf.com.au) of this body (later named Golf Tasmania North and then Northern Golf Inc) shows that a meeting of delegates from Mowbray, St Leonards, Longford, Sheffield and Devonport Golf Clubs met on 21 June, 1900, with the purpose of forming the Association. The first meeting of this body took place on 19 July, 1900 and the internet site indicates the five foundation members were St Leonards, Longford, Sheffield, Devonport and Tasmanian Golf Clubs. Launceston Golf Club did not exist at this time, becoming St Leonards Golf Club; nor did Mowbray since it had become Tasmanian Golf Club.

The next press reports to mention Launceston Golf Club were in the Tasmanian News (p6) and the Examiner (p2) on 16 March, 1906. They revealed that the annual meeting of the St Leonards Golf Club had voted to alter its name to Launceston Golf Club. This development needs to be teased out.

The St Leonards Golf Club - a short story

First mention of what may have been the St Leonards GC was in the middle of 1900. The statement was

*The exceptionally fine weather prevailing on Saturday induced many golfers to visit the links for practice. There was a goodly number at Strathroy**, and Tolarno***, while nearer home the Mowbray and Newstead links were well patronised.*⁴¹

A couple of weeks later the name 'St Leonards Golf Club' was actually supplied in the Examiner where some inter-club foursomes were referred to.⁴² Then, about 14 months later it was reported *On Saturday afternoon a strong team from the New Chum Club, at Tolarno, went out to Wickford.*⁴³ ****

'Tolarno' was a working farm, and this could well be the reason the St Leonards Golf Club relocated to Mowbray racecourse a little later. Evidence for this is that

*A visitor to the Mowbray course on Saturday might easily have thought a race meeting was taking place instead of the opening of the St Leonards Golf Club, owing to the numbers of golfers who assembled there.*⁴⁴

However, it was pointed out at its fifth annual meeting that St Leonards members at Mowbray racecourse were described as being *heavily handicapped in only having two afternoons in the week for practice.*⁴⁵ This fact may have prompted a 'takeover' attempt of the club. In response to this, 'Rubbercore', a local correspondent probably, had a letter to the editor of the Examiner published. He/she spoke of *the controversial nature of a proposal by the Tasmanian Club to the St Leonards Club that the latter merge itself into the former.*⁴⁶

St Leonards Golf Club rebadged as Launceston Golf Club

A report on the St Leonards Golf Club's eighth annual meeting held in 1906 stated *Taking into consideration the name of the club being the St Leonards Golf Club no longer exists, through the fact that the location of the links is now at Mowbray, and that no players now come from St Leonards, the committee desires to have an expression of opinion from members as to the advisability of re-naming the club 'The Launceston Golf Club'.*⁴⁷

This motion was passed by the meeting.⁴⁸

There were only two references in the press to the Launceston Golf Club over the following two years. These were:

*The first monthly medal of the Launceston Golf Club (formerly the St Leonards Club) was held on their links at Mowbray (in May, 1906)*⁴⁹

and

*The balance sheet of the Launceston Golf Club shows that last year £271/4/6 was received and £201/15/3 expended (April, 1907)*⁵⁰

Similarly, there were few references to the St Leonards Club. The most significant one was made by 'Caddie' in his column:

*Since last year the most interesting indication of an advance in golf here is the decision of the St Leonards club to withdraw from all matches, and continue only as practice club.*⁵¹

Launceston Golf Club reborn

It will be recalled that the Mowbray Golf Club was renamed the Tasmanian Golf Club in 1900. This nomenclature continued for the next eight years or so. However, in 1908 it was reported that the annual meeting of the Tasmanian Golf Club supported a motion to change its name to Launceston Golf Club.⁵²

Riverside Golf Club formed

The first mention in the local press concerning the emergence of Riverside Golf Club was in August, 1930.⁵³ It stated a number of young men met on 21 August, with Mr T. Brownrigg occupying the chair, and revealed permission had been obtained to play on part of Mr A.H. Luck's property behind the Association tennis courts at Newstead. It

went on to say that the official opening of The Riverside Golf Club Ltd would be on Saturday 27 September, 1930. A little later the location of the links was 'clarified' as being *along the river flats near Hoblers Bridge*.⁵⁴ However, Riverside Golf Club decided within a few months to move its links. It was reported that its new links would be *...at the back of Mowbray racecourse on a property owned by Mr J.J. Broomby*.⁵⁵ *****

Again, Riverside's tenure at its Mowbray site was relatively short lived. At its annual meeting of 9 April, 1934 the decision was made to lease land owned by Mr E.W. Freeland on the West Tamar.⁵⁶ The move from Mowbray was rapid, since it was reported that in less than a week *The Riverside Golf Club course has been moved from Mowbray ... and all the gear was shifted yesterday*.⁵⁷ Riverside's official opening at its new site occurred on 12 May 1934.⁵⁸

It has been suggested to me that the local government area known as 'Riverside' was actually named after the Riverside Golf Club (rather than the Club being named after its location). A petition under The Towns Act, 1934, to the Governor of Tasmania by the Warden, Councillors and Electors of the Municipality of Beaconsfield, to have the area proclaimed as a Town, to be named Riverside, was displayed in the Examiner in 1949.⁵⁹ This was some 15 years after the formation of the Club. Furthermore the Tasmanian Gazette published 'Decision List No. 36 of the Nomenclature Board Of Tasmania, Approval of Place Names' which consists of decisions made prior to October 23, 1953. It includes Riverside and states it *Is the site of a well-known golf Course*.⁶⁰ Given these two pieces of evidence, it is likely the suggestion stated above is true, and if, indeed, the location was named after the golf club, such an outcome may be quite rare.

New Mowbray Golf Club formed

As flagged in the time line displayed above, the new Mowbray Golf Club emerged in 1934. Initially, I was tempted to claim that Mowbray Golf Club was 'in recess' from the time it became Tasmanian Golf Club until its 'rebirth' following Riverside Golf Club's migration to West Tamar. However, I believe the approach eventually adopted here is more truthful. This approach is vindicated further by the fact that Mowbray Golf Club celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1959 - 25 years after 1934.

The turbulent era of infancy and adolescence of golf in Launceston was coming to an end, and a new, more mature era was beginning. This was the starting point for my first communiqué.

Highfields Golf Club

However, before leaving this era, it is necessary to say something about the final entry on the time line displayed near the commencement of this communiqué. An article in the Hobart Mercury told the tale: *A golf club to be known as the Highfields Golf Club was formed at a meeting at Launceston last night. The club will be located on property owned by Mr J.J. Broomby, at Mowbray Heights...and formerly leased by Mowbray Golf Club*.⁶¹ This same article indicated there were 31 members and a full committee structure.

Despite what appeared to be a promising start, Highfields Golf Club had a very short life, since the final mention of it in the press was in September, 1936.

Looking back, the early demise of Highfields is not surprising, given that its emergence brought the number of golf clubs in Launceston to four. This number was for a total population in Launceston and its suburbs of just 32,833 at the June, 1933 Commonwealth census.⁶²

* It is interesting to note the 'Global Financial Crisis' of 2007 and 2008 and its aftermath brought forth similar sorts of commentary, despite the messages to come from experiences in the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s and other difficult economic episodes of the past.

** C.A. Grubb's grazing property, formerly known as Kerry Lodge, a kilometre or two south of Youngtown (Burnie Advocate, 17 June, 1937, p2)

*** 'Tolarno' is permanently registered on the Tasmanian Heritage Register and is located at 41 Station Road, St Leonards (<http://stors.tas.gov.au>). At the turn of the 19th century it was the property of W.C. Grubb who ... *has indirectly done more than he ever dreams of for the promotion of the game in the colony, and golf players, one and all, feel personally indebted to him.* (Launceston Daily Telegraph, 17 October, 1900, p3) It is likely another site in the Corra Linn - St Leonards area hosted golf as well. A long-time identity in the Northern Tasmanian golf scene, Iris Meek, has advised me she recalls *One of my stepfather's uncles held leases on three or four large properties in St Leonards...one was Darleymore, and it was supposed to support a 'golf club' of sorts which folded after a big flood. Some of these tracts of land which were written up as 'golf clubs' were no more than grazing land.*

****A grazing property within three miles of Longford (Hobart Mercury, 25 April, 1910, p5)

***** Mr J.J. Broomby was a significant Launceston identity at the time. For example, he was Managing Director of Reliance Worsted Mills Pty Ltd and a Director of the Railton-Latrobe Shale Oil Co.; was involved in local cricket and football; was a notable director of choral activities; was mentioned frequently for his golfing deeds.

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