

## HENBURY GOLF COURSE: A REMARKABLE PROVENANCE

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Colleen O'Sullivan

The other day I was riffling through my 'Henbury' file – a six-centimetre thick file of assorted information that I collected while writing the 'Henbury' book. It is over six years since I opened that file and it would still be collecting dust, if someone hadn't asked me a question about Henbury. Which I couldn't answer!

It amazes me that I can write a book and a few years later have forgotten all the research that went into it; all the serendipitous pieces of information that fell into my lap.

One such item was a double-page spread from *Golf in Australia* (the official weekly magazine of Australian golf clubs), dated 29 October 1931, and titled "Modern Golf Course Construction in the Country: the Henbury Golf Club's Links". It reminded me again of Henbury's surprising origin.

The writer of the article is clearly impressed at the way members of Henbury Golf Club constructed their course. Their first step, after securing the land, was to engage a golf architect, "to have the course properly laid out in order to avoid the mistakes that many, not only country clubs, fall into by not obtaining expert advice."

That expert was Rupert S Black. He had increased his credentials when renowned British golf architect Dr Alistair Mackenzie visited Australia in 1926 and retained Black as his chief draughtsman. By the time Black visited Henbury five years later he had established himself as a golf course designer and expert in turf culture, and made regular contributions to golfing magazines. He designed and constructed Oatlands golf course and had a significant role in constructing Royal Queensland and Elanora.

Rupert Black, the writer explained, "was successful in obtaining a splendid layout of 3,178 yards (2906 metres) for the nine holes, taking advantage of every natural feature which abounded on the 40 odd acres at the disposal of the club."

The writer of the Henbury article was intrigued at how this golf course was built in a small country town in the second year of the Depression. He suggested that city clubs who were concerned that their courses were deteriorating, due to lack of money, should take note.

"The moment the visiting expert had definitely decided the positions of the first and ninth holes no fewer than thirty voluntary workers armed with hickory handled axes and spades...were eagerly felling timbers with a stroke...For three days including King's birthday did this ardent band of golfers sacrifice their golf for their future home." Even to this day, course maintenance at Henbury is carried out entirely by volunteers.

The following week voluntary workers toiled beside hired workers and horses with scoops. They removed trees and obstructions, dug a mile-long canal to drain off soakage, and constructed greens, tees and "modern" bunkers. [It is] "The first time an inland golf club will have introduced and proved that modern bunkering is possible and no more costly than the previous uninteresting type (sand wall and pit bunkers) usually encountered."

One of Black's innovations was double greens. "The usual sanded and oiled greens are laid down in front of which will be formed the grass ones." This plan took into account drier country conditions and the two types of greens which players would encounter on other courses. As it turned out Henbury did not get grass greens till 1956.

Good golfers are drawn to courses that challenge – 'links lands'. These resemble the tough terrain of a Scottish coastal course (where golf originated). According to the writer, Henbury "more closely approaches links lands than many golf courses around Sydney".

As if Henbury course wasn't tough enough, pitch blocks were introduced as another hazard. These were low mounds or ridges about ten metres from each green which forced the player to make a "lofted approach".

The founders of Henbury wanted a golf course to embrace the whole community: Kandos, Rylstone, Charbon and Clandulla; a golf course to be proud of. Their vision, they assured Rylstone Council, was of "something out of the ordinary". When the golf course was declared open on 9 August 1931 handsome swing gates "on ball bearings" welcomed golfers to the course. Greens and hazards were enclosed by low ornamental iron fences with "rounded tops and loops brazed on the posts to carry wires".

Five years after Henbury opened, the club decided to extend their course to eighteen holes. They applied to the land board to lease a further 102 acres of crown land. Rupert S Black was their preferred golf architect to design the course but he was by then attached to the Virginia Golf Club in Brisbane. Closer to home was Arthur East, a golf architect of distinction and head professional at the Lakes Golf Club in Sydney.

During a weekend in mid-October 1937, he marked out the new tees and greens, gave orders for the initial clearing of the fairways and marked trees that were to be left standing. He proposed that the club introduce oil into the eleven-metre-diameter sand greens, pointing out that a pitched ball stops quicker on those greens. He proposed an extra hole in each green to give members variety (these to be filled with sand when not in use). Another suggestion to improve players' foot action was the use of two ordinary door mats fitted into wooden frames placed 30cms apart for members to play off.

The Secretary reported on the nine-hole extension at the next meeting. "He (Arthur East) generally expressed himself as extremely well pleased with the class of country...and thought it would make an excellent addition to our course."

Provenance is not just about physical origins. It is also about the stories that accompany origins.

Some of you will know the story of how Henbury came to be. It was a story my mother told me: "Mrs Saville and Mrs Fink had an argument on Kandos golf course, so Mrs Saville started her own course." My mother went on to explain how her father, (my grandfather W H Walsh), wanted to show his support for Mrs Saville who was a good customer. He bought three of his daughters each a set of golf clubs and joined them at Henbury.

I liked that story. It was about a strong woman who took matters into her own hands. It was also about loyalty and unexpected gifts.

The argument between the two women prompted the new golf course. On learning about the argument, Mrs Saville's husband is reported to have said, "We won't put up with that!". It was soon after, that he and a group of local high profile businessmen negotiated a deal to establish a golf course on Dawson land.

That in itself adds to Henbury's provenance. James Dawson was the surveyor of Kandos and his property was called 'Henbury', named after Henbury Park in Cheshire where the Dawson family originated. There is another Henbury Golf Course, in Bristol, England.

The argument on the golf course was indicative of a wider conflict in the town; a rivalry between two cement companies. In my file there is a letter written by the Saville's daughter, Peggy, who explains the rivalry. Her father, Christopher Saville, was manager of the Charbon cement works and Mrs Fink's husband, also Christopher, was secretary of the Kandos cement works. "Kandos was older and larger and Charbon smaller and more modern." Over the next two decades the Kandos company sponsored the Kandos Golf Course while the Charbon company sponsored Henbury. Kandos Golf Club closed soon after World War 2.

Henbury is a forgotten asset. John Blain (a founding member) declared in a taped interview with local, Judy Robinson, that Henbury was a course you could play State championships on. I don't know whether in fact any State championships were played at Henbury but it is certainly indicative of the pride that those early members had in their course.

Driving into Kandos from Rylstone, Henbury golf course provides a charming entry to the town. Players in particular are in touch with its beauty, especially at the stillness of dusk when the western sun burns the cliffs of the Coomber Melon range and kangaroos bound across fairways.

At a time when many golf courses are under threat of closure, Henbury, with such a provenance, would benefit from a marketing campaign.

[www.henburygolfcourse.com.au](http://www.henburygolfcourse.com.au)