

EDNA CROPLEY

In 1997 the Club made Edna a Life Member. This was a tribute to her tireless work over three decades. This is her story.

“I had been introduced to golf by friends in the 1930’s when two holes of the course were on the other side of Sutton St in Warragul and I always had vague plans to take up golf when the time was right. That time came in 1971 when I joined some of my friends at Drouin. There was no professional at the Club so it was a matter of read what was available and hope my second-hand clubs were already trained. We enthusiastically played in all sorts of weather when the ball sometimes disappeared into the mud or washed into the drains crossing the fairway. Lightning could be a problem too. The Club came close to tragedy in the eighties, when, in a heavy storm, our curator, Frank Cobbledick, was making his way on foot back to the Clubhouse. Lightning struck the ground very close to him, leaving a spidery pattern burnt in the grass. This was clearly visible for weeks. A similar fate happened to Club stalwart, Jim Burke.

In 1974 I was thrilled to win the “Ann Roberts” (Mrs Don Roberts) Trophy for best handicap score over three rounds of the Annual Club Championship and repeated the success on two other occasions. Never a top golfer, I was fortunate to win the Bronze Division of 27 holes “All Gippsland Championship” in 1984 - a day I’ll never forget. It was held at Yallourn in dreadful weather with some of the greens covered in hail. My playing partners should have been awarded a medal for playing with me after the 18 holes break!

Another special happening was a hole-in-one on the 5th (now the 14th) although at that time the Club was experimenting playing the 18 holes in a different sequence and on that lucky day it was number 17 on the card. Good fortune struck again on the same hole in 1996 although by then it was back to being the 5th. I used a six iron on both occasions. Now, 16 years later, I need a dry course and a driver even to make the green. It may be of interest that the original Honour Board showed the ladies with their husband’s initials, so that many times Club Champion was first shown as Mrs L. Smith and only later as E. Smith.

1977 was a time of taking steps into the unknown. It was Drouin’s turn to take office in the WGGAA and no-one was prepared to put up their hands. To have to “pass” reflected poorly on the Club so Elvie Pratt and I volunteered to do our best as President and Secretary. As absolute newcomers to matters administrative, we were given great support and advice by the Garfield ladies who had held office the previous term. It proved to be a demanding time. The Morwell Golf Club opened in 1977 and needed support. This brought to ten in the Association and required a revision of the format of competitions. In 1978 the Alma Pepperell Encouragement Trophy for long markers was established. The Drouin Associates presented the perpetual trophy bearing her name at the inaugural event played at Drouin.

1986 saw the passing of the Equal Opportunity and Sex Discrimination Act. This involved attendances at seminars held in Melbourne for VLGU representatives where we were addressed and advised by the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, Mrs Fay Marles. It was a time of change within clubs – the ladies were no longer Associates and became full members with equal rights to men. This was not greeted with great joy in some areas – the passing of an act does not necessarily mean changing of an attitude. In 1986, Joy McIntosh (Ladies President) and I (Ladies Captain) served on the General Committee. We were joined by Sheila McDowell as Minute Secretary..

In that era we had much bigger ladies' fields with 50-60 players on Club days, up to 120 players on Open Days and up to 26 teams for the Silver Salver. Catering for those events was, as is now, admirably handled by the ladies. Catering for weddings and special events raised thousands of dollars towards the Club funds

In 1997 I was honoured and surprised to be made a Life Member of the Club. In 2002 at the official opening of the new nine complete with various dignitaries and a “champagne marquee” on the present 8th tee, I was proud to share the honour with Gerry Butler to open the course. Gerry took a driver and flighted the ball over the dog-leg. I used a seven iron up the fairway for safety! We all have fond memories of Gerry and his astounding turn of phrase. I recall turning up at an evening function at the Club to be greeted by Gerry with, “It’s wonderful what a pot of paint can do to an old barn door!” Gerry was a special fellow and he is missed.

As my golfing years wind down, I had a last hurrah when with my daughter, Jenny Bolger, we won a 4BBB event at Devil Island on our Gymkhana day in 2009 with a score of 51. I managed to get my name on the card six times.

I have had much enjoyment as a member of the Drouin Golf Club and regard the lasting friendships I have made as by far the biggest bonus.”

Of course modesty has prevented Edna from telling the full story. She is representative of those whose hard work ensured the Golf Club consolidated the efforts of those who got the Club going in 1955. By the time Edna joined in 1971, the Club was in reasonable shape. The full eighteen was opened in 1963 and a Club House built in 1967. Both only happened because of confidence in the future. It was Edna’s generation that ensured that confidence was not misplaced. In the eighties it led to the purchase of land on Princes Way, the extension to the Golf House and the purchase of land on Fairway Drive in 1989.

Edna’s contribution was to get involved administratively, work hard with the innumerable Associates’ fund raising activities to provide much needed cash for the Club and help out at jobs others would prefer to ignore. It might be as simple as cleaning the toilets when Ladies’ Captain – obviously the men didn’t have to do it because after all they didn’t use them. It was also much more complex such as taking on the executive role in the WGGAA when others were reluctant and of course steering the Club through the implementation of the Equal Opportunity and Sex Discrimination Act.

This latter effort is revealing. It is no coincidence that the delegate chosen was a woman because it was not seen as a matter of social justice so much as a “women’s issue.” There is some suggestion that the Club would have been happy not to move at all until it was realised that the liquor licence would be under threat.

The difficulty was to persuade the members that it was not only an inevitable but a fair thing to do. Ruffled feathers had to be smoothed and a lot of this fell to Edna. Attitudes had to be changed and perhaps even today there is work to be done. When I was told about the resentment toward women playing on Saturdays and said, “Well at least that is in the past now” I got a chuckle in reply.

At the time Edna had this to say: “I have been privileged to serve on the previously all-male General Committee. While this increased the work load considerably, I do feel that we were able to make a worthwhile contribution to the *stability of the Club during a very difficult period* (my emphasis). We look forward to the future with optimism.” Well the future is now and Edna can feel proud of her contribution then and now – she still sponsors a trophy for the best handicap performer in the Ladies Championship.

EDNA CROPLEY

Drouin Golf Club wouldn't exist without the tireless work of many people over the years. In 1955 the doubting Thomases were swept aside by those who said, "We had a club before the war; we can have one now." This only became a reality when, through sheer hard work, a course was carved out - initially within the confines of the Race Course but later over more of Mathew Bennett Park. In those days as well as owning a set of golf clubs you needed a mattock because the many Sunday working bees required hard work.

It helped too if you had deep pockets because keeping the whole enterprise solvent was a constant battle. Nevertheless, in 1967 a Club House was opened and not much more than 10 years later on, extended. The Club must have been an appealing prospect to the bank because both of these projects required loans. When the Committee declared in 1967 that present and future members were required to take out shares in the Club Cooperative, it happened. Members were dedicated to their Club.

Where does this leave Edna Cropley? She was made a Life Member in ??? It must have been for something other than golfing prowess because by her estimation she was no more than what most of us are as golfers - a hacker. By my reckoning she was rewarded for being a worker. She represented the often unacknowledged contribution that the Ladies - called Associates in those early days - made to the creation and then survival of our club.

But first of all, the lady herself. She remembers hitting a few shots at Warragul before the War - WW2 of course - but didn't get involved in the game until 1970. It was really in a fit of pique. She left her racquet and purse behind after a game of night tennis. Of course they went missing and she thought, "Damn (?????) this, I want something better." Alan "Darky" (long time Captain and Committeeman) Dunstan provided the answer: a set of clubs for sale. With Lady President Anne Roberts' encouragement (no, not the current Ann Roberts but the wife of our very first Club President, Don) and club stalwart, Jim Burke, Edna switched allegiances and began a life-long love affair with what should be regarded as the "noble game".

She was entirely self-taught with a lowest handicap of 17 so there are no Club Championships to her name. However she did win the Handicap Championship four times to illustrate one of the most appealing aspects of our game: the handicap system allows us all to compete. There are not too many sports where this is done as fairly. Edna certainly believes in the principle because for 17 years she has sponsored the trophy for the best handicap performer in the Ladies Championship.

The other achievement as a player that makes her proud is to have won the All Gippsland Bronze (equivalent to Division 2). This was stroke event over 27 holes. Given that Gippsland stretches from Garfield in the West to Bairnsdale in the East and includes clubs south of the Strzelecki's this is an impressive achievement.

However, it is as a worker that Edna made her most valuable contribution to the Club. She was at the centre of the fund raising activities of the Associates. The Club from its inception had relied heavily upon the fund raising ability of its members and at the forefront were the activities of the Associates. For example in 1981 the Ladies spent \$3000 on curtains for the Club House, passed over \$2000 to the General Committee and still found time to raise \$545 for Lyrebird Village. Up until the opening of the refurbished Club House 2 years ago the Tournament was always catered for by the Ladies. Social activities like the Annual Ball, the monthly dinner dances, the annual dinner and Saturday night counter meals were all catered for by the Associates. When the Club facilities were hired out for weddings, service club functions, social events it was often the Associates who did the catering.

On Sundays Associates were rostered to feed the many green fee players, especially from Melbourne, who provided a valuable source of income. Interestingly today the Sunday green fee players are still vitally important which makes the very wet weather and vandalism to the greens a problem for our finances.

Where were the men in all of this? They claimed that they contributed through bar sales but that wasn't particularly hard work. In 1983 Daryl Donaldson - now there is someone who liked a good party - announced that the men would cook and wait for the Christmas diner. This was a tradition that continued into the eighties so presumably they didn't kill any one. Of course through working bees and by participating in the many social activities they still contributed.

Edna's work for the Club was more than just in catering. Today we pay staff to perform the myriad activities needed to keep a multimillion dollar enterprise operating. For most of the Club's history this work was done by the members. Floors don't get swept by themselves nor toilets cleaned. Beautification of the course was carried out by members - even today some holes are still the responsibility of interested members. I think the garden bed at the 19th tee and the garden around the dam on the 23rd tee are examples. Edna was one of those people who made the place tick over.

Inevitably this wanting to help the Club found expression in administrative roles. Unable to join the General Committee, she joined the Associates' Committee and held roles such as Secretary and Captain. This led to her becoming Secretary for two years of the West Gippsland Association when it became Drouin's turn to fulfil that role. This coincided with the introduction of new clubs Morwell and Mirboo North. Both need considerable support so that Edna's time there was a demanding one.

The other major contribution Edna made was to ensure that the Club complied with the Equal Opportunity legislation enacted by the Cain Labor Government in the 1980's. Prior to this time the Associates - the Legislation changed the name to the Ladies although I am sure they were always ladies - did not have voting rights and could not stand for the Committee. They were allowed of course to fund raise and contribute money to the Club. There was a long standing debate as to whether they should be allowed to play on Saturday. When numbers were low in the 1950's it wasn't an issue but Edna can remember when membership had picked up, to being restricted to starting off the 10th tee and knowing that some men resented even that. This all changed with the new legislation.

When it was realised that we could lose our liquor licence if change was not implemented, we became very interested. Each Club had to send representatives to meetings in Melbourne and then return and advise the Club as to what had to be done. Edna was our representative and this in itself reflected thinking of the time: this was a woman's issue rather than a matter of social justice.

The difficulty was to persuade the members that it was not only an inevitable but fair thing to do. Ruffled feathers had to be smoothed and a lot of this fell to Edna. I don't see Edna as a rebel-rouser but it was the eighties and the feminist movement still had a job to do in changing attitudes. Some would say that today their work is far from done. When I was told about the resentment toward women playing on Saturdays and said, "Well at least that is in the past now" I got a strangled laugh in reply.

Eventually the changes were introduced and we became an integrated club ultimately leading to incorporation. To this day though the Ladies have maintained a separate identity. This is a story in itself but will have to wait for another day. Our records show that in 1985 Sheila McDowell and Edna became the first ladies to join the Committee. Edna says that their presence was by virtue of being Lady President and Captain and that as soon as their report was delivered they had to leave. There had to be more to it than that. Her comment at the time is revealing: "I have been privileged to serve on the previously all-male General Committee. While this increased the work load

considerably, I do feel that we were able to make a worthwhile contribution to the *stability of the Club during a very difficult period* (my emphasis). We look forward to the future with optimism.”

Edna has been a part of the Club for more than 40 years. At 91 she is still playing although often just nine holes and in a cart. In that time she has seen many external changes take place. What hasn't changed though are the elements that make for a good Club. A place where friendships are formed, good social times experienced and the occasional golfing success occurs. Gerry Butler once said of her as she prepared for her part in the traditional pre-Tournament concert, “It's wonderful what a pot of paint can do to an old barn door.” She laughed but I think most of us would say that if we had a barn door we would want it to be Edna.

Written by George Shand