



# THE MELBOURNE SANDBELT

SUMMER 2025



THE ROYAL MELBOURNE GOLF CLUB



# WELCOME GOLFERS

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural edition of The Melbourne Sandbelt Quarterly. This publication is dedicated to celebrating the exceptional golf courses that make the Sandbelt region a world-renowned destination for the game.

The Sandbelt's reputation is built on its remarkable courses - each a masterpiece of design, strategy, and challenge.

In this issue, we delve into the characteristics that set them apart. From exclusive interviews with Sandbelt figureheads to stories highlighting their architectural brilliance and history, we are excited to showcase why these courses are celebrated globally.

We also bring you highlights from recent tournaments and events, offering a glimpse into the vibrant activity that makes the Sandbelt a hub for golfers.

With each edition, we will continue to explore the legacy and allure of this remarkable golfing destination.

We hope you enjoy this first step into the world of the Melbourne Sandbelt and look forward to sharing more in the coming issues.

*The Melbourne Sandbelt*

**PLAN YOUR TRIP**





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## PHOTO CREDITS

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# KINGSTON HEATH TURNS IT ON FOR THE AUSTRALIAN OPEN









## AUSTRALIAN OPEN

**Kingston Heath Golf Club, one of Melbourne's most revered Sandbelt courses, reaffirmed its reputation for excellence as host of the 2024 ISPS HANDA Australian Open. The event, held from November 28 to December 1, shared early rounds with The Victoria Golf Club before Kingston Heath took centre stage for the decisive weekend.**

The tournament saw American rookie Ryggs Johnston secure a breakthrough victory, finishing with an 18-under-par total of 269. Johnston's composure and precision on the back nine during his final round of 68 cemented his position at the top of the leaderboard. Alongside the title, Johnston earned a substantial prize and an exemption to the 2025 Open, marking a significant milestone in his career.

In the women's division, South Korea's Shin Jiyai claimed her second Australian Open title with a total score of 274. Shin displayed remarkable consistency throughout the event, holding off a late charge from defending champion Ashleigh Buhai to take home her 65th professional win.

Despite periods of rain during the tournament, Kingston Heath demonstrated why it is regarded as one of the world's finest courses. The impeccable design and exceptional maintenance of its fairways and greens ensured play continued smoothly, even under challenging weather conditions.

As the final rounds concluded and champions were crowned, Kingston Heath once again cemented its standing as a premier golfing destination. With its world-class course and ability to host events of this calibre, it continues to set the standard for excellence in Australian golf.

***Kingston Heath GC is set to host the Presidents Cup in 2028.***







# PLAY AND STAY AT PENINSULA KINGSWOOD

Peninsula Kingswood Country Golf Club, nestled just a short distance from Melbourne and the stunning Mornington Peninsula, offers a unique play and stay experience, combining exceptional golf with luxurious accommodations—making it the only club on the Melbourne Sandbelt to offer on-site lodging.

The club features two of Australia's top-rated golf courses, the North and South courses. The North course, in particular, stands out with its undulating terrain and sweeping views, challenging even seasoned golfers with its strategic layout. Its tight fairways, large bunkers, and carefully designed greens create a demanding yet rewarding experience. Meanwhile, the South course provides a slightly different test, offering its own blend of beautiful scenery and tough golf. Both courses have earned recognition as some of the best in the country, ensuring a world-class golfing experience.

The accommodation at Peninsula Kingswood complements the quality of its golf courses. Guests can choose from 18 luxurious rooms, including eight within the clubhouse that overlook the 18th hole of the South Course, and ten remote rooms offering private decks and views of the 10th hole. The rooms are equipped with king-sized beds, which can be split into two singles, and feature spacious en-suite bathrooms.

Guests can unwind and enjoy a range of amenities including a swimming pool, gym, tennis court, and a games room. The club's offering goes beyond just golf, with access to excellent practice facilities like a driving range and short game area. Whether you choose to relax by the pool, indulge in a game of tennis, or enjoy some quiet time in the clubhouse, Peninsula King-

swood offers the perfect mix of relaxation and recreation.

Beyond the club, the surrounding Mornington Peninsula region is known for its beautiful beaches, renowned wineries, and vibrant food scene. You can take a scenic drive along the coast or visit one of the many boutique wineries. For those interested in nature and wildlife, there are several walking trails and wildlife parks to explore. Additionally, the area offers a variety of local attractions such as boutique shops, art galleries, and historical landmarks.

**To book your room or find out more [CLICK HERE](#)**

### WHAT TO DO WHILE STAYING AT PENINSULA KINGSWOOD

Play at other iconic Sandbelt courses, including Royal Melbourne, Kingston Heath, and Victoria Golf Club.

Explore the charming coastal villages along the Mornington Peninsula, including Sorrento and Portsea.

Visit the region's boutique wineries, such as Montalto or Ten Minutes by Tractor, for tastings and gourmet dining.

Unwind at the Peninsula Hot Springs, an award-winning natural hot springs and day spa.

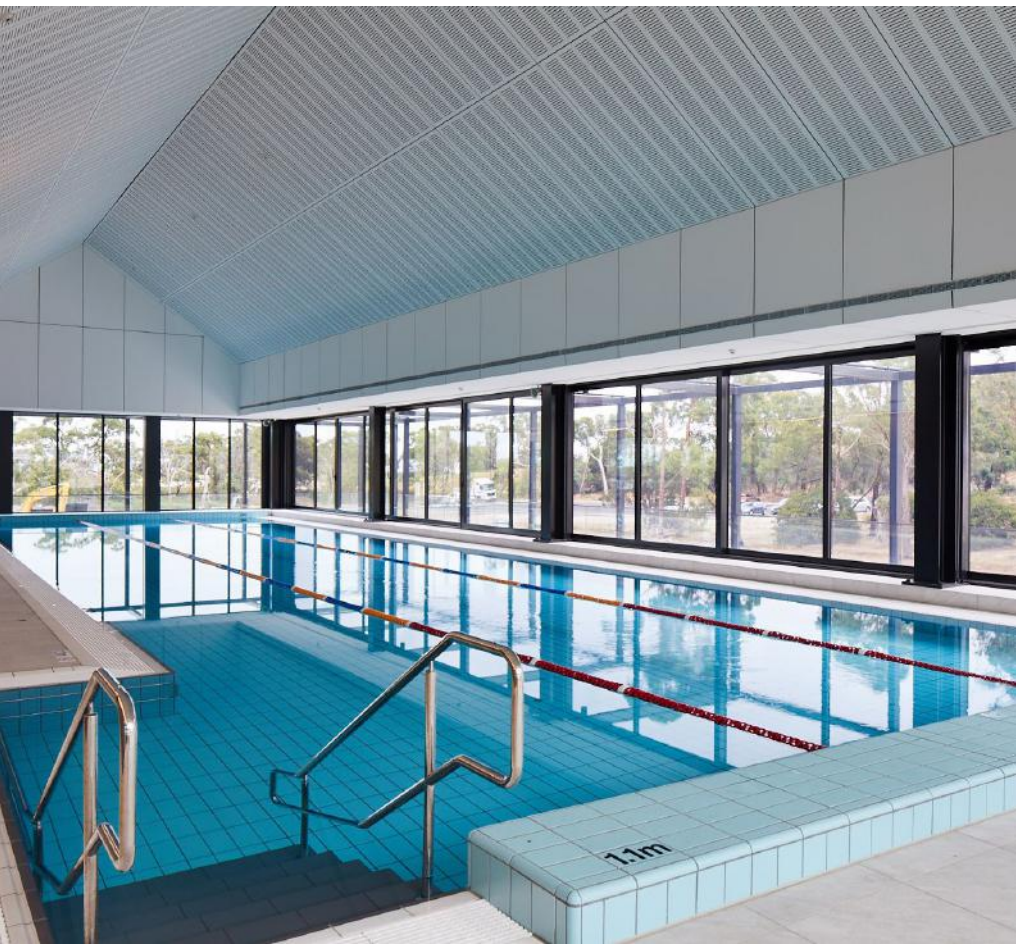
Take a walk or cycle along the scenic Coastal Walk.

Discover local attractions like the Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park and the historic Fort Nepean.















# THE VICTORIA GOLF CLUB'S ST





# UNNING CLUBHOUSE FACELIFT





## THE VICTORIA GOLF CLUB

Victoria Golf Club has unveiled a beautifully restored clubhouse, just in time to co-host the world's golfing elite for the 2024 Australian Open.

The clubhouse, an iconic structure steeped in history, has undergone an extensive repaint and repair to ensure it remains a centerpiece of the club's renowned heritage.

The clubhouse was built in 1927 and has long been a symbol of tradition and prestige in Melbourne's golfing community.

Designed in the Spanish Mission architectural style, it has been the heart of the club's social and sporting life for nearly a century. Over the years, it has witnessed countless tournaments, social gatherings, and memorable moments for members and visitors alike.





## THE VICTORIA GOLF CLUB

The recent restoration project focused on refreshing the building's exterior with a vibrant yet timeless palette, repairing intricate architectural details, and preserving its historic charm. This meticulous work underscores the club's dedication to balancing heritage with modernity.

General Manager Warwick Hill-Rennie highlighted the significance of the transformation, stating, "The clubhouse has always been a source of pride for our members, and this refurbishment reflects our commitment to preserving its legacy."





# THE CHARM OF A FORGOTTEN MACKENZIE BUNKER

Once upon a time a golfing magician came to Oakleigh and waved his wand over our golf course.

In 1926, the doyen of all golf architects, Dr Alister MacKenzie, outlined his wizardry in a blueprint to transform the crude bunkers and greens on the course at Oakleigh into a golfing landscape that survives in many parts today.

There's no doubt his genius contributed largely to Metropolitan becoming a championship course recognised throughout the golfing world.

Some of the course craft that he introduced has disappeared over the years. However, the reopening of the course enhancements on the first nine now unveils at least one of his personal bunker designs, re-emerging nearly 100 years since his rough sketches were put into shape.

It's on the third hole. Originally known as "Ant Hill South" A famous fairway bunker comes into play again. Most members have known it as hillock and a hollow since around 1962 when major forced changes had to be made to the second nine under a design by Dick Wilson and around the same time, alterations were made to some areas on the first nine.

Almost impossible to mow. That mound and slopes have been cursed by some for years as balls that failed to navigate the tricky neck between it and the lefthand fairway trap nestled into thick growth on the up and down hill slopes.

The sandy re-creation of his unique vision by Course Architects, Crafter+Mogford and Metropolitan Course Superintendent John Mann on the third hole has salvaged the frustrations while another of the Doctor's reformed bunker shapes also emerges on the righthand side of the 9th fairway.

Dr MacKenzie left his mark on some of the world's greatest golf courses including Augusta National in the 1930s and Royal Melbourne in the 1920s. On a brief visit to Metropolitan in 1926 his wizardry enhanced our course that had been carved out of scrub and farmland 18 years earlier.

He produced a sketchy blueprint that helped convert Metropolitan into a course that within the next decade was to host its first two Australian Opens in 1930 and 1936. But more importantly it was revealed to the world when the cream of US golfers came to play in the 1934 Centenary Open. Metropolitan was an international destination. Walter Hagen in 1930 and Gene Sarazen 1934 and 1936 extolled the course.

In this retrospective view, we can trace the steps of Dr MacKenzie and the club officials and staff who were left to carry out his work.

Before MacKenzie set foot on the Sandbelt, there were already rumblings about the course that John Bower Mackenzie (no relation) who was a member and an engineer of renown, had laid out for play to begin at Oakleigh in October, 1908. His signature cross-bunkers (including the third) and unique water storage system based on dykes were under attack.

The Club was split. It came to a head when the great Ivo Whitton, who was in Sydney, reported back to the Club that the game's ruling body did not believe Metropolitan was good enough to host an Australian Open.

A group of members known as "The Bolsheviks" mounted a challenge at the AGM in 1922 and the old guard led by Robert Debenham, and including Ivo's father Percy, Harold Umphelby, and Dr Barclay Thomson, Chairman of Greens, withstood the challenge but it was bitter.

When Royal Melbourne secured the services of the esteemed golf architect Dr



The finished  
product: 3rd hole





The vision for the reinstatement of the bunker on the right side of the hole and the other changes short of it down the left side

C+M

Reinstate Mackenzie  
c1932 bunker

295 x

285m x

272 x

Relocate existing  
drive bunker.  
Encourage carry  
approx. 262m

262 x

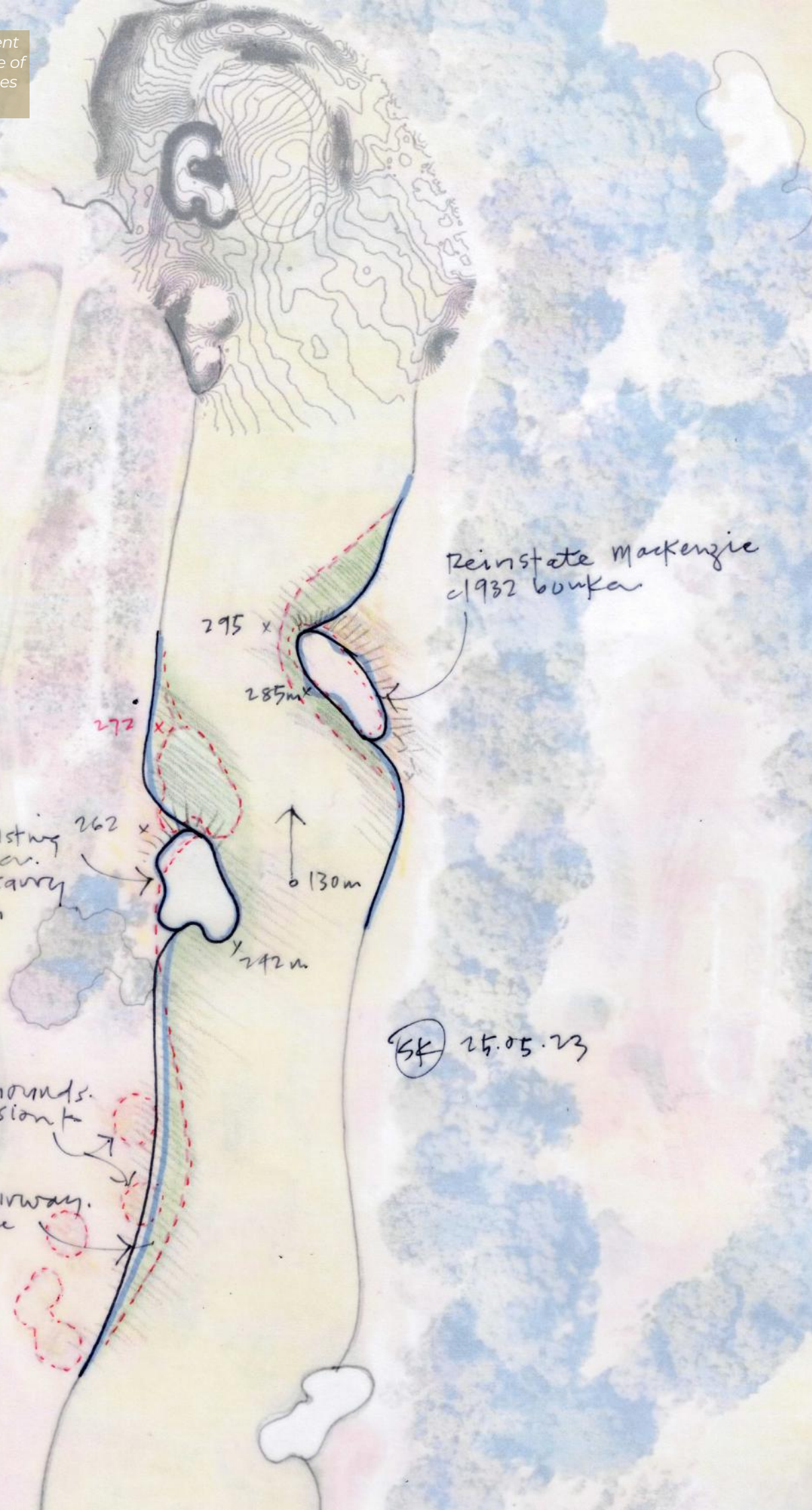
130m

242m

Remove mounds.  
Improve vision to  
bunker.

Widen fairway.  
Incorporate  
swales

SK 25.05.23







Alister MacKenzie to visit and advise on their Sandringham course for a fee of 1000 guineas the RM decided to alleviate the cost by asking other Clubs if they wanted to secure the wisdom of the golf architect with a worldwide reputation to visit their courses. Dr MacKenzie was famed for his designs since he honed his craft during the Boer and First World wars by camouflaging trenches and earthworks.

Royal Melbourne got half of the fee Dr MacKenzie charged a number of courses including Victoria, Kingston Heath, Barwon Heads, Flinders, Royal Sydney, Royal Adelaide and others including Metropolitan. They also got proceeds from New Zealand and in January, 1927, RM told Dr MacKenzie that it had been most satisfactory.

It was a windfall for Royal Melbourne as the average charge was around 200 guineas – and for Metropolitan it was 250 pounds. He was said to have visited 19 courses, including some in New Zealand, over 10 weeks from October to December. It was reported at one stage in January 1927 that his collect so far was 2400 pounds.

He arrived in Melbourne on October 25 from England via Fremantle and Adelaide on the “Otranto” and spent the day at Royal Melbourne. On Tuesday, October 26, he visited Metropolitan and also spent another half day at the course.

There to meet him were the Club Secretary Manager Charles Shaw and the Chairman of Greens, Dr Barclay Thomson, a medico like Dr MacKenzie. Thomson was an authority on the treatment of typhoid and “The most enthusiastic golfer in Victoria” according to The Herald). Also present the greenkeeper Leo Bienvenu and a Greens Committee member L. H. Biddle.

Dr MacKenzie asked clubs beforehand to

provide him with information about the membership, average handicaps, and also sought personal input from leading players at the Club. Who better than Ivo Whitton and the lefthander Bruce Pearce, with seven club championships between them, to walk around the course? Whitton had won the Australian Open just three months earlier at Royal Adelaide and Dr MacKenzie visited the club’s Seaton course on the previous Saturday. Imagine that conversation. Dr MacKenzie rapidly scribbled his notes and drew his sketches on a square loose-leaf folder.

Women, regarded as mere Associates, were not in the welcoming party. (Even though at one time in the early days they outnumbered the men).

Dr MacKenzie soaked it all in and did not waste time. He submitted his report and plans to Royal Melbourne on November 18, and to Metropolitan on November 20. Nine days later The Age reported that: “Dr A. MacKenzie’s report and plan of the (Metropolitan) course, also of the new greens, has been received and has given much satisfaction to members.”

He strongly recommended that the Metro work to be carried out be supervised by those “who had the advantage of going around the course with me and hearing my verbal explanation.” If they needed any outside help, he suggested greenkeeper Mr (Mick) Morcom who had impressed him during his visit to Royal Melbourne.

Dr Thomson grabbed the mantle and tons of sand were shifted, greens and bunkers moved and reconstructed and by May 1927 the General Committee had passed a motion by acclamation highly commending the Greens Committee for the changes.

The Club’s copy of the historic MacKenzie document and any sketches sadly disap-



## THE METROPOLITAN GOLF CLUB

peared over time though they were displayed through the summer of 1926-27 in the Clubhouse for all members.

Fortunately, The Herald on December 29, 1926, proudly alerted its readers on Page 4 that it had a scoop and on the following day it would publish the complete and detailed report by Dr MacKenzie.

And so, it appeared on Page 14, Tuesday, December 30, 1926. About 2500 words with the new course layout outlining all the bunkering.

The by-line on The Herald report was P.A.R. It was a time when sports writers frequently adopted pseudonyms. P.A.R., we now know was Jack Dillon, widely admired for his golf coverage in The Herald and The Sporting Globe.

It is clear that Dillon had a special relationship with MacKenzie and the evidence is confirmed in a copy of MacKenzie's book "Golf Architecture" that was the golfing bible of the era and still is 104 years after its initial publication.

Journalist Trevor Grant, who wrote on golf for many years for both The Herald and The Age, died in 2017. His brother Graeme gave a bunch of his papers to the Golf Society of Australia. Graeme was a famed Superintendent at Kingston Heath and a leading golf architect.

Included was a copy of Dr MacKenzie's

guide to architects. Golf Society Committee member, John Trevor, a retired Melbourne Herald journalist, was intrigued by the inscription on the inside cover. The significance is now clear. It says: "To J. M. Dillon, with the author's compliments. Melbourne, October, 1926." Jack had Alister's trust.

Dr MacKenzie's total time in Australia and New Zealand was October 19, 1926 – February 1, 1927, including two weeks fly fishing in New Zealand.

Dr MacKenzie died in 1934 in California. Seven years after he left our lands. He was broke. All the fees he had collected had gone. He was in dispute over his fee for designing the Augusta National masterpiece. Club chairman Clifford Roberts refused to pay thousands of dollars as the Club had also exhausted its funds. Dr MacKenzie pleaded that he could not even afford to buy a new golf ball and resorted to playing with one from Woolworths.

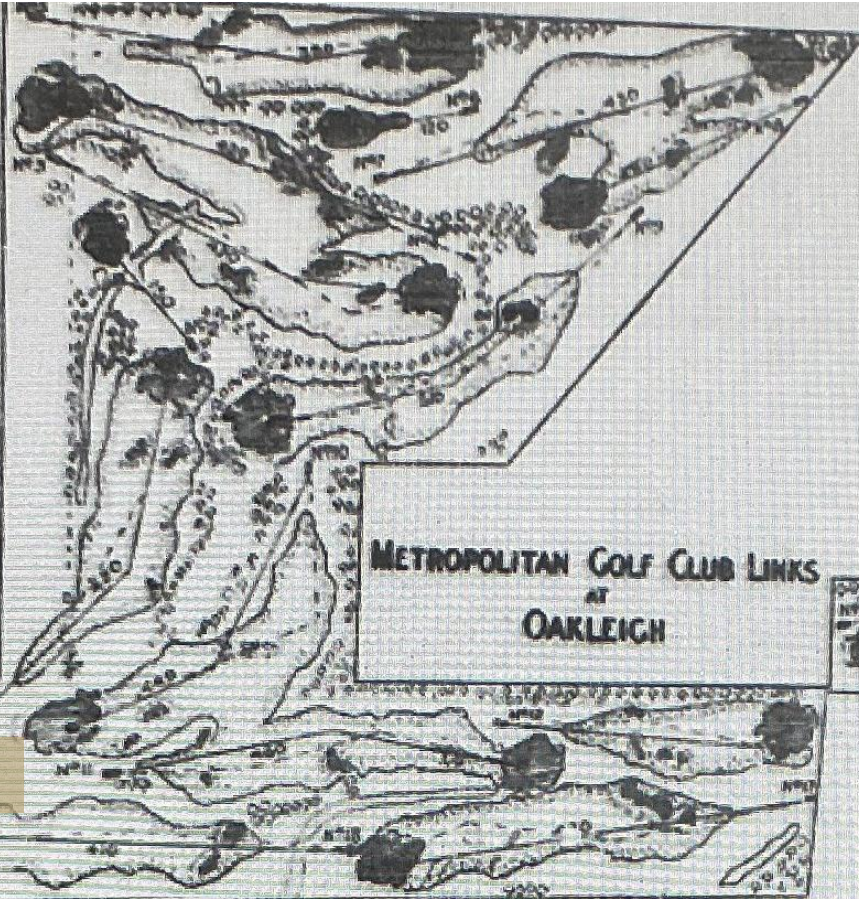
He designed around 150 new golf courses and advised on hundreds more including Metropolitan where he certainly left a strong sample of his DNA including that reformed bunker on the third. He proposed a new green slightly to the left and beyond the existing one and the hole bunkered in such a way that the player who carries a new bunker on the right should have a comparatively easy second shot.

As mentioned earlier the hole was origi-

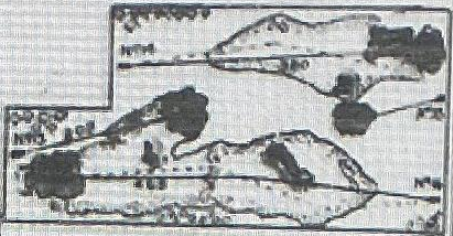




...the  
 accompanied  
 group one day  
 Mackenzie  
 submitted his re-  
 to the club on  
 ember 20, 1924.  
 he report was:  
 The course of  
 Metropolitan  
 Club is con-  
 sisted on ground  
 a similar excel-  
 to that of  
 al Melbourne,  
 sition. It is a th-  
 Victoria. Tak-  
 into considera-  
 the fact that  
 course was de-  
 ed many years  
 it is infinitely  
 er than most  
 courses, even  
 Britain, which  
 laid out dur-  
 the same  
 ad.  
 The holes are  
 good length,  
 most of the



...any more difficult for the  
 player, but they will make it  
 ively more pleasant, and  
 over, will provide a much higher  
 dard of golf for the scratch man.  
 "May I suggest that the detail  
 the construction work be left to  
 who had the advantage of  
 round the course with me, and  
 ing my verbal explanations. If  
 is any doubt as to the interpreta-  
 of my design, I would suggest  
 the club ask Morcom's advice. M-  
 com has been so closely associ-  
 with me since I have been at M-  
 bourne that I feel sure he thorow-  
 understands my views and my  
 thods of making greens and bunk-  
 ers."  
 Note.—As I stated verbally,  
 essential that some of the trees be  
 moved round the tee at the sixth.  
 It is impossible to get a good green  
 grass with trees so near a tee.



Throughout this report Dr Mac-  
 kenzie touches on so many points  
 that apply to every golf course in  
 land, and emphasises so many gen-  
 eral principles of golf course architect-  
 ure that the intelligent golfer, even if  
 he is one who has not had the pleasure  
 of playing over Metropolitan, can  
 discover innumerable useful points

Dr MacKenzie's course plan in The Herald

nally named "Ant Hill South" and the name retained in the MacKenzie document and the 4th hole was "Ant Hill North." You ventured carefully for wayward balls in between.

The names of the holes were incorporated in the 1908 original design of Metropolitan, by the other Mackenzie (John Bower). A Telford Medal winning engineer for his work on the Avonmouth Docks at Bristol, "J. B." was a devotee of James Braid and drew up a plan of Royal Dornoch in 1892 that included similar names for holes that he used at Metropolitan such as the First and Home Holes and also Foxy.

And finally in the saga of Dr Mackenzie's brief sojourn in Oakleigh where his fingerprints have left their marks throughout. He loved the plantations which were still less than 20 years old. After his first view of the course, he wrote: "Metropolitan members certainly take their golf in beautiful surroundings."

**Bruce Baskett, who wrote and researched this article for Metro members was the last editor of The Melbourne Herald when it closed on October 5, 1990, and the first editor of The Herald Sun when it began on October 8, 1990**



Another of Dr MacKenzie's reformed bunker shapes emerges down the right side of the 9th



# GARY LISBON: THE SANDBELT THROUGH THE LENS

***Gary Lisbon, a celebrated golf course photographer and proud local of Melbourne's Sandbelt, has captured some of the most iconic golf courses around the world.***

***A member of Royal Melbourne Golf Club, Gary brings a unique perspective to the artistry and design of the Sandbelt courses.***

***Known for their exceptional layouts, dramatic bunkering, and strategic challenges, the Sandbelt is one of the world's premier golf regions.***

***Gary shares his insights on photographing these masterpieces, his favourite courses to play and shoot, and what makes the Sandbelt such an extraordinary golfing destination.***

***You've photographed many of the world's most iconic courses. How does Melbourne's Sandbelt compare?***

The 'Sandbelt' is one of the best golf regions on the planet. I don't say that lightly having visited, as you mentioned, a fair few different places around the world.

When talking about famous golf regions places like SW Ireland, Monterey Peninsula, St. Andrews Region of Scotland, West Coast of Scotland, New York / Long Island come to mind, however, I consider the Sandbelt easily in the top 3 in the world.

The aforementioned regions have courses that are, in some cases, over 3 hours drive from one another. When you consider that the majority of the Sandbelt courses are within a 15 minute drive of one another (with PK being a further 25 min away), it really highlights the "perfect" location of the Sandbelt.

***Royal Melbourne is known as a masterpiece of golf design. As both a member and a photographer, what do you think makes it stand out from other courses you've seen?***

It is indeed a masterpiece of golf design but one which does not immediately present the first time you play it.

Having played both the East and West courses more than 200 times each, I am still learning things about how to play certain shots on particular holes. That to me is a key element of a golf masterpiece - you are always learning and is always testing you.

At the same time both courses are so very playable for all standard of golfers. Both Dr Mackenzie (West) and Alex Russell (East) created designs that allows me, as a single figure handicapper, to play alongside my wife who is a 24 handicap.

Risk and reward are key elements but always providing an alternate way to negotiate the hole (often at the expense of a shot or two) helps to ensure the courses will remain relevant over time.

***Living locally, what's it like to capture their changing moods and unique lighting at different times of the day and year?***

It helps greatly to live alongside Royal Melbourne at the heart of the Sandbelt and see the changing landscape on a daily basis. Most photo shoots I conduct around the world see me visit a location for a set number of days and the weather is what I get presented with! This is great when the weather is nice but challenging when it is not.

Courses present differently throughout the year due to the changing seasons. The flowering nature of many of the trees provides an explosion of colours during spring but a more sparse look (still attractive) during winter.

During colder temperatures fog can come into the picture. Kingston Heath provides this on occasion and over the years I have





captured some great, moody, fog affected shots that almost gives a feeling of being in the United Kingdom.

Another element which changes greatly throughout the year is the rising and setting of the sun in the sky. At its extreme the sun could rise at a different point almost 160 degrees from where it did 4 months earlier. The end result here is that some holes photograph better at different times of the year.

Living locally allows me to capture the optimal shooting conditions for each hole on the Sandbelt over the year rather than a 5 day period when I am on a typical shoot.

***Do you have a particular time of day or season that you feel best captures the character of the Sandbelt courses?***

The character of the Sandbelt is best summed up with firm and fast playing surfaces, an abundance of strategically located, well defined bunkers with compacted sand and native tea tree that frames many of the holes.

You generally get these conditions during December to February where browned off rough areas and sandy wasteland contrast beautifully with perfectly manicured fairways. The contrast is great for me as a photographer.

I am a morning person. Give me a 5am wakeup rather than something late at night. There is a real sense of anticipation about the day as the sun rises. The crispness in the air, the untouched, dew covered fairways; they set the scene for what is to come. Then as the sun rises, the magic happens with the illumination of the landscape.



## PEOPLE OF THE SANDBELT

Having spoken positively about the mornings, I must admit the long rich shadows of a summer evening also has an appeal about it and gives rise to plenty of good photos. So I have answered your question by saying morning and evening - not really an answer right?

**With the rise of drone photography, how do you blend these shots with traditional photography to capture the full character of a course?**

Drones have made capturing "spectacular" images a lot easier. This is both good and bad.

As golfers we don't see the angles that drone images capture however what we do see, with a bit of elevation, are the wonderfully shaped bunkers that are a hallmark of the Sandbelt.

I remember first capturing the bunker complex that features on the right hand side of the 1st hole on the East Course and the right hand side of the 8th hole of the West Course at Royal Melbourne.

From the ground it looks like a large bunker but it is only from the sky that you see how it resembles, very clearly, a Christmas tree. There are many other examples of this bunkering on the Sandbelt.

However we do play golf on the ground so it is important to capture ground shots as well. Getting low to the ground gives a different perspective and can highlight other key elements of a course. Taking a shot through the trees can help to frame a hole and invoke a sense of isolation - all of these techniques can be used to showcase the full character of the course.

As a guide I try and capture both ground and aerial shots into all of my photo shoots and provide a balanced portfolio of images.

Whilst drone images are often memorable just quietly some of my favourite shots have been captured from the ground.

**Sandbelt courses like Kingston Heath and Victoria Golf Club have legendary bunkering. Do you have a favourite bun-**

**ker shot or angle that truly captures the essence of Sandbelt golf?**

There are many bunkers on the Sandbelt that I love photographing. With the essence of sandbelt golf including creative, dramatic, defensive bunkering I would have to say the sharp edged greenside bunkering is it.

In fact when I host overseas friends this is the one common element that comes into all conversations "How can the bunkers be so close to the putting surface".

To throw a few Sandbelt greenside bunkers complexes your way that are excellent examples of this - Royal Melbourne East 16, Royal Melbourne West 5, Kington Heath 10, Victoria 7, Commonwealth 15, Metropolitan 16, Yarra Yarra 11, Peninsula Kingswood North 1, with the new version of Huntingdale (still a work in progress) likely to throw out a few more.

**Given your extensive travels, are there elements from international courses you'd love to see incorporated into the Sandbelt, or do you feel the region is perfect as it is?**

The Sandbelt is what it is. That is what makes it so great. It is unique in world golf in so many ways. It has invited imitation (which, as is said, is the sincerest form of flattery) and to introduce international elements would, in my opinion, lose much of the charm of the region. In my opinion no changes are necessary!

**As a golfer, what's your favourite hole on the Sandbelt and why? Does your view differ as a photographer?**

Ah what a question. Like asking "which is my favourite child?". So difficult to narrow it down to one hole so I am going to give you a few that really stand out for me with a short reason why:

***Royal Melbourne 16 East***

Beautifully framed par 3 with bunkers cut into the edge of the green. Great to photograph and fantastic to play.

***Kingston Heath 10***

Shortest par 3 on the sandbelt yet still



packs a punch. Miss the green and up and down is not always easy.

### **Peninsula Kingswood 18 North**

I was previously a member here and this hole always had potential that, I believed, was never fully realised. Now it is an “off the charts” finishing hole. As you round the corner and see the bunker protected green in front of you with the clubhouse watching over proceedings, I admit to tensing up a bit and am always thankful to walk off with a par.

### **Royal Melbourne 6 West**

How much do you take on off the tee? Classic risk, reward hole with plenty of fairway left. Get to the green and start thinking again. Avoid the left hand bunker at ALL costs. A par here is always grabbed with both hands.

Certainly as a photographer I look for key elements to help frame the shot. Each of the above holes allow this and are both great to photograph and play.

**Given your experience, is there a particular course in the Sandbelt that you find most challenging to photograph and why?**

Tall established trees on golf courses can cause shading problems and challenges with camera exposure. Ideally the best light for photography is when the sun is at its lowest and if trees prevent shooting at this time, it makes the shoot more difficult.

The old iteration of Yarra Yarra provided extensive challenges in this regard with shading on many of the holes at the start and end of the day. Recent work, however, by the Doak golf team have removed many of these trees, without losing the charm of the course and, as a result, opened up vistas allowing a photographer to capture the underlying beauty of the course with the right light at the right time.

**What advice would you give to an aspiring golf course photographer aiming to capture the soul of a course, especially one as historically significant as those in the Sandbelt?**

One thing I have learnt over the years is

that all photographers see things differently. Different angles, perspectives, time of the day, framing elements - they all combine to ensure a good photo.

Every golf course has its own unique elements. You describe this as the “soul of the course” and that is a great word.

I would advise any aspiring photographers to try and get a feel for what the soul of a course is and to try and capture this. This may involve multiple visits to look at the lie of the land, it may involve talking to elder statesmen of the club, it may be looking through historical archives - or it may be a combination of all of these.

In the Sandbelt the “soul” of the course is likely to involve combinations of bunkers, native off fairway vegetation, great contrasts between fairway, greens and rough and maybe some “local” wildlife.

The Sandbelt does not have the “wow” elements that courses with ocean or mountain backdrops around the world have and nor does it need to. Its soul is more understated.

### **GARY'S FAVOURITE IMAGES OF THE SANDBELT**

**Royal Melbourne 16th East**

**Kingston Heath 10th**

**Peninsula Kingswood 18th North**

**Yarra Yarra 2nd**

**Commonwealth 15th**

**Victoria 7th hole**

**Metropolitan 9th**

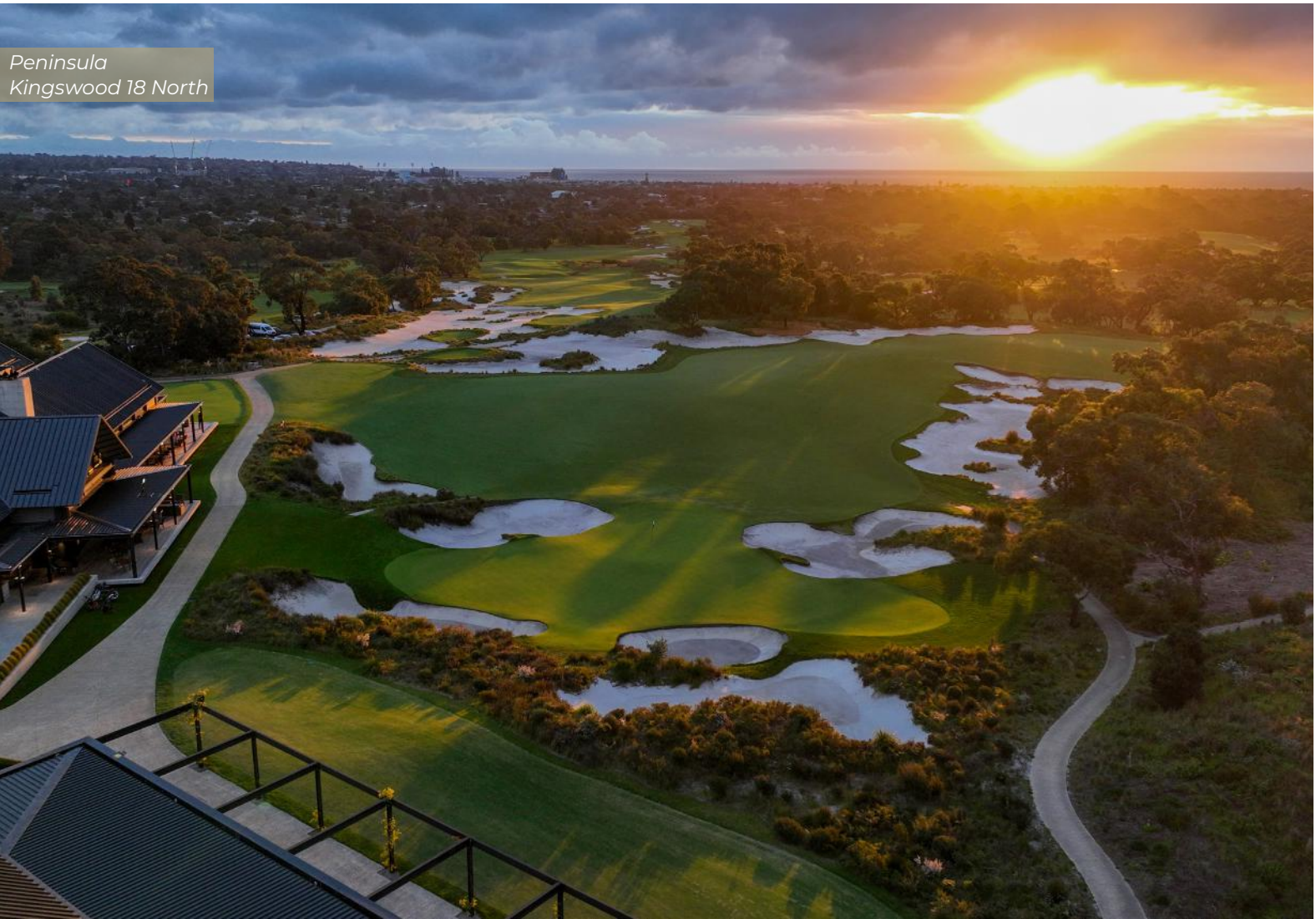
**Huntingdale - Work in Progress**



Royal Melbourne  
16 East



Peninsula  
Kingswood 18 North





Kingston Heath GC  
10th



Yarra Yarra CC  
2nd





Commonwealth CC  
15th



The Metropolitan CC  
9th





*The Victoria GC  
7th*



*Huntingdale  
To Come*





# HUNTINGDALE REIMAGINED

We spoke with Mike Cocking from OCM (Ogilvy Cocking Mead), the renowned Australian golf course architect, about the exciting redevelopment underway at Huntingdale Golf Club.

As one of Melbourne's iconic Sandbelt courses, Huntingdale holds a special place in the world of golf, and Mike's approach combines modern design elements with the course's rich history, ensuring it remains globally competitive while providing a great experience for golfers of all levels.

Mike shares his insights on how the redevelopment honors the Sandbelt legacy, the changes golfers can expect, and how the new design will enhance playability for both professionals and members.

***Can you describe the vision for the redevelopment of Huntingdale Golf Club? How does this align with its legacy as a Sandbelt classic?***

Huntingdale was the last of the sandbelt courses to be built (1941) and became especially famous as the home of the Australian Masters tournament, which for most of us was synonymous with golf's golden era in this country during the 1980's and 1990's. But, even though it was regarded as sandbelt, it stylistically differed from its neighbours.

In 1926 the famous English architect, Alister Mackenzie, came to Australia to design the West course at Royal Melbourne. In just 10 weeks he would design the West course and consult to over 20 clubs around the country, including creating design





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plans for Victoria, Kingston Heath and Metropolitan. Importantly, he would also make close relationships with Alex Russell, who he would form a design partnership with, and master constructors Mick Morcom and his son Vern. These four would ultimately be involved in some way or another at every sandbelt club, other than Huntingdale, Cranbourne and Peninsula, and they helped establish the design strategies and the unique sandbelt style of greens and bunkering.

Whilst Huntingdale was designed by the English architect Charles Alison, the job of constructing the course was left to the superintendent of the day - Sam Berriman - who would also make many changes to the plan and go on to be an architect in his own right. Berriman's style of construction differed from that of the Morcom's and over the decades since the course was built, Huntingdale further differentiated itself from its neighbours, with a series of renovation projects, built in a different

style again, as well as the dense planting of trees down the sides of each fairway. This made for a much narrower test of golf than at the other sandbelt courses which champion the use of width.

Whilst as architects we strive to give each course we work on its own style and individuality, we felt that it was a mistake to stray too far from what we feel makes the sandbelt so famous and we felt that Huntingdale would be better served to more closely align itself with its neighbours.

The bunkering style has changed drastically and is now a little closer in style to Vern Morcom's work at Kingston Heath or our own shaping at Peninsula Kingswood.

Greens have also been contoured to better match the neighbouring clubs and a different type of sand and construction style will allow the superintendent to maintain consistently firmer playing surfaces throughout the year.





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Playing corridors have been widened where possible and tree lines have been opened up to create some spaces between holes. This helps break up the linear rows of vegetation and has provided some great views across the course, including adding a better sense of scale to what is a tight property.

Perhaps some of the biggest visual impact will come off the playing surface with the promotion of heathland plants and native grasses off the fairway edge and in the tee carries. This contrast and texture has become part of the sandbelt aesthetic and in combination with the broader vistas, will make for a much more attractive looking course.

***What specific elements of the course design are being updated or reimagined? Are there particular holes or features getting the most focus?***

During the early members presentations, we broke the work down into 3 major elements. Redesign, restore and retain. There are probably a third of the holes that more or less will look like they previously did. Even though there are still going to be some changes to bunkers or green contours they will look and play somewhat similar to the way they did. This includes holes like the old 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 8th holes. Then there are holes or aspects which we're looking to restore. A good example is the old 5th which up until the late 1990's played as a short par 4 (it was turned into a long par 3).

There is also a wonderful old photograph of the 7th from the mid 1940's which shows a skyline green which has just recently been returned to the course. Then there are the holes that have undergone a major redesign and this is mainly on the Northern side of the property (back nine) with the relocation of the practice fairway to the old 16th hole and the creation of a potential new finishing hole in its place. On the front the biggest change involve the creation of another new hole – the short par 3, 8th – which takes the place of the old 15th hole at the other end of the property.

***How are you balancing modern golf de-***

***mands while preserving Huntingdale's historical essence and its place among Sandbelt courses?***

Golfers' expectations are higher than ever before. And while we're attempting to improve the architecture and make the holes more interesting than they were, most golfers will judge the course on its conditioning. Whether the greens are consistently firm and fast, the putting surfaces roll true and the fairways provide a consistent, tight playing surface irrespective of the time of year.

To this end the project includes the reconstruction of all greens, re-grassing them with a modern creeping bentgrass (pure distinction) and adding over 20 kilometres of drainage to fairways and bunkers.

***Can you share insights on how the new design will enhance playability and strategy for players of all skill levels?***

The sandbelt courses are some of the most playable, tournament courses anywhere in the world. They achieve this by offering the average golfer plenty of space to play from the tee, whilst positioning bunkers and hazards exactly where the better play must position their ball in order to have the best angle into the flag. When the greens are firm and fast it further emphasises the strategy and demands that golfers must take on some level of risk in order to score well, yet at the same time those who are happy to make a bogey or double can plot their way around the course without ever really playing close to trouble.

***What role did the local landscape and Sandbelt terrain play in shaping the re-development approach?***

Irrespective of the type of golf course we are designing, we always draw inspiration from the local landscape. How the contours are used to lay out the holes, the scale of the property will help with the size and shape of the bunkers and the vegetation types – socially the presence of the low heathland plants and grasses - will help establish the aesthetic of the course.

As part of the design process we engaged



with a well-known ecologist to assist with the re-vegetation plan. As a sandbelt style course we want the low vegetation to play a large role in the aesthetic and the style of the bunkering. Close to 90, 000 plants have been added to the rough areas – especially around bunkers and in the tee carries, along with seeding of native grasses.

***Huntingdale is famed for hosting professional tournaments. How does the redesign cater to both championship play and regular member enjoyment?***

Designing courses for tournaments and member play is one of the greatest challenges when consulting to championship courses such as Huntingdale or our recently completed work at Medinah, in Chicago. In the last 20 or 30 years it has become increasingly more difficult as technology has widened the gap between the average golfer and the game's elite.

To ensure the course remains enjoyable for the average member one of the keys is width. Making sure there is plenty of fairway to hit to and scattering a variety of tees to reduce the carry to the fairway and ensure holes aren't stretched beyond their capabilities.

Bunkers are then positioned exactly where the golfer must hit to in order to have the shortest shot, or the best line, to the green. On a dogleg for instance, bunkers are generally placed on the inside corner, so that a special effort must be made to avoid them.

Then at the green, hazards are placed on the opposing side. This way golfers must play close to the fairway bunkers in order to avoid the green side bunkers for their approach. Importantly there is a lot of fairway away from the fairway bunkers, but every metre from the hazard the golfer plays, the shot to the green becomes slightly longer, and the angle more difficult, as they now must play over the green-side bunkers. This is the essence to strategic golf. Take some risk by playing close to a hazard, in order to gain some sort of reward.

The new design features more decisions like this, where golfer must choose a line

and length that may vary depending on how well they're playing and the conditions of the day. For the game's elite, they must flirt with hazards more frequently and face the prospect of a bogey in an effort to make a birdie.

Allied with the improved strategy of holes, the greens will be consistently firmer and faster. Ultimately this is just as important as bunker position or green design. Without firm greens position in the fairway matters little as the ball can be stopped easily and the course becomes defenceless against the game's elite.

***Can you share the timeline for the redevelopment? When can members and visitors expect to experience the new design?***

We started the project in November of 2023 and should have everything grassed by the end of May 2025. We're hoping to have the full course open for member play in December 2025.

***What are the main ways you aim to differentiate Huntingdale within the iconic Sandbelt group post-redevelopment?***

I guess part of the goal was not to differentiate the course. We felt the old Huntingdale was different to the other sandbelt courses and that if it aligned a little closer to RM, Victoria, PK and KH that it would be better for it. Now that's not to say we are trying to replicate holes or exact features and there will always be some unique features of the course. The land is different... the contours of each hole, the views and backdrops and the vegetation vary greatly from site to site, even from a course just down the road. Then there are the hole designs themselves.

Holes like the new par 3, 8th or the great short par 4 9th (old 8th), are completely original and can only be experienced with a game at Huntingdale!

***Overseas Visitor bookings will be taken from March 2026 onwards enquiries to [golfbookings@huntingdalegolf.com.au](mailto:golfbookings@huntingdalegolf.com.au)***



# COMMONWEALTH CELEBRA



On November 29, 2024, Commonwealth Golf Club in Melbourne celebrated the grand reopening of its restored course with the Commonwealth Renaissance Celebration. The event featured appearances by touring professionals Lucas Herbert and Marc Leishman, who joined the 2024 Club Champions in a ceremonial tee shot on the first hole.

Club Captain Ray McCann expressed gratitude to those instrumental in the course's rejuvenation, notably Course Manager Adam Lamb and Course Architect Brian Slawnik. In recognition of his significant

contributions, Slawnik was awarded Honorary Membership by the Committee.

The restoration, led by Renaissance Golf Design under the guidance of Tom Doak and Brian Slawnik, commenced in August 2022. The project aimed to enhance the course's quality and restore its esteemed reputation within Australia's golfing community. Key aspects of the restoration included:

**COURSE RESTORATION:**

Reconstruction of all 18 green complexes, regrassed with Pure Distinction bentgrass



# TES COURSE RENAISSANCE



and Santa Ana couch, preserving the course's classic Sandbelt characteristics while improving playability and turf quality.

**Irrigation Replacement:** Upgrading the irrigation system to ensure optimal maintenance and sustainability of the course.

**Vegetation Management:** Implementation of a vegetation plan to restore native flora, enhancing the natural landscape and aligning with the original vision of the course's designers.

The restoration was completed in two phases, with the first nine holes reopening in February 2023 and the full course available for play by February 2024. The project reflects Commonwealth Golf Club's commitment to excellence and its dedication to providing members and guests with a premier golfing experience.

The Commonwealth Renaissance Celebration was a memorable evening, honouring the club's rich history and looking forward to a promising future on the Melbourne Sandbelt.



## YARRA YARRA

The Mick Fanning Charity Golf Day at Yarra Yarra Golf Club was an incredible event, raising an impressive \$289,000 for the Reach Foundation, the Cure EB Foundation, and Yarra Yarra-affiliated charities. Combining the thrill of golf with the generosity of participants and celebrities, the day exemplified the power of community and giving back.

### A DAY OF FUN AND GENEROSITY

The event was packed with excitement, featuring fun activations on almost every hole. These activities kept players and celebrities entertained and hydrated throughout the day, creating a lively and memorable atmosphere.

### STAR-STUDED PARTICIPATION

Yarra Yarra members were thrilled to walk the course and interact with a host of high-profile celebrities, including:

Mick Fanning, 3-time World Surfing Champion and event founder. Eric Bana, acclaimed Hollywood actor. Australian cricket stars Aaron Finch and Scott Bolland. Celebrity Chef Andy Allen. Comedians Glen Robbins and Tommy Little. Sporting icons Andrew Gaze (basketball) and Archie Thompson (soccer), among others.

Their presence added to the event's unique charm and brought smiles to all involved.



## MICK FANNING DAY: A SPECTAC







# CHARITY GOLF CULAR SUCCESS



## ABOUT THE MICK FANNING CHARITY GOLF DAY

The Mick Fanning Charity Golf Day was inspired by Mick's personal experience with the devastating 2022 floods in Northern NSW. Witnessing the destruction firsthand, Mick actively participated in rescue efforts, which motivated him to establish the event to make a lasting difference. Since its inception, the Charity Golf Days have raised over \$2.0 million, directly supporting families and communities in need.



## WHAT'S ON

# EXPERIENCE MELBOURNE THIS SUMMER

Melbourne is buzzing with activity in the first few months of 2025, offering an exciting mix of world-class sporting events, concerts, cultural festivals, and more. Whether you're a sports enthusiast, music lover, or food and wine connoisseur, there's something for everyone. Here's your guide to the events happening across the city.

## FEBRUARY 2025

### 15TH & 16TH - ST KILDA FESTIVAL

Celebrate summer with live music, food stalls, and activities along St Kilda Beach.



## MARCH 2025

### 13TH- 16TH - FORMULA 1 AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX

Albert Park Circuit welcomes the thrill of Formula 1 racing in this premier motorsport event.





**21ST - 30TH - MELBOURNE FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL**

Feed your curiosity at Australia's biggest celebration of drinking and dining



**26TH - 30TH - MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOW**

Marvel at stunning floral displays and innovative garden designs.



**26TH MARCH - 20TH APRIL - MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL COMEDY FESTIVAL**

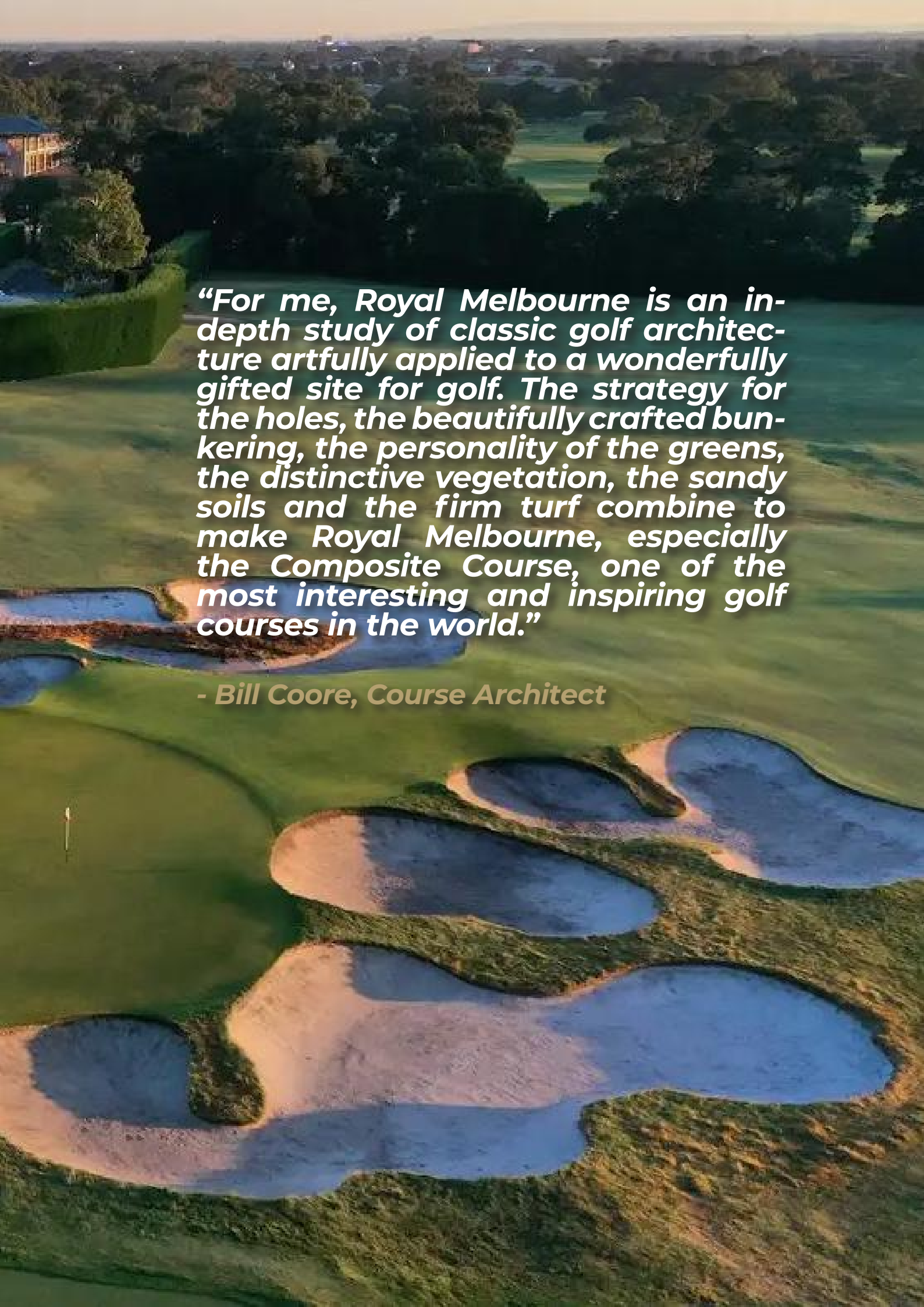
Enjoy laughs from comedians worldwide in venues across the city.









An aerial photograph of a golf course, likely Royal Melbourne, showing several large, irregularly shaped sand traps (bunkers) scattered across a lush green landscape. The traps are filled with light-colored sand and are surrounded by dense, dark green grass. In the background, a line of trees and a building are visible under a clear sky. The overall scene is a well-maintained and scenic golf course.

***“For me, Royal Melbourne is an in-depth study of classic golf architecture artfully applied to a wonderfully gifted site for golf. The strategy for the holes, the beautifully crafted bunkering, the personality of the greens, the distinctive vegetation, the sandy soils and the firm turf combine to make Royal Melbourne, especially the Composite Course, one of the most interesting and inspiring golf courses in the world.”***

***- Bill Coore, Course Architect***





# THE MELBOURNE SANDBELT



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