

"ROYAL" NORTHERN

### **A Link with Royalty?**

The writings of the Honourable Dr. S. Merrifield about the Essendon Golf Club (later Northern Golf Club) in the early years of the twentieth century as reported in the Newsletter of the Essendon Historical Society, Volume 7, No. 5, Issue 41, May-June 1978 and Issue 42, July-August 1978 suggest that Northern might have some link with Royalty or at least with England's oldest links golf club.

Doctor Merrifield's articles trace the years from 1891 to the commencement of play at Northern Golf Club on the Glenroy site on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1912, and beyond and while the focus is on the club officers and the transfer to the new site he makes one brief reference to early course design.

Dr. Merrifield writes, "*...it may be of interest to know that Greenkeeper Bennett (1912) re-produced holes similar to those on the Westward Ho links in Devonshire where he had learned his profession*".

The Westward Ho links, Royal since 1867 and known as the Royal North Devon Golf Club, is the cradle of English Golf and is regarded as the St. Andrews of the south. The Scottish game pre-dates Royal North Devon by centuries, but the Club founded in 1864 is the oldest links golf course in England. NB: We even had golf in Victoria before that date with play commencing in 1845 on a site extending from Batman Hill to Flemington Bridge, where Docklands is today.

### **Where's the link with Royalty?**

Perhaps our link is with England's first Royal Golf Club. Royal North Devon, a great links course, a treeless, flat plain which extends into the Irish Sea and is open to many a stiff breeze has recently been listed in Golf World's top 100 courses that every golfer "must" play. Like St. Andrews a first sighting can be deceptive, many new arrivals ask where the course is! (That was our experience in 2005 on a visit recommended by VGA President, Dick Kirby).

The Royal North Devon website says that "everyone who loves golf should play here, if not walk on a genuine heritage site to soak up the unique atmosphere". The clubhouse, itself un-presupposing from the outside, is a golf museum worth a visit.

### **Another link?**

HRH Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, is the Club President. Maybe that's part of his job description but he is a golfer. That probably means nothing to us! Maybe we can claim some kind of link through Bennett in 1912? He may have only been an apprentice, this is not known, but Merrifield said that he brought some Westward Ho design to Northern. A contemporary of Bennett, John Henry Taylor, was Royal North Devon's greatest player. Taylor who started as a caddie boy, was a five-time winner of the Open Championship, 1894, 1895, 1900, 1909 and 1913.

### **Does that deserve a Royal distinction?**

Perhaps not, but we sometimes use the term Royal of our own club, as a form of endearment and Royal North(ern) sounds good.

Merrifield also reported that "*In 1913 Bennett went on to become the Club Professional in charge of teaching and repair of clubs and his replacement, Spicer, the new greenkeeper, was from the Royal Cinque Ports links in England*".

Cinque Ports? Isn't that where Bob Menzies played after he became Lord Warden in the 1960s?

Our first two greenkeepers from Royal Clubs. **Royal Northern indeed!**