

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE BERHAMPORE GOLF COURSE AND THE MORNINGTON GOLF CLUB



In the early 1900's there were no publically owned golf courses in NZ but in Wellington a local doctor was preparing to stand for election to the City Council and one of the major planks of his campaign was the establishment of a municipal golf course. His preferred site was the gorse and scrub covered hills of the town belt in Berhampore.



That doctor was Robert A Cameron MD, who subsequently was widely acclaimed as the 'originator' of New Zealand's first Municipal golf course.

Dr Cameron, while of Scottish decent was born in the Wairarapa and went to school at Wellington College. In 1911 he and his family were living in Wellington East.

His arguments for a public golf course were first and foremost health related, for example he argued that golf was a better and more cost effective way of combating consumption (an increasingly important health issue at the time) than providing sanatoriums. He argued that it was not a game for the 'aristocracy' but a poor man's game that anyone should be able to afford as was the case in Scotland and England. At this time there were 4 private golf clubs in Wellington, but all were fully subscribed and expensive.

He also made the point that women and girls were poorly served for recreation in the city, with the only affordable option being hockey and the only hockey club being in Day's Bay, Miramar. However golf, he postulated, "was most suitable for women and girls" and a public course would make it accessible and affordable.

Dr Cameron was elected to the Council in 1911 and served for one term.

He believed that a public course need not be a cost to the Council and he gave a donation of 10 guineas for a public course. He was later to collect many donations and pledges of fees to demonstrate the public's willingness to contribute. In total he collected pledges of £98 from 67 people.

While Council agreed to the creation of the public course in August 1914, the start of the First World War had intervned and it was over a year later, and after NZ had entered the war, that an 8 hole course was completed and officially opened in Berhampore.

The original course started and ended at Britomart Street and was finally opened by Mayor Luke on October 30, 1915 and an 18 hole exhibition match by 2 professionals was played on the course before a large crowd of onlookers.



Playing off the second tee in the 1920's. In the background Emerson and Stanley St.

In January 1916 a men's club, the Wellington Municipal Golf Club, was established, and in March a women's club, the ANZAC Golf Club, was also established. In 1919 the men's club was renamed the Mornington Golf Club. The women's club became the Mornington Ladies Golf Club and joined forces with the Mornington Golf Club.

Dr Cameron was elected the first Captain and the first President of the golf club and donated a cup which was competed for annually till 1929. In 1942 the Cameron Shield was dedicated to his memory and has been played for every year since.

The establishment of the course received great support from the local community but no sooner had the course opened and the Club established than it was surrounded in controversy. Namely the playing of golf on Sundays.

In 1915 there was a by-law in place that prohibited playing sport on Council land on Sunday, and although the Mayor and the majority of Council wanted golf prohibited on the Council Course on Sundays, the by-law did not specify golf and much, often humorous, debate ensued about whether golf was in fact a sport. The result being that the by-law was not enforced on the golf course. Sunday was the most popular and profitable day for golf as most workers only had Saturday afternoon and Sunday free each week. After deputations from the Presbyterian Boys Home (that bordered the course) and the Presbyterian Assembly however, a new by-law that specifically prohibited golf on Sunday was enacted by the Council in September 1916. This created much public debate for and against, including a petition of over 2,000 signatures in favour of golf on Sunday.

Less than a month after the by-law was enacted it was deliberately flouted by the Club Secretary (well known local accountant William Whitehead) and he was taken to court by the Council in November 1916 and, after a long and very public battle (with the full support

of the Club), the case ended up in the Supreme Court. In 1917 the Supreme Court deemed the Council by-law unlawful. William and the Club had won.

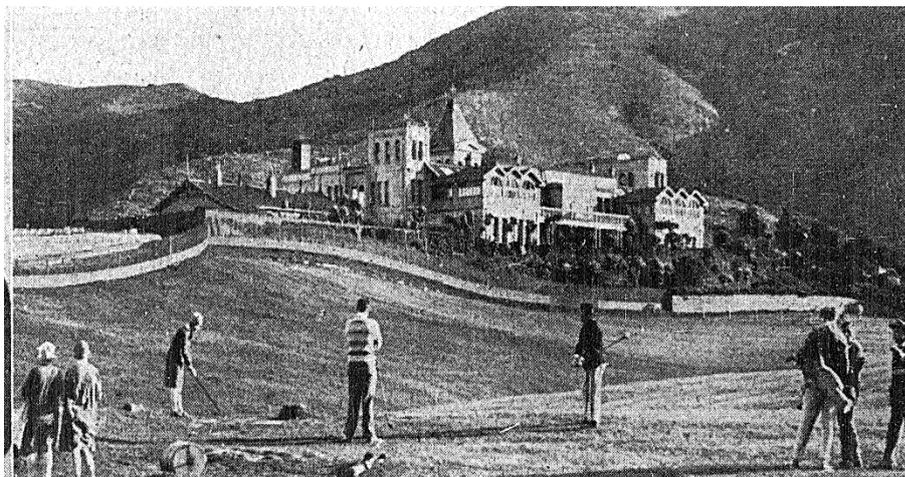
The popularity of the course grew exponentially. In 1917 80 tickets were being sold each Sunday, by 1919 that number had grown to over 140 on a fine Saturday or Sunday and as many as 220 on a holiday. The 9 hole course was incredibly congested and players often had to wait hours for a game.



Council golf course Custodian collected green fees.

The congestion on the course led to calls for it to be extended to 18 holes and for a beginners' 9 hole course to be established on the town belt opposite Athletic Park.

The Council agreed to extend the course to the east side of Adelaide Road and the additional holes were opened in 1921. The 'beginner's' course opposite Athletic Park wasn't opened until 1931.



The 4<sup>th</sup> hole on the original 8 hole course, in 1921 it became the 14<sup>th</sup> (today it is the 2<sup>nd</sup>).

**A complete history of the Berhampore Golf Course and the Mornington Golf Club will be published in early 2016 and will be available to be purchased from the Mornington Golf Club <http://www.morningtongolf.co.nz>.**