

book reviews

**Andrew Baker, *Florence Fowler's Scrapbooks*,
Fleurieu Hickory Golfers, Yankalilla SA, 2024, pp. 186, hb, \$75.00.**

A year ago in this journal I described Andrew Baker as ‘a one-man South Australian golf history industry’ and he has kept the momentum flowing with a third major book in the 2024 calendar year.

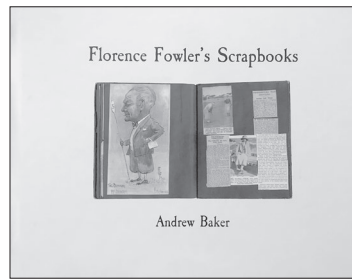
Eight of Florence Fowler’s scrapbooks and photographic albums had been donated to the Royal Adelaide Golf Club archives by her niece Elizabeth Mann shortly after her death, aged 88, in 1966 with the assistance of Florence’s close friend Lillian Gordon, the 1923 Australian Women’s Amateur Champion. As Baker points out in his introduction ‘with guidance provided by Lillian, golf historian Marjorie Ridgway undertook the process of preserving and cataloguing

the books’ but that is where they remained until he took on the task of reproducing them for the first time in a handsome landscape hardback edition.

So, who is the subject of the book’s title?

Born Florence Ayers in 1877, she was the daughter of lawyer Fredric Ayers, the third son of five-time South Australian premier Sir Henry Ayers, and thus very much a member of Adelaide’s Establishment. In her youth in the 1890s she would reveal considerable ability as a pianist and at the same time play for the North Adelaide Cricket Club, one of only two city women’s clubs in the colony. Over the next few years she would prove an accomplished tennis player, winning the Ladies and Gentlemen’s Doubles Championship of South Australia with a future Australasian Davis Cup player Alf Dunlop in 1900, represent the state as a singles player against Victoria in 1902, and win the equivalent of a state table-tennis final in 1901. It was golf, however, in which she would make her sporting fame.

In 1896, at 18, she was one of eleven women to play in a ‘lady associates’ event of the Adelaide Golf Club and ten years later won the club’s inaugural associates’ championship. As South Australia’s best early female golfer, she distinguished herself at the national level by finishing third in the 1902 Australian Women’s Amateur Championship, runner-up the following year, and third in 1905. In 1906 she won the inaugural South Australian Women’s Amateur Championship, the first of five times, although the other victories in 1910-12 and 1922 were under her married name of Mrs Maxwell Fowler. As Mrs Fowler she also twice finished



runner-up in the Australian Women’s Championships of 1910 and 1912.

The marriage to Royal naval officer Maxwell Fowler took place in London in 1908 and Baker surmises that the couple might have met on a golf course. *Florence Fowler's Scrapbooks* provides an insight into a remarkable woman. Florence lived in England from 1907 to 1909, the couple returned to Australia from 1909 to 1914, spent the First World War in England, were back in Australia from 1919 to 1924, spent the next nine years in England and Europe, were then in Adelaide for four years, in England from 1937 to 1944, and back and forth between the two countries before retiring in England.

Baker structures the biographical element of the book around these moves and the most fascinating chapter is that of the 1920s when Florence not only continued to play top-level golf in her forties and fifties, culminating in becoming Australian golf’s first female international title holder when she won the Italian Ladies’ Amateur Championship in 1931 and finishing runner-up in the 1932 Swiss Ladies’ Amateur Championship, but also finding an outlet for her skilful caricatures in *Golf Illustrated* magazine.

Maxwell Fowler gained positions as secretary of Burnham Beeches Golf Club at Slough on the outskirts of London, the Hyères Golf Club in France, and at Lausanne Golf Club in Switzerland. Florence and her husband became intimate with not only British royalty but American show business and sporting stars, and the higher echelons of amateur golf. Among the outstanding illustrative material from the interwar years is a spectacular poster of the Hyères Golf Club and caricatures of leading British women’s golfer Joyce Wethered and Paris-based American Jazz Age entertainer Josephine Baker.

The story is presented in several parts. The first half of the book is an illustrated biography employing a double-column narrative for the main text to good effect, while the remainder incorporates two photographic albums, caricatures and artworks which reveal other aspects of Florence’s talents.

‘Book 3’ is a 30-page album that represents the highlight of the visual collection and includes snaps of main events in women’s golf in Britain and Europe in the 1920s and 1930s such as the English Ladies Close Championships, the English Girls Championship at Stoke Poges, the 1930 French Open at St. Germain, Britain v America at Sunningdale in 1930, and Britain v France in 1933. A much smaller album titled ‘Australian Caricatures’ contains examples of Florence’s work including notable South Australian golfers such as early state champion William Gunson, ‘Cargie’ Rymill, the original course designer of Kooyonga Golf Club, eight-time winner of the South Australian Amateur Championship Legh Winsler, and of fellow caricaturist Kerwin Maeraith. ‘Assorted Works’ contains further caricatures of leading Victorian player Betty Nankivell, two of the professionals at Lausanne Golf Club, and one of Florence herself. At the end of the book an Appendix titled ‘Notes About the Scrapbooks’ offer a wealth of extra information about the books and many of the images found within them.

Florence Fowler's Scrapbooks provides a rich example of early women's golf history in South Australia, and in Britain and Europe in the interwar years. Andrew Baker is to be congratulated not only his historian's expertise but for his design flair in producing such an attractive volume. It is an absolute aesthetic delight.

Bernard Whimpress

Independent scholar