



ARTHUR VERNON MACAN (1882 – 1964)

ARCHITECT OF ROYAL COLWOOD COLF COURSE

A.V. Macan was an exceptional man with a remarkable talent: He brought creative genius to the design of golf courses. From the time of his arrival in Victoria, British Columbia in 1912, until his death at age 82 in 1964, few can claim to have had a more lasting effect on the game of golf in the Pacific Northwest. His vision impacted 55 golf courses along the coast from San Francisco to Nanaimo.

The first course Macan created was Colwood Golf Club. Some of the other notable courses he designed or remodeled include: Shaughnessy, Richmond, and Marine Drive in Vancouver; the Victoria Golf Club and Gorge Vale in Victoria; Fircrest, Inglewood, and Broadmoor in Seattle; the Columbia-Edgewater Country Club in Portland; and the California Golf Club near San Francisco.

Macan was raised and educated in Ireland where he studied law at Dublin's Trinity College. In his youth he became one of Ireland's most prominent amateur golfers serving on Trinity College's golf team in 1907 and 1908. During these early years Macan developed his love of the Old Course at St. Andrew. There is no doubt that the architectural principles of links golf courses played an important role in shaping his future designs.

He immigrated to North America and settled in Victoria, where he rapidly established his golfing credentials by winning the 1912 BC Amateur Championship. One year later, he repeated the feat and then added the 1913 Pacific Northwest Amateur Championship to his list of accomplishments. In 1913, he received his first golf architecture opportunity when Joseph Sayward commissioned him to design and build the new Colwood golf course. Unfortunately, his budding career was interrupted by the Great War. As a married and a professional man, in all likelihood Macan would have been exempt from service; however, at age 33 he volunteered and went overseas with the 88th Victoria Fusiliers. On April 10th, 1917, during the famous Allied assault at Vimy Ridge, he was wounded and required a below-knee amputation of his left leg. After a long recuperation in Ireland, Macan

returned to Victoria in 1919. Despite his physical handicap he played for many years to a six handicap, only two shots higher than he had maintained before the war. In 1925, eight years after his life threatening injury, he won the Colwood Club Championship.

While Macan's golfing prowess was earning him accolades, so was his first course design. In 1931 the Colwood Club was granted "Royal" status by King George V. The American Society of Golf Course Architects recognized his talent by admitting him in 1950. The noted golf architect, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., praised Macan's greens as being 50 years ahead of their time. Macan designed undulating greens with drainage suitable for the Northwest's wet climate and with enough contour to defy the backspin players. He believed that distance shots and spinning the ball through the air required only a modest amount of talent. It was the creativity in golf - playing the ball along the ground, up and over slopes, mounds and swales - that made an approach, chip or putt a formidable challenge. He described his goals as follows:

"A perfect putting green must, of course, provide interest and amusement for all. These are the essential qualities of a perfect golf course, of which the greens form so important a part. It must then be a perfect test of the player's skill, not only while on the green, but in testing his accuracy in playing the ball to it....As it is a run-up or pitch-and-run shot we are trying to encourage, the front or apron to the green cannot be bunkered, nor can it be a type of ground which gives any great promise of success if pitched onto."

While he loved to test skilled golfers, he ultimately believed the game should be enjoyed by every calibre of player. He observed that:

"Golf was not conceived as a mechanical operation, but rather full of fun and adventure.....holes should be designed so that the man who pays the bills, namely the average golfer, can have a nice day."

In 1922 Macan described his first golf course design in these words:

"The Colwood course is difficult, though wherein the difficulty lies is rather hard to define. It is not imaginary, as everyone who has played it has had the same experience. Difficult it is to score on, and while the holes in general are comfortably within the reach of two shots - there is only one real three shotter - fives and even sixes keep appearing on one's card. Even the four one shot holes do not seem to help as much as they should toward keeping somewhere near an average of fours....While...the course is by no means narrow, slices and hooks receive severe punishment. This may be the reason that the tee shots at Colwood seem to keep one in a perpetual state of anxiety over the imaginary evils that may happen to one if a shot goes astray."

In 1919, Colwood made Macan its first Honourary Member, and he remained actively involved in the Club until his death in 1964. That long-term commitment allowed Macan to achieve his full expression as a golf architect, for which all members of the Club are grateful. The Royal Colwood golf course stands as an enduring testament to Macan's vision and genius.

