

Women to the Fore: Gender Accommodation and Resistance at the British Golf Club Before 1914¹

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(published in *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 23, 2, May 2007, 79-98)

Introduction

In the four decades before the First World War golf was one of the fastest growing recreational activities in Britain. From less than 100 clubs in the 1870s the total rose to almost 3,000 by 1914 with an estimated aggregate membership of over 350,000 golfers. Whilst golf was not a sport of courage and overt masculinity like cricket, football and rugby it was still framed as a male-dominant activity. Early female golfers faced ridicule and restriction, though, as this infers, the sport was not gender exclusive. Indeed significant numbers of middle-class women played the game either within the 'ladies' section' of male clubs or often at clubs developed specifically for female participants. In 1900 63 clubs were affiliated to the Ladies' Golf Union [LGU]; by 1911 there were 400 clubs with 50,000 members; and for 1914 the *LGU Year Book* records 548 clubs suggesting perhaps over 60,000 female golfers, a significant proportion of all those playing the game at club level.² As with men, the popularity of golf participation had increased with the introduction of the rubber-cored ball to Britain in 1901, a technological breakthrough that offered golfers greater distance to their drives, most iron shots and even topped efforts.³ Yet the role of women in golf and golf clubs has been marginalized by historians who have generally followed contemporary male golfers in seeing them as inferior players by virtue of their lesser strength and perceived emotional fragility.⁴

The aim of this article is to pull women in from the periphery and show that they had a significant role in the organisation, promotion and development of golf. It will also look at two other groups of women at the golf club, those of a lower social class to the members who found employment as cooks, cleaners and even caddies, and those who exhibited hostility to the clubs as part of militant suffragette activity. The paper will provide evidence on gender power relationships between male and female golfers, employers and employees, and suffragettes and the political establishment.

Motivations

As with male players golf for women was mainly a middle-class pursuit: the costs incurred for equipment and subscriptions saw to this. A first-class woman golfer could have been spending up to £100 a year and even an ordinary player would lay out around £30, no small sum when the average level of full-time earnings was 28s a week.⁵ Coupled with the opportunities for midweek play, this meant that women's golf was a relatively exclusive game for females of a certain socio-economic class. Social barriers could also be erected as at Burbage where a shopkeeper was informed that she was ineligible for membership but an ordinary member's subscription would cover 'any governess in charge of a member's children'.⁶

One journal aimed at a middle-class female readership maintained that golf was 'an excellent means of combining fresh air, exercise and society.'⁷ This summed up the situation for most women golfers. They saw golf as a gentle form of healthy exercise

that required skill rather than force and which allowed time on and off the course for social interaction. Some, satirised by a male correspondent to *Golf Illustrated*, took up the game because ‘Mrs So-and-so plays and the golf course is delightful.’⁸ Even Blanche Martin, the first treasurer of the LGU, identified a ‘large army of lesser golfers ... frivolous and unpromising’ who played simply to keep up their social reputation and came up ‘to the links bedecked in feathers and ribbons, and their feeble expletives, as they ineffectively waggle a club of whose name and nature they are totally ignorant, can be heard on every ladies’ course wherever the game is established.’⁹ Yet, as another supporter of women’s golf acknowledged, ‘were it not for this burning desire ... to be in fashion, it would be financially impossible to keep our golf clubs going. Quite sixty per cent of the members support our club only because it is the correct thing to do. So they fill their niche in the general scheme of things, pay their subscriptions, wear fascinating golf costumes ... please themselves, and do comparatively little harm.’¹⁰

Golf, unlike many sports, offered the possibility of mixed gender participation. For a few this might have romantic connotations. For a greater number it provided an opportunity for a family or married couple to share recreation together as at Edinburgh Ladies’ where sons, daughters and male ‘associates’ were welcomed as members and mixed foursomes were included amongst the numerous competitions.¹¹ Some clubs afforded female relatives special rates as at Littlehampton where wives, daughters and sisters of members were allowed to play for 2s 6d a week or 10s 6d annually.¹² The Lundin Ladies’ Golf Club in Fife was particularly family friendly, being open to ladies, ‘gentlemen associates’ and children over seven, for whom it organised competitions during the summer holidays when the local village became a popular resort for families from elsewhere in Scotland.¹³ Even if they played without males, golf offered female family members an opportunity to socialise together. Judging from the addresses, the membership register at Wirral Ladies in 1895 included at least 9 mother and daughter combinations and an additional 19 sets of sisters. At Stanmore, a total female membership of 173 between 1907 and 1909 included 78 married women, eleven mothers and daughters and nine groups of sisters.¹⁴ Although the married cohort were mainly wives of club members, opportunities to play together on the main course were restricted to Tuesdays until 1911 when mixed foursomes were introduced as an experiment at quiet times at the weekend.¹⁵ These figures do not account for all female players: a considerable number (at least 25%) of unmarried women had no obvious relatives at the club. Who they were and how they financed their membership remain unresearched issues.

Clubs of Their Own

Whilst the social golfers might ‘vie with each other in the excellence of their tea-cakes’, others sought competition on the course ‘and played in a style which some gentlemen themselves might well have tried to emulate.’¹⁶ For this substantial minority golf was a serious sport but one of separate and often unequal development. There were no followers of the Barnehurst Golf Club model in which men and women had the same rights of membership, equal use of the links, and similar access to the clubhouse where certain rooms were reserved exclusively for each sex. Situated near London on Bexley Heath, the course was unique as it had been designed by James Braid, the professional and Open Champion of 1901, as a gift from Christopher Gray to his wife. Yet although four years on from its inception a sporting journal noted that

‘the experiment of the entente cordiale between the sexes at golf had proved a brilliant success at Barnehurst’,¹⁷ it seems that no other clubs copied the idea.

Instead a substantial number of female golfers belonged to clubs specifically organised for women. The first properly constituted ladies’ golf club was at St Andrews in 1867, soon followed by one at Westward Ho! in Devon. Both were established by male golfers for their female relatives and neither possessed a full-length course. That at St Andrews was little more than a long putting course; the other had holes between 50 and 120 yards, significantly less than on the parent course on which the men played.¹⁸

Most women golfers, however, became members of what was often labelled a ladies’ club but which was in reality a ‘ladies’ section’ within a parent club. Most of the newer clubs of the 1890s onwards had allowed women membership from their foundation but they moved to form separate ladies’ sections [or even clubs] when numbers increased.¹⁹ South Staffordshire typified the experience: when their female numbers rose from an initial 15 in 1892 to 65 four years later a separate nine-hole course was laid out for their exclusive use.²⁰

Whether they were labelled members of a branch, as at Folkestone Ladies’, Bexhill, and Hastings & St Leonards, or ‘associate members’, as were the women at Heswall Golf Club in Cheshire, they were subject to restrictions on when they could play. Usually the course was solely for men on competition days and on Saturdays either all or part of the day. Additional restrictions at some clubs included not being able to play on Bank Holidays as at Chester and Leicestershire Ladies’ or on Thursday half holidays at Blairgowrie.²¹ Even when they shared playing times with males female golfers were expected to give way to men on the course. When women were allowed to play at Dunbar one of the first rules was that ‘they shall interfere as little as possible with the gentlemen players and allow them to pass when called upon’.²²

The objections to women centred around slow play, attributable to them taking more strokes due to the lesser distances that they hit the ball, and their inadequacy in dealing with bunkers and other hazards. One way round the problem was to develop separate playing facilities for men and women. At Dunbar ladies were provided with a short course of 12 holes as there were so many women ‘causing delay and inconvenience to members’; at Beverley and East Riding Golf Club in East Humberside a proposal was made in 1889 that ladies ‘form a ground of their own’ on which they would have unrestricted use of their course; and at Formby, although ladies had been members of the Formby Golf Club from its inception in 1884 (paying only half the men’s subscription), with membership booming and changes made to lengthen the course the gentlemen decided that ‘the women should have a course of their own’.²³ What is not clear is the extent to which clubs were formed at the initiative of women rather than at the behest of men. Lady members at Seaford near Eastbourne formed their own club in 1887 and played on a nine-hole course as times were restricted for them on the main course and Brighton and Hove Ladies’ established their own club in 1891, two years after the men, and also developed their own nine-hole course.²⁴

Female social golfers might have preferred such an arrangement.²⁵ Many men certainly did. Scottish High Court judge, Lord Wellwood, did not wish to share his

course with women. He accepted that 'if they chose to play when the male golfers are feeding or resting no one can object. But at other times ... they are in the way'. He was not alone in his views. As one female golfer acknowledged 'gentlemen feel the presence of women on the links to be irksome we know and that is why so many ladies' links are being formed, for it is embarrassing for women to feel themselves in the way.'²⁶

The pattern of differentiated courses for women that had begun at St Andrews and Westward Ho! continued at least up to 1914. Theirs tended to be of nine holes (eighteen was often seen as too tiring), of much less yardage than those of men, and without serious hazards.²⁷ This did not suit the better female players who wished to play challenging golf. The club course then became contested terrain. As Horace Hutchinson noted in respect of the incursion on his own links: 'We used to hear at first: "It's absurd, these ladies not sticking to their own course; they can't drive far enough to be able to appreciate the long course." But then it very soon became evident that they could play better than a large number of the male members of the club, which rather knocked the bottom out of the argument.'²⁸

The issue then became one of distinguishing between female social golfers and the more serious women players.²⁹ As a generalisation what tended to happen was that many clubs allowed women the privilege of playing over the men's course perhaps on one specified day a week but allowed greater access to those with low handicaps, thus keeping off the links 'the inefficient lady players who would be apt to block the green and whose right place is on their own course, while it freely admits those who are capable of appreciating the blessing of the long course.'³⁰ An example of such quality control was at Bath where members of the Bath Ladies were allowed to play on the gentlemen's course if their handicaps were 14 or under. Interestingly at Stanmore and Minchinhampton, both with nine-hole ladies courses, important matches for women were played over the men's course.³¹ Nevertheless these women, like any that used the men's course, played off advanced tees so as to shorten the length of the round, a device that reinforced the notion of golf as masculine.

There was less compromise off the course. Whilst Douglas Park allowed women to use the men's dining room for lunch and tea [though only during designated 'ladies' hours'], Dunbar was more typical in not admitting them to the clubhouse at all.³² Even the most liberal clubs drew the line at letting women have equal rights in the clubhouse. At Littlestone, one of the very few clubs where women and men shared unrestricted use of the course, they were only allowed in by special invitation at Christmas and could not enter by the front door. Indeed on one occasion when a group of visiting women found the ladies' clubhouse locked they were refused permission to dine in the men's clubhouse and had to eat outside on the balcony despite driving wind and rain.³³

The solution adopted by several women's clubs was to build their own premises. As with those of men they varied in their level of sophistication. Within the same county, for example, they ranged from Hoylake Ladies GC's 'little shanty that did not even seem to stand straight on its own little particular sandhill' to West Lancashire's 'bright airy sanctum, arrayed in lace curtains and striped sunblinds and dainty furnishings ... the hall and entertaining rooms are both lofty and commodious and the

kitchen is, as it should be, the best room in the house and shining brilliantly with copper and brass.’³⁴

Like the clubhouse, power too was generally not for sharing. Purley Downs was a rarity in that women could become full members with equal access to the course but there was a limit set of a dozen only and they still had no voting rights as was the case at almost every club throughout Britain. Most were like South Beds where lady members were not admitted to the AGM but were able to join the men for a social afterwards. At Braemar, most unusually, they were allowed to attend and vote at general meetings, but they were not allowed to hold office.³⁵

Even when men helped to establish separate clubs or branches for women, there was sometimes a reluctance to devolve power to the female offshoots. Clearly as was openly specified at Douglas Park and implicitly understood elsewhere, ‘they shall have no voice in the management of the club’ but even the right to make decisions within their own section was often curtailed. The Ladies’ Committee at Stanmore had no power to confirm new female members who could be elected directly by the men. At Eastbourne Ladies the committee had no representation of ladies and was run by five gentlemen, with a Secretary and President who were also male. At least, unlike at Craigmillar Park in Edinburgh, the women do not seem to have been relegated to a Tea Committee! Another Scottish club, Edinburgh Ladies, initially had a male President, Secretary and both Vice-Captains, and sixteen of the twenty committee positions went to men. At Rochdale ladies were allowed to elect their own captain, secretary, treasurer and committee but all decisions had to be approved by the exclusively male main club committee.³⁶ Of course this followed the political thinking of the time with women often denied a say in the running of anything, except the household.

There was some change in the relative status of women at some clubs before the First World War. Until 1913 women at the Blackburn club could not play on Saturdays or after 1.00 pm on Thursdays but thereafter they were allowed to play until noon on Saturdays when there was no male competition being held and on Thursday afternoons before 3.00 pm. Similarly at Sutton Coldfield a previous ban on Saturday play for women gave way to a restriction only after midday. Off the links Dunbar had agreed to provide accommodation for ladies in the south club room and men were to use it only if accompanying a lady and by 1913 Edinburgh Ladies had reduced its committee to thirteen but expanded the female representation to six.³⁷

Nor were restrictions unilateral. Although – perhaps because – women faced exclusionary policies from male club members, they were prepared to introduce their own restrictions. At Minchinhampton in 1906, when women were prohibited from playing on the men’s course at certain hours, the response was a directive to the gentlemen that ‘no men (whether with or without a lady) to commence play on the ladies’ links between ... etc’!³⁸ Yet the ladies’ clubs did not adopt full exclusionary policies towards men. At Lundin Links, for example, perhaps in a move to promote mixed gender social golf, gentlemen ‘were allowed to play [on the women’s course] only when accompanying ladies.’ Hoylake Ladies established their club in 1895 and allowed male relatives to become ‘associate members’ at special rates of £6 6s entrance fee and an annual subscription of £2.³⁹ Possibly the financial motive was

imperative in this and similar cases. Ladies' clubs, like those of men, needed money to cover operating costs.

Despite often being physically relegated to lesser facilities on and off the course, usually being symbolically relegated to the 'ladies' section', and having little or no voice in parent club affairs, women's golf was an expanding sport at both recreational and elite level. A contributory factor was that, although men sometimes continued to intervene in the ladies' clubs and sections, sufficient women came forward to take on the necessary administrative and organisational tasks required to run over 500 ladies clubs and, as one grudging critic acknowledged, 'the ladies show a very marked capability for managing their own golfing affairs.'⁴⁰

Wider Organisation

Some of these female administrators made their mark beyond the confines of their own clubs as women's golf progressed beyond men's in two organisational respects, a representative national body and the development of a standardised system of handicapping, two things that did not appear in men's golf till more than a decade later.⁴¹ The initiative came from Issette Pearson who had earlier led the revival of Wimbledon Ladies Golf Club in the late 1880s. This time she proposed setting up a Ladies Golf Union. She felt that a national body was required to bring some regulation and organisation to the game. A governing body could offer advice to women golfers, suggest solutions to problems within clubs, and deal with the anomalies of handicaps. It was Miss Pearson's belief that the LGU would give women's golf more focus. Women would be kept informed about who was playing the game, where it was being played and what opportunities were available for them to compete nationally, thus hopefully raising the standards of play.

Her decision to circulate all the known ladies' golf clubs in Britain and call all those who might be interested to a preliminary meeting in London at the Grand Hotel, Northumberland Avenue on 19 April 1893 significantly coincided with the beginning of the London season when many golf club members would be in town. Clubs expressing an interest sent along delegates with fifteen English clubs and one Scottish club represented.⁴²

Issette Pearson sought the advice and support of Laidlaw Purves, one of the leading players from the Wimbledon Club, to assist with the initial organisation of the meeting. Purves was sympathetic with the objectives of the ladies as he had tried unsuccessfully to establish a similar golfing association for men. He gave his backing to the scheme paying tribute to the women present at the meeting and indicating that their presence signified 'the welfare of present and future golfers, which had not been evinced to the majority of the other sex'.⁴³ The meeting also received the support of a society magazine, the *Gentlewoman*, which reported the instigation of the LGU as 'a much needed movement for lady golfers'.⁴⁴

The idea of the LGU was not to 'dictate' to affiliated clubs how they should be run but to 'encourage a universality of aims' which would, it was hoped, 'increase the sense of comradeship and sportsmanship'.⁴⁵ Clubs which affiliated to the Union would have the opportunity of addressing their problems directly to this body which would give women golfers' representation. The purpose and objectives of the LGU were: to promote the interests of the game of golf; to obtain a uniformity of the rules

of the game by establishing a representative legislative authority; to establish a uniform system of handicapping; to act as a tribunal and court of reference on points of uncertainty; and to arrange an annual championship competition and to obtain funds necessary for that purpose. In contrast to men's golf which suffered from 'an oligarchy of each local club ruling over its individual members, and a great oligarchy of an ancient and venerable club ruling over the golfing world', the LGU would provide an opportunity for all clubs to vote on issues.⁴⁶

All affiliated clubs were to submit their local rules and bye-laws to the executive council in order that the Union could advise on those which were deemed unnecessary or contrary to the laws of golf. Sometimes in open competitions or inter-club matches difficulties of interpretation had arisen and it was considered that an impartial body could be a point of reference for club secretaries if assistance was necessary.⁴⁷

It was agreed at the preliminary meeting that the Union would be run by an executive of office bearers, consisting of four vice-presidents, a treasurer, a secretary and a council of delegates. Although the LGU was willing to develop women's golf on separate lines from men, they drew on the expertise of men from the golf world. Initially all four vice-presidents were males from different parts of the country and not till 1908 was Lady Alice Stanley appointed as the first female vice-president. That said, one researcher who has read the Minutes of the LGU argues that male influence on decision-making was minimal.⁴⁸

As part of its objective to raise golfing standards the LGU felt that a national championship open to all female golfers would bring focus to women's golf and give the best players the opportunity to compete against each other. The women of St Anne's Golf Club in Lancashire had already announced in April 1893 (prior to the formation of the LGU) that they were considering running an 'open' competition and that they had received contributions from other clubs towards the purchase of a fifty-guinea challenge cup. St Anne's and the LGU combined their efforts. The newly-formed LGU agreed to organize the national championship and accepted the offer made by St Anne's to use its course. This club had a reputation of 'treating its female members with fairness' which indicated that they could rely on assistance from the male members of the club.⁴⁹ Issette Pearson, with the assistance of Laidlaw Purves and the LGU committee, proceeded to organise the event. Some male golfers were sceptical about women's competence in organising let alone playing in a major championship. Among them was Horace Hutchison, a British Amateur champion, who predicted in a letter in April 1893, that there would be no more than one such championship.

"They will never go through *one* Ladies' Championship with credit. Tears will bedew, if wigs do not bestrew, the green. Constitutionally and physically women are unfitted for golf. They will never last through two rounds of a long course in a day. Nor can they hope to defy the wind and weather encountered on our best links even in spring and summer. Temperamentally the strain will be too great for them. The first Ladies' Championship will be the last unless I and others are greatly mistaken."⁵⁰

He was decidedly wrong and sporting enough to concede so, to the extent of becoming a Vice-President of the LGU in 1901.

In a little under two months after the inaugural meeting in April 1893 to form the Union, all the necessary arrangements for the Ladies' Championship to take place between the 13th and 15th June 1893 had been made. This inaugural national championship marked the beginning of women's golf as a serious sport.⁵¹ In 1893 38 women played matches twice round the nine-hole course at St Anne's but from 1894 the championship was played on men's courses. In 1897 107 entrants challenged the seaside links at Gullane and in 1914 a record 166 women played at Hunstanton. Perhaps the most significant championship was that of 1908, later described by LGU official Mabel Stringer as 'epoch-making' for it was held in front of several thousand spectators at the Old Course in St Andrews, the traditional home of (men's) golf. The Royal & Ancient even relaxed its rules to allow the competitors into the club premises to view trophies.⁵²

Another major achievement of the LGU was the establishment of a national system of handicapping. At the end of the nineteenth century each club calculated handicaps by its own methods and based on conditions at its own course, usually giving the best player scratch and ranking the others relative to that player. Some used best performances, others looked to the average. This caused confusion and even friction in inter-club or open meetings. The LGU introduced more consistency by persuading clubs to accept an agreed method of calculating par against which a handicap could be struck on the basis of two scores on a prize or medal day (i.e. in competitive not recreational golf). While not insisting that member clubs adopted its system of handicapping, tactically the LGU enhanced its position by donating silver medals for competition at every club that did take it up.⁵³ Within a decade the LGU's methodology had become widely accepted and provided a reasonably reliable indicator of the quality of players from club to club. In 1897 four volunteer LGU handicap managers were at work; by 1905 this had risen to 15. Such was the success of the handicap system that it became extensively adopted by female clubs in both Australia and New Zealand.⁵⁴

The publication of a handbook from 1894 was also a pioneering golfing venture by women. It was issued free to affiliated clubs by the LGU to provide an official point of reference but was also available for sale to individuals and other clubs. However sales did not cover costs and, despite sponsorship first from the *Gentlewoman* magazine and then from the Golf Agency (who insisted on more advertising), the Handbook struggled for viability. The situation improved from 1906 when Miss Pearson, who remained Hon. Secretary of the LGU till 1921, brought in the idea that affiliated clubs should be compelled to purchase copies, the numbers required to be in proportion to membership.⁵⁵

Whilst appreciative of the social golfer the LGU was aimed at the competitive golfer. That they hit the target was indicated in a comment in *Ladies Field* in 1908 that 'Ladies have improved their game in leaps and bounds. The improvement is due to the inauguration of a Ladies' Open Championship and other open meetings and competitions encouraged by the LGU.'⁵⁶ Those other competitions included home internationals which by the early 1900s had become a regular feature in the women's golfing calendar.

Club Servants

One reason why middle-class women had the time to play golf or become administrators at club level and beyond was that some other tasks were undertaken by their household servants. Servants were also in attendance at the golf club to help the middle-class players replicate a leisured life-style within the clubhouse.

Golf clubs were not just sporting enterprises, they were also local businesses that employed people both on and off the course. The clubhouse was where women found jobs in catering and hospitality which were important for revenue raising or member satisfaction. Being a club-mistress at a top club could be like running a hotel (though under committee instruction) but at a smaller one it could be a grandiose title for a combination of tea dispenser, cleaner and washerwoman, as at Torwoodlee where Mrs Crombie was expected to clean the clubhouse and lavatories and keep the floor properly washed. Such jobs often came as a package deal when a husband was offered a green-keeping or caretaking position. This was standard practice at Blackburn where four married couples were employed between 1895 and 1914. Other club-mistresses were independent female entrepreneurs who operated catering on a retainer plus profits system, a similar procedure to how most club golf professionals ran their shops. A few took on additional tasks. At Douglas Park Miss Christian Morrison agreed to clean the ladies' clubhouse for an extra 1s 9d a month and between July and September she was paid an additional 2s 6d a week for assisting in the bar and dining room). As well as being caretaker at Beverley & East Riding, Mrs Smith also acted as a caddie-mistress.⁵⁷ However, she employed no female caddies.

Women as cooks or cleaners raised no issues at golf clubs, not so females carrying golf bags for members. Some clubs, such as Reigate Heath in 1902 specifically banned their employment.⁵⁸ Others operated an unwritten discriminatory policy. Yet there were exceptions. The first mention of regular girl caddies seems to have been at Guernsey in 1890, though one golf historian claims that girls replaced striking male caddies for six weeks at Gullane in Scotland around 1870. From about 1890 too, four years after the club was founded, Lytham and St Annes employed girls, though they had to be over fourteen and could carry only for lady members. By 1897, however, they could caddy for men and at the Autumn meeting that year girl caddies outnumbered boys. Girls were also caddying at Newquay in 1901 and at Huntercombe in Oxfordshire and several Yorkshire courses prior to the First World War. Nevertheless they were uncommon enough for comments to be made in *Golf Illustrated* about the fashion for girl caddies at some continental clubs.⁵⁹ Women caddies were even rarer. At Royal Ashdown, Mrs Mitchell, from the family that produced Abe Mitchell the professional golfer, carried from the turn of the century, initially because she lived close to the professional's shop and helped out when there was a shortage, and at Westward Ho! Mrs Williams became a first-class caddy in 1910. Bernard Darwin, the golf writer, also recalled a Mary Davina, who carried clubs at Aberdovey in Mid-Wales and champion Midlands' golfer Lily Moore had a female caddie.⁶⁰ It is significant that neither girl nor women caddies are mentioned in a major inquiry into the social and economic condition of caddies conducted in 1912.⁶¹

That caddies were predominantly male owes more to social mores than the requirements of the job. Possibly carrying a bag of clubs around the course was seen as being too heavy work for women, but many members of clubs had no hesitation in employing children as caddies or females for hard domestic work in their households. Nor did the Secretary of Copt Heath resist from paying two women at 1s 9d a day to

pick stones from the fairway.⁶² More likely it was the perceived disreputable nature of those who caddied, particularly adult males, and a desire to keep females protected from their influence.⁶³

Unlike their male counterparts there was a no chance of a female caddie advancing to green-keeper or golf professional. This would have involved an apprenticeship (assistantship) to an existing professional in which the art of club-making would be taught and these were exclusively for males.⁶⁴ Indeed there does not appear to have been a female assistant in British golf until the 1930s when Sydney Wingate appointed his sister Poppy to help him at Temple Newsham. That said, there were at least two women golf teachers. Mrs Gordon Robertson in 1905 became an instructor specifically for female players. By 1908 she claimed to have given over 2,000 lessons, mainly at the Prince's (Mitcham) and West Middlesex clubs but also on a peripatetic basis when requested by other clubs. Additionally in 1911 Sunningdale Ladies employed Lily Freemantle, daughter of a male professional.⁶⁵

Suffragettes

A male commentator writing in 1913 reckoned that 'women on the links have made greater strides than in any other section of womanhood.'⁶⁶ Certainly they had made more progress there than in the struggle for the franchise, though, except at the few fully independent ladies' clubs voting rights for women at golf clubs mirrored those in society at large. Nearly forty years of campaigning had brought female suffragists no closer to achieving their political aims. Although the founding of the more militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903 had led to demonstrations, publicity stunts and an escalating level of disorderly behaviour, culminating in prison sentences and hunger strikes, an all-male parliament still refused to grant women the vote.

In January 1913 the WSPU embarked on its most serious campaign of violence, prompted by the failure of the latest franchise bill, with Mrs Pankhurst declaring that members of the organisation intended to inflict widespread damage against property. For the next eighteen months private houses, public buildings, postal services and transport throughout Britain were burned down, bombed, disrupted and destroyed.⁶⁷ Sports venues such as racecourses, cricket grounds and football stadiums were subject to arson attacks, bowling greens and tennis courts were hacked up, boat houses and billiard rooms damaged. The sportsmen who suffered the greatest inconvenience, however, were golfers.

Golf courses – vast, semi-rural and difficult to protect from intruders – were easy prey to suffragettes toting trowels and bottles of corrosive fluid. Although fires were sometimes started at clubhouses the most common atrocity was cutting or digging up the turf and throwing acid around the greens. Sometimes VW or Votes for Women were carved or etched on the ground. Unlike grandstand saboteurs, few perpetrators of acid attacks were ever caught; they took advantage of quiet locations under cover of darkness.⁶⁸ But ease of access was not the main reason why golf was singled out for attention. Although this paper has shown that large numbers of women played the game golf clubs were targeted because suffragettes apparently saw them as the haunts of male chauvinists and of figures of authority who could change society.⁶⁹ This is the likeliest explanation: during the Edwardian era golf had become the favoured pastime

of many Liberal MPs whose party dominated British politics in the period 1906-14 and whose leaders were implacably opposed to female suffrage.

The Prime Minister and several of his Cabinet colleagues had in fact been subjected to suffragette abuse on the golf course for years. As early as 1909, Asquith and Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone had been cornered by three determined young members of the WSPU while playing in Kent. A report on the incident commented that ‘the Suffragette harpies’ were ever on the track of the Prime Minister. But it was on the links of north-east Scotland where Asquith passed many days during the summer Parliamentary recess that most incidents occurred. He was verbally assaulted by a Mrs Cruikshank while playing at Aboyne near Balmoral in August 1912. A few weeks later he and Reginald McKenna, the current Home Secretary, were set upon by two women at the Royal Dornoch course. And in a much publicised incident a year later he and his daughter were attacked on the 17th green of the Moray Golf Club at Lossiemouth by two women who allegedly seized his arms, knocked his hat off, tugged his hair and shouted abuse.⁷⁰

The attitude of the golfing community to these acts of violence against persons and property can be followed privately in the minutes of individual golf clubs and publicly in the national press. In 1913 the *Sunday Times* warned suffragettes not to alienate golfers as they were a large and influential class.⁷¹ Mrs Pankhurst responded to widespread condemnation by announcing that, “We are not fighting you because you play golf. We are not fighting you at all but trying to stir you up.”⁷² In this she undoubtedly succeeded. According to Constance Rover, an early historian of the women’s suffrage movement, “the activities which enraged the public most were the setting fire to the contents of pillar boxes and damage to golf courses.”⁷³

During February and March that year a war of words took place in the pages of *Golf Illustrated* as supporters and detractors of the suffrage movement tried to put across their opinions. These frequently took the form of verses, stirring or scathing according to the author’s stance, or cartoons ridiculing the tactics of the suffragettes. The female editor of the ‘Woman’s Golf’ section felt sure that no golfers were amongst the “scratchers and scrapers” as “golfing instinct would somehow come before political hysteria.”⁷⁴ A report from St Andrews suggested that any suffragette damage to the Old Course should result in the offenders being ducked in the Swilken Burn.⁷⁵ As for the perpetrators of the crimes they seemed to rejoice in the outcome of their deeds. Hannah Mitchell, a member of the WSPU, later wrote that “there did seem something to laugh at in the idea of the plus-foured MP toddling along to his favourite golf links, to find, cut in the sacred sward, the terrible slogan, “Votes for Women”.”⁷⁶ This statement seems to reinforce the notion that suffragettes were more intent in getting their message across to golfing politicians than in upsetting ordinary club members.

Although ‘the tearing of the greens’ was widely reported in the press, it is in privately published individual club histories that much new material has come to light. During 1913 committees can be seen wrestling with awkward and potentially expensive problems. Decisions had to be taken about whether or not to insure against suffrage atrocities and whether to set aside extra funds to pay for guarding the greens. After underwriters at Lloyds had begun to offer policies specifically to protect golf clubs, the modest and the prestigious took advantage of this service, from Denham in Buckinghamshire to the Old and New Courses at St Andrews, the latter insured for

£1,000 against damage.⁷⁷ Two hundred watchers were enrolled to guard the Fife greens day and night before the Amateur Championship in May and Boy Scouts patrolled the links at Lytham ahead of the Open.⁷⁸ At a less exalted level, the greenkeeper at the Royal County Down Golf Club was awarded £2 “for his attention to the greens from attacks by the suffragettes” while Rye Golf Club provided guards to escort competitors threatened with violence during the Bar Golfing Society visit to the course.⁷⁹

A further, and largely unrecorded, aspect of the WSPU campaign against golf concerns female suffragists who played the game. It would be misleading to think of all suffrage activists as blinkered idealists, dedicated to ‘The Cause’ and lacking other interests. On the contrary, many rank-and-file members – and a few leaders - of both militant and non-militant societies enjoyed sport, and golf was as popular amongst suffrage women as it was with many Edwardian ladies.⁸⁰ The dilemmas for these golfers were whether to condone militant tactics and, if so, how to support the campaign while ensuring that acid-wielding suffragettes avoided their own club. The ladies’ section at Woking was convinced that the ‘Destroying Angel’ had passed over them because several prominent suffragettes, who had the ear of Mrs Pankhurst, were members.⁸¹ Tensions between male and female golfers as a result of suffrage ‘outrages’ only diminished when militancy was halted on the outbreak of war.

Conclusions

The suffrage movement was part of a wider shift in women’s attitudes and behaviours, certainly among the middle class. Part of the phenomenon was a growing involvement in sport. *Punch* printed many misogynist cartoons about women in sport, parodying them as inept participants. However, the very fact that it did so for over a decade could suggest that women were persistent in their efforts to play sport.⁸² For women, golf clubs in particular were an enclave outside the home where they had the opportunity to experience not only fresh air, exercise, relaxation and enjoyment but also competition.

Although some detractors remained, generally by 1914 women golfers had been accepted both on and off the links. As Mabel Stringer, a member of the LGU executive, put it in regard to the 1908 Ladies Championship, ‘men who came to scoff stayed to watch’. (p45) Women golfers began to feature in advertisements aimed not just at women or even at golfers: for example to extol the benefits of Bovril for ‘health, strength and beauty’ and Elliman’s embrocation for ‘aches and bruises’.⁸³

In playing golf women were not really threatening the male golf world. A few choleric colonels might be aghast at the thought of women hacking around the links but generally women were accepted at most clubs, though usually under conditions laid down by the committee, all of whom would be males. Although there were significant exceptions, at club level women tended to accept their subordinate role with its restrictions on playing times, separate shorter and less challenging courses, and lack of decision-making power. Indeed many social players might have preferred such a situation. There was certainly no consideration of undermining class relationships which were replicated in golf with servants being employed to cater to the on and off-course needs of middle-class golfers.

Women's golf, particularly that of the 'ladies' section', developed separately but not fully independently from men. Women faced restricted access to clubhouse facilities, usually had no vote at the AGM, and generally were not represented on the main club committee. This discrimination was reflected in a difference in entry fees and in the cost of subscriptions between men and women. It was, however, in the financial interests of the men to have a thriving ladies section as, despite these lower subscriptions, they made a contribution to the club's coffers via purchases at the professional's shops, payment for lessons, hiring of caddies, and, when allowed, using the clubhouse for meals and refreshments. Yet discrimination and segregation generally came by consent and, despite the restrictions, the number of female players continued to increase.

Women who had demonstrated their ability to organise domestically did the same when it came to forming and running their own local golf clubs. At a wider organisational level women were to the fore. The establishment of the LGU (in advance of a similar organisation for men) with the consequent inauguration of an open championship, the introduction of home international matches, and the development of a national handicapping system (again in advance of men) did much to raise the standard of women's golf. The LGU not only showed that women could create and run a national organisation, but had an important role in demonstrating that women could be serious golfers.

¹ Some of the evidence here is drawn from a Leverhulme-funded grant to investigate the Emergence of the Golf Club as a British Social Institution before 1914.

² *LGU Year Books*, London 1900, 1914; M. Stringer, 'Women's Golf in 1911', *Golfing* 28 December 1911.

³ W. Vamplew, 'Sporting Innovation: The American Invasion of the British Turf and Links 1895-1905', *Sport History Review*, 2004, 35.2, p. 126.

⁴ Two exceptions, but unpublished, are H. Pearson, 'The Ladies' Section: The Development and Popular Perceptions of Ladies' Golf in Britain 1890-1914', M.A. Hons dissertation, Economic History Department, University of Edinburgh, 2002 and J. George, 'Women and Golf in Scotland', Ph.D., Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2003.

⁵ F. G. Aflalo, *The Cost of Sport*, London, p. 285; C. Lindsay, 'A Century of Labour Market Change: 1900 to 2000', *Labour Market Trends*, March 2003, p. 141.

⁶ M. Mortimer, *The Spirit of Cavendish Golf Club with Burbage Ladies' Golf Club 1899-1999*, Grant, Worcestershire, 2000, p. 7, p. 9.

⁷ *Ladies Field*, 25 February 1899, p. 493.

⁸ *Golf Illustrated*, 29 December 1899, p. 24.

⁹ B. Martin, 'On Lady Golfers', *The Annual of the Ladies' Golf Union* (1893-94), p. 24.

¹⁰ E. M. Boys and L. Mackern, *Our Lady of the Green*, Lawrence, London, 1899 p. 24.

¹¹ *The LGU Official Year Book*, London, 1914, pp. 419-421.

¹² R. Milton, *A History of Ladies Golf in Sussex*, Sussex County Ladies' Golf Association, Brighton, p. 78.

¹³ A. Elliot, *Lundin Ladies' Golf Club 1891-1991*, Artigraff, Buckhaven, 1991, p. 4, p. 20.

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- ¹⁴ B. Lloyd, *Wirral Ladies: A Centennial Portrait*, Grant, Droitwich, 1993, p. 7; Holt, *Stanmore*, p. 83.
- ¹⁵ R. Holt, *Stanmore Golf Club 1883-1993*, Club, Stanmore, 1993, p. 84.
- ¹⁶ J. Kerr, *The Golf Book of East Lothian*, Constable, Edinburgh, 1896, p. 294, p. 133.
- ¹⁷ *The Bystander*, 15 March 1905.
- ¹⁸ Pearson, 'Ladies' Section', p. 12; E. J. Davies and G. W. Brown, *The Royal North Devon Golf Club 1864-1989*, Club, Westward Ho!, 1989, p. 35.
- ¹⁹ Of a sample of 43 separate ladies clubs in England in 1913 three had no male equivalent. Of the others none were formed simultaneously with a man's club though 8 followed within a year. A further 17 came within 5 years but 15 took longer than this. There was a different pattern in Scotland, perhaps owing something to the earlier development of the game there. Although again there were three clubs with no male equivalent, 16 of the 18 in a Scottish sample had a lag of over 6 years. (based on data in *Nisbet's Golf Guide and Year Book*, Nisbet, London, 1913)
- ²⁰ T. Boliver, *South Staffordshire Golf Club 1892-1992*, Club, Wolverhampton, 1992, pp. 11,15.
- ²¹ *Nisbet's Year Book*, 1913, p. 86, p. 213; A. McIntosh, *Blairgowrie Golf Club 1889-1989*, Club, Blairgowrie, 1989, p.14.
- ²² J. H. Legge, *Dunbar Ladies' Golf Club: The First 100 Years*, Club, Dunbar, 1994, p. 2.
- ²³ B. Ironside, *Dunbar Golf Club: A Short History*, Club, Dunbar, 1977, p.14; J. M. G. Ward, *One Hundred Years of Golf On Westwood*, Coxton, Beverley, 1990, p. 67; P. Davis, *Formby Ladies' Golf Club: A History of the Club*, Club, Formby, 1996, p. 10.
- ²⁴ Milton, *Ladies Golf in Sussex*, p. 81, p. 75.
- ²⁵ At Purley Downs women could become full members but most opted for associate membership with its playing restrictions and lower fees. H. Sagar, *A History of Purley Downs Golf Club*, Club, Purley Downs, 1983, p. 75.
- ²⁶ Lord Wellwood, 'General Remarks on the Game' in H. G. Hutchinson (ed), *Golf*, Longmans Green, London, 1892, p. 47; *Gentlewoman*, 7 March 1891.
- ²⁷ A. M. Starkie-Bence, 'Golf' in Frances E. Slaughter (ed.), *The Sportswoman's Library*, Constable, London, 1898, vol I, pp. 260-267. Of a sample from Nisbet of 29 women's clubs with a separate course 25 possessed 9 holes or less]
- ²⁸ Hutchinson, *Book of Golf*, p. 71.
- ²⁹ This begs the question of how many men were merely 'social' golfers. They cannot all have been competent and serious.
- ³⁰ Hutchinson, *Book of Golf*, p. 73.
- ³¹ *Nisbet's Year Book*, 1913, p. 30, p. 264.
- ³² J. O. MacCabe, *The First Eighty Years: Douglas Park Golf Club*, Club, Douglas Park, 1982, p. 68; Ironside, *Dunbar*, p. 16.
- ³³ M. Stringer, *Golfing Reminiscences*, Mills & Boon, London, 1924, p. 14, p. 24; *Ladies Field*, 23 October 1909, p. 546.
- ³⁴ Stringer, *Reminiscences*, pp. 22-23.
- ³⁵ Sagar, *Purley Downs*, p. 75; J. A. Kingham, *South Beds Golf Club. The First 100 Years 1892-1992*, Club, Luton, 1992, p. 39; E. M. Soulsby, *Braemar Golf Club: The Story of the First 100 Years*, Club, Braemar, 2002, p. 16.
- ³⁶ MacCabe, *Douglas Park*, p. 66; Holt, *Stanmore*, p. 83; Milton, *Ladies Golf in Sussex*, p. 4; W. Russell, *A History of Craigmillar Park Golf Club 1895-1995*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 3; *LGU Annual*, 1897, p. 120; E. Deasy, *Rochdale Golf Club 1888-1988*, Club, Rochdale, 1987, p. 35.

- ³⁷ R. B. Smith, *Blackburn Golf Club 100 Years 1894-1994*, Club, Blackburn, 1993, pp. 18-19; D. Hoskinson, *Sutton Coldfield Ladies' Golf Club 1892-1992*, Grant, Worcestershire, 1992, p. 11, p. 52; Ironside, *Dunbar*, p. 19; *LGU Annual*, 1897, p. 120.
- ³⁸ D. Martin, *Minchinhampton Golf Club Centenary History 1889-1989*, Club, Minchinhampton, 1989, p. 118.
- ³⁹ *Nisbet's*, 1906, p. 316; *LGU Year Book* 1906, pp. 475-9; Elliot, *Lundin Ladies*, p. 4.
- ⁴⁰ *Golf*, 11 August 1905, p. 314.
- ⁴¹ Irish men had formed a Union in 1891 but there was no Welsh Union till 1895 or Scottish till 1920 and an English one was not formed till 1924. The handicapping scheme prepared by the British Golf Union Joint Advisory Committee did not become operational until March 1926 (*Golfers Handbook*, Glasgow, 1954, p. 123).
- ⁴² R. Cossey, *Golfing Ladies: Five Centuries of Golf in Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, Orbis, London, 1984, p. 24.
- ⁴³ Boys and Mackern, *Lady of the Green*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁴ *The Gentlewoman*, 29 April 1893. This journal promoted sport and especially golf for women producing a golfing supplement, *The Golfing Gentlewoman* between 1914 and 1916.
- ⁴⁵ Boys and Mackern, *Lady of the Green*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁶ *Annual Report of LGU*, 1893, p. 38.
- ⁴⁷ Cossey, *Golfing Ladies*, p. 27.
- ⁴⁸ Pearson, 'Ladies' Section', p. 28.
- ⁴⁹ M. Crane, *The Story of Ladies' Golf*, Stanley Paul, London, p. 18.
- ⁵⁰ Cited in Stringer, *Reminiscences*, p.13.
- ⁵¹ Officially known as the Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship but generally referred to as the Ladies' Championship.
- ⁵² Stringer, *Reminiscences*, p. 25; M. E. Stringer, 'Ladies' Golf in the Spring of 1908', *Badminton Magazine*, 1908, 27, p. 45.
- ⁵³ Starkie Bence, 'Golf', p. 327.
- ⁵⁴ Cossey, *Golfing Ladies*, pp. 46-49; Stringer, 'Ladies' Golf', p. 48.
- ⁵⁵ Cossey *Golfing Ladies*, pp. 30-31.
- ⁵⁶ *The Ladies' Field*, 16 May 1908, p. 675.
- ⁵⁷ Anon. *Torwoodlee 1895-1995 Centenary*, Club, Torwoodlee, 1995, p. 9; Smith, *Blackburn*, p. 13, p. 15, pp. 23-24; McMillan, *Douglas Park*, p. 113; Ward, *One Hundred Years of Golf*, p. 31, p. 35.
- ⁵⁸ C. Sheldon, *Reigate Heath and its Golf Club*, Straker, London, 1982, p. 43.
- ⁵⁹ D. Stirk, 'Carry Your Bag, Sir?', Witherby, London, 1989, pp. 112-113, 115; J. Adams, *Huntercombe Golf Club 1900-1983*, Higgs, Henley-on-Thames, 1984, p. 19; *Golf Illustrated*, 25 July, 4 July, 24 October 1913; 13 March, 31 July 1914.
- ⁶⁰ Stirk, *Carry Your Bag*, pp. 114-5; 44; *Times*, 5 September 1919; D. Cadney, *The Story of Olton Golf Club*, Grant, Worcestershire, 1991, p. 58.
- ⁶¹ Agenda Club, *The Rough and the Fairway: An Enquiry by the Agenda Club into the Problem of the Golf Caddie*, Heinemann, London 1912.
- ⁶² V. Summers, *Copt Heath Golf Club to 1990*, Club, Birmingham, 1990, p. 120.
- ⁶³ Agenda Club, *Rough and Fairway*, p. 9.
- ⁶⁴ W. Vamplew, 'Exploited Labour or Successful Workingmen: Golf Professionals and Professional Golfers in Britain before 1914', *Economic History Review* (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ R. Holt, P. Lewis and W. Vamplew, *The Professional Golfers' Association 1901-2001*, Grant, Worcestershire, 2002, p.54; Stringer, 'Ladies Golf', p. 50; J. Lowerson 'Golf' in T. Mason *Sport in Britain*, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge, 1989, p. 206; A. Jackson, *The British Professional Golfers 1887-1930: A Register*, Grant, Worcestershire, 1994, p. 32.

⁶⁶ *Ladies' Golf*, April 1913, II, p.38.

⁶⁷ A. Rosen, *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the WSPU, 1903-1914*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1974, p. 188.

⁶⁸ The substantial drop in the number of golf course incidents during the summer of 1913 may be partly explained by the long daylight hours

⁶⁹ J. Connelly, *A Temple of Golf: The History of Woking Golf Club, 1893-1993*, Club, Woking, 1993, p. 104.

⁷⁰ D. Hamilton, *Golf: Scotland's Game*, Partick Press, Kilmalcolm, 1998, p.228; *Golf Illustrated*, 17 September 1909; E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, UCL Press, London, 2000, p. 296; L. Leneman, *A Guid Cause; The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Aberdeen U. P. Aberdeen, 1991, p. 116, p. 155; J. McConachie, *The Moray Club at Lossiemouth, 1889-1989*, Club, Lossiemouth, 1988, pp. 27-8.

⁷¹ *Sunday Times*, 14 February 1913.

⁷² *Golf Illustrated*, 21 February 1913.

⁷³ C. Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1967, p. 82.

⁷⁴ *Golf Illustrated*, 21 February 1913.

⁷⁵ *Golf Illustrated*, 28 February 1913.

⁷⁶ G. Mitchell (ed), *The Hard Way Up: the Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell*, Faber, London, 1977, p.176.

⁷⁷ M. Melford and B. Fenning, *Denham Described: A History of Denham Golf Club 1910-1992*, Grant, Droitwich, 1992, p.14; Minutes of Royal & Ancient Golf Club, 5 March 1913.

⁷⁸ *Golf Illustrated*, 16 May 1913; E. A. Nickson, *The Lytham Century. A History of Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club 1886-1986*, Author, Lytham, 1986, p. 115.

⁷⁹ H. McCaw and B. Henderson, *Royal County Down Golf Club: the First Century*, Club, County Down, 1988, p. 47; D. Vidler, *Rye Golf Club: the First 90 Years*, Club, Rye, 1984, p. 53.

⁸⁰ A.J.R., *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who*, Stanley Paul, London, 1913. Of 176 women who listed a sport amongst their recreations, 32 (including 8 members of the WSPU) mentioned golf, the highest number after walking and cycling. For a fuller analysis see J. Kay, "'No Time for Recreations till the Vote is Won'": Suffrage Activists and Leisure in Edwardian Britain', *Women's History Review* (forthcoming).

⁸¹ Connelly, *Temple of Golf*, p. 106.

⁸² M. Constanzo, "'One Can't Shake Off the Women'": Images of Sport and Gender in *Punch*, 1901-10', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19.1, 2002, pp. 31-56.

⁸³ Pearson, 'Ladies' Section', p. 48.