



Ladies First

Pioneering moments in
women's golf

An exhibition at the Swedish Golf Museum
21st March – 22nd October



Who was the first woman to pick up a golf club? We may never know. What we do know is that many pioneering and colourful characters followed in her footsteps.

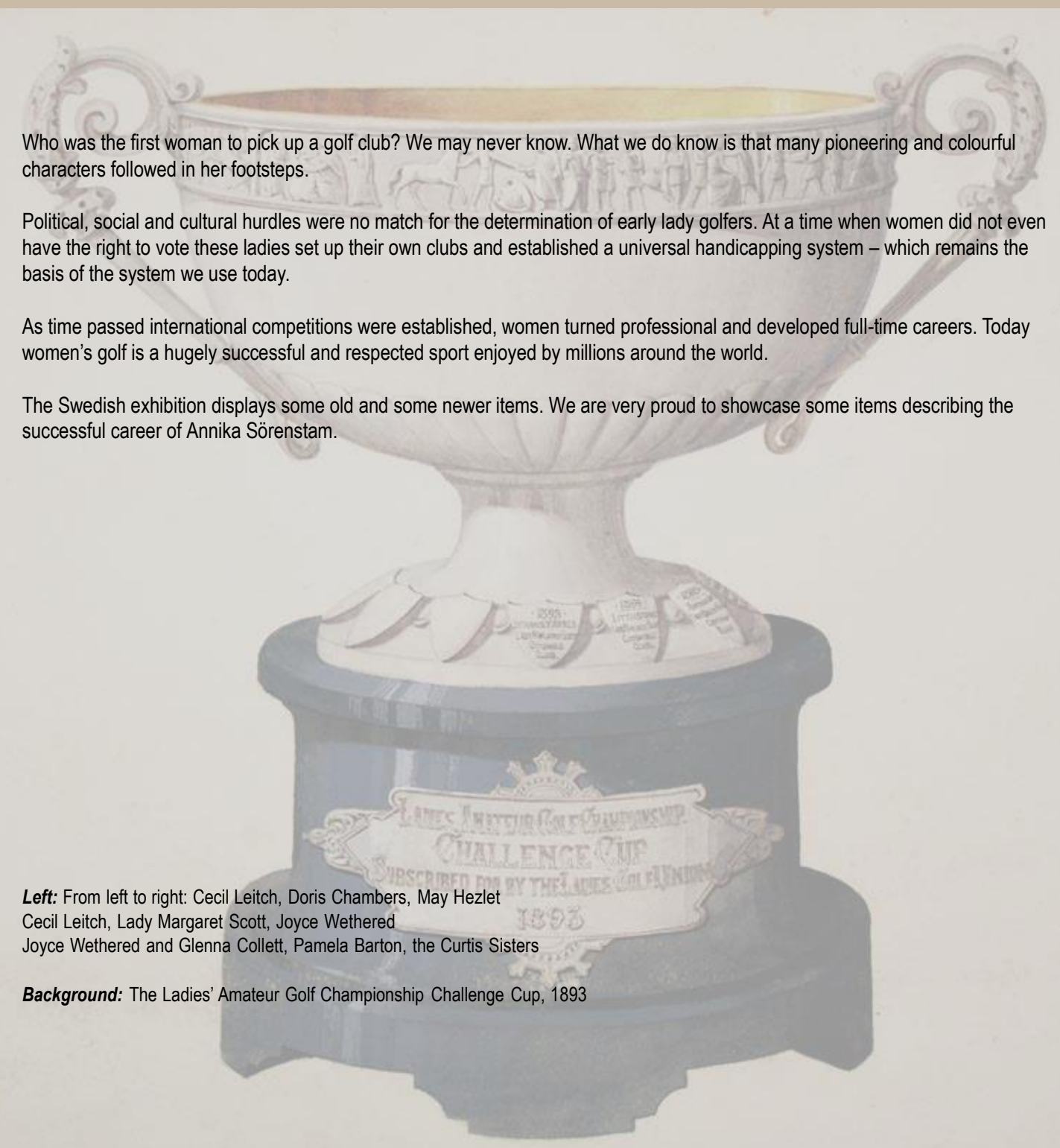
Political, social and cultural hurdles were no match for the determination of early lady golfers. At a time when women did not even have the right to vote these ladies set up their own clubs and established a universal handicapping system – which remains the basis of the system we use today.

As time passed international competitions were established, women turned professional and developed full-time careers. Today women's golf is a hugely successful and respected sport enjoyed by millions around the world.

The Swedish exhibition displays some old and some newer items. We are very proud to showcase some items describing the successful career of Annika Sörenstam.

Left: From left to right: Cecil Leitch, Doris Chambers, May Hezlet
Cecil Leitch, Lady Margaret Scott, Joyce Wethered
Joyce Wethered and Glenna Collett, Pamela Barton, the Curtis Sisters

Background: The Ladies' Amateur Golf Championship Challenge Cup, 1893





Thomas Hodge's watercolour of lady golfers, St Andrews, 1870

18 ACES IN WOMEN'S GOLFING HISTORY

- 1567 Mary, Queen of Scots is recorded as the first woman to play golf
- 1795 Fishwives of Musselburgh are documented playing golf during their holidays
- 1811 First women's competition recorded, held on New Years' Day at Musselburgh
- 1867 First golf club, the St Andrews Ladies Club, was formed
- 1893 Ladies' Golf Union and Irish Ladies Golf Union founded. First Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship played and won by Lady Margaret Scott
- 1895 First US Women's Amateur Championship held at Meadow Brook Club, New York
- 1896 LGU develops and refines the first handicapping system, soon adopted all over the world
- 1909 Dorothy Campbell becomes the first woman to win the US and British amateur championships in the same year
- 1932 First Curtis Cup Match, captained by Joyce Wethered (Great Britain & Ireland) and Marion Hollins (United States)
- 1933 Gloria Minoprio scandalises the golfing world by being the first woman to wear trousers during a major tournament
- 1938 Women Golfers' Museum established. Babe Zaharias is the first woman to play in an all-male PGA tour event, the Los Angeles Open
- 1946 First US Women's Open
- 1967 Catherine Lacoste becomes the first and only amateur to win the US Women's Open
- 1976 First Women's British Open
- 1985 Laura Davies becomes the first golfer to win Rookie of the Year and top the Ladies European Tour's Order of Merit in the same year
- 1990 First Solheim Cup held between USA and Europe
- 2001 Annika Sorenstam is the first woman to shoot 59
- 2012 For the first time all four women's Majors are won by golfers from Asia



THE BEGINNINGS OF LADIES' GOLF

Women and golf: two words that have not always sat comfortably together. Attitudes to women in golf, and sport in general, have in the past been driven by ideas about appropriate feminine behaviour.

While written references to golf date back to 1457, when the sport was banned by James II of Scotland, evidence of early women players is scarce. The first recorded female golfer was Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was accused of playing golf in the fields beside Seton Palace, near Edinburgh, just days after the murder of her husband in 1567.

More than 200 years pass before we find the next reference to women golfers. Alexander Carlyle describes the lives of the fishwives of Musselburgh in his 1795 contribution to the Statistical Account of Scotland. He spoke of these hard-working women with admiration, noting that as they “do the work of men... their amusements are of the masculine kind. On holidays they frequently play at golf.” Not only were working class women playing golf at this time but as the minutes of Royal Musselburgh Golf Club from December 1810 make clear, they were doing so on a competitive basis. The prizes available to the ‘Fish Ladies’ playing in the New Year’s Day competition included a creel and two of ‘the best Barcelona silk handkerchiefs’. A far cry from the million dollar earnings on offer today, but probably no less keenly contested!

Early lady golfers were often met with disapproval or thought masculine, but thankfully this did not stop them. Today over 10 million women play regularly.



Mary, Queen of Scots, the first recorded lady golfer

Left: Fishwives displaying their catch at Fisherrow Fishmarket, Musselburgh, c1895

THE FIRST CLUBS – GETTING ORGANISED

Ladies putting on the Himalayas, St Andrews, 1886

The game became ever more popular among women. Soon being invited to play alongside their husbands and brothers was not enough. In 1867 the ladies struck out on their own with the formation of the St Andrews Ladies Club - the first ladies' club in the world. Twenty years later the club had over 500 members. Now known as the Ladies' Putting Club of St Andrews, ladies still play over the world-famous Himalayas, one of golf's best and bumpiest 18-hole putting courses. Putting was considered appropriate for ladies, as it was not too strenuous. It also protected feminine modesty by keeping ankles and wrists covered, since there was no need to swing at the ball. The whalebone corsets that women had to wear made it, in any case, very difficult to swing the clubs back past their shoulder. Additionally, the ladies club offered a chance for upper-class ladies to meet young men in an appropriate fashion. Other ladies clubs, including Westward Ho! and Carnoustie, soon followed - by the 1890s there were 50 ladies clubs in the United Kingdom alone.

1893 marked another important year; the first ladies' golf unions were established, and the first ladies' championship took place. The Irish Ladies' Golf Union (ILGU) was set up in February with Clara Mulligan as its honorary secretary. The Ladies' Golf Union (LGU) followed in May, due largely to the efforts of Issette Pearson. Horace Hutchinson, two-time Amateur champion and golf writer, declared that the LGU would fail because "women never have and never can unite to push any scheme to success". Despite this claim, the LGU became and remains a vibrant organisation working tirelessly to promote the ladies' game.

Wasting no time once formed, the LGU organised the first ladies' open championship. It was held at Royal Lytham & St Annes in June 1893, and was won by the young Lady Margaret Scott. This championship continues today and has produced many notable winners such as Cecil Leitch, Babe Zaharias and recently 16 year-old Lauren Taylor. The LGU in its first year also developed and refined a fair and consistent handicapping system that continues to be used worldwide to this day.

In August 1894 the Geelong Golf Club, Victoria (Australia) organised the first Ladies Golf Championship of Australasia. The American ladies were not far behind. The Amateur Golf Association was formed in 1894 and the first US Women's Amateur Championship was held at the Meadow Brook Club in 1895.



Joyce Wethered and Glenna Collett Vare competing in the Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship at St Andrews, 1929





Cecil Leitch competing in the Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship at Troon, 1925

TWENTIETH CENTURY FIRSTS

Britain led the way when, with the first wave of feminism, women found themselves not only with the right to vote but the right to play golf on full-length courses.

Many of the most talented lady golfers of all time lived and played in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This period also produced the first and only female golf Olympic champion in history. Margaret Ives Abbott won the ladies golf medal at the Olympic Games in Paris in 1900. However, with no governing organisation at the time, it was unclear which sporting events had Olympic status. Unfortunately, Abbott died in 1955, unaware that she was the first female Olympic golf champion.

Other inspired individuals included Rhona Adair, May Hezlet and Cecil Leitch. Adair won the prestigious Ladies' British Open Amateur Championship twice, in 1900 and 1903, and the Irish Ladies Close Championship four times from 1900-1903. Hezlet won the Irish Championship five times. Leitch won 12 British titles and captured five French Ladies' Amateurs and one Canadian Women's Amateur. These are significant records in any sport, regardless of gender.

Mabel Stringer, known affectionately as Aunty Mabel, contributed greatly to the success of the ladies' game. She was a born organiser and, as well as working alongside Issette Pearson as Chairman of the LGU, she founded the Girls' Golfing Society and Veteran Ladies' Golf Association.

By 1900, it was clear that women's golf had become an international business. A number of championships were held throughout Britain, and across the 'new world'. A noted champion of the period was Dorothy Iona Campbell, a celebrated Scottish golfer who was the first woman to win the British (1905-1908, 1911), American (1909-1910, 1924, 1938) and Canadian (1910-1912) amateur championships.

This period is also characterised by the first books written about women's golf. In 1904 Genevieve Hecker's book, *Golf for Women*, was published. Soon after, Hezlet published her book *Ladies Golf*, which was enormously popular and helped inspire the growing numbers of women players around the world.



Rhona Adair's Commemorative Golf Balls

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

Many sporting codes drew strict lines between the amateur and professional game. It took some years before ‘professional’ golfers, male and female, would earn respect while earning money from the sport. In 1934, Helen Hicks became one of the first women golfers to turn professional. There were no professional tournaments for her to compete in, but she was considered a professional because she received a small payment for promoting the Wilson-Western Sporting Goods Company. Poppy Wingate and Meg Farquhar were two of the earliest appointed female assistant professionals in Britain. Wingate was employed at Temple Newsam in 1923 and Farquhar at the Moray Golf Club in 1929. In 1933, both Wingate and Farquhar entered and played admirably in men’s professional tournaments.

Fashion has always played an important role in golf. Early lady golfers had to adhere to strict codes of modesty, which meant wearing long skirts, hats and tight corsets. This restrictive clothing affected their ability to swing freely. The 1920s brought knits, cloche hats, dropped waists and far more freedom, comfort and ease of movement, enhancing a woman’s ability to swing and push through the ball. In 1933, Gloria Minoprio caused a sensation when she strode onto the first tee at the English Ladies Championship at Westward Ho! wearing beautifully designed navy trousers. The LGU chairman issued a statement noting, “I much regret that there should be this departure from the usual golfing costume at this championship”. She was years ahead of her time and made headlines around the world. Adding further to the controversy was the fact that Minoprio played her entire round with only a single club!

By 1930, golf was a hugely popular international sport. Memberships of ladies’ golf clubs were increasing at an astonishing rate. The LGU boasted more than a thousand affiliated clubs at this time, as well as over 400 ‘colonial’ or Commonwealth clubs.



Poppy Wingate’s Golf Shoes

Talented lady golfers emerged from many nations. In 1931 Florence Fowler was the first Australian to claim an international championship, winning the Italian title. Others followed pursuing successful professional careers. Along with 11 Canadian amateur titles Marlene Stewart Streit won the British, American and Australian amateur championships. South African ladies gained prominence when Alison Sheard became the first to win the Women’s British Open in 1979 (then a Ladies European Tour event). Karrie Webb became the youngest woman ever to achieve the Career Grand Slam.

A major initiative, which remains a fixture on the calendar today, is the biennial team event between Great Britain & Ireland and the USA - the Curtis Cup. The first Curtis Cup, held at Wentworth in 1932, resulted in a win for the American team. Despite several victories for Great Britain & Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s, the US remains slightly ahead in the overall standings.

The Commonwealth Tournament (now the Astor Trophy) played every four years between Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, began in 1959 at St Andrews. Other prominent international tournaments followed including the Espirito Santo Trophy and the Solheim Cup.

The American Women’s Professional Golf Association (WPGA) was founded in 1944. This was a clear indication that American golfers intended to challenge the British and European command of the game. The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) was founded in 1950 by some of the US-based pioneers of ladies’ golf during this period. Colourful characters including Babe Zaharias, Patty Berg, Louise Suggs and Marlene Bauer Hagge were founding members. Between them, these ladies achieved some remarkable firsts. Patty Berg was the first LPGA player to earn US\$100,000. Babe Zaharias was the first female to compete in a male Professional Golf Association (PGA) tour event in 1945. Louise Suggs was the LGPA’s first Hall of Fame star and the first player to win the LPGA Career Grand Slam in 1957. Finally, Marlene Hagge was the first under-16 to join the LPGA Tour in 1950 and the first under-18 to win it in 1952.

In 1959, the LPGA established its own Teaching Division, a pioneering move. This was an important step in recognising the depth and breadth of women’s golf. It signalled that golf, as well as an enjoyable pastime, could be developed as a serious, full-time career. This period also saw a rapid expansion in the number of the women international professionals and championships

In Sweden ladies golf started to grow in the 1950’s and 60’s featuring players like Britt Matsson and Liv Forsell (Wollin). But the big move towards dominating the professional game started with the amateur team winning the gold medal in 1988 and Liselotte Nuemann winning the US Open the same year, followed by Helene Alfredsson capturing the Women’s British Open in 1990. In 1995 Annika Sörenstam won the first of many major Championships and becoming World No 1!

Background: Babe Zaharias in the finals of the US Women’s Amateur Championship at Southern Hills Country Club, 1946



Yani Tseng tees off at the Sunrise LPGA Taiwan Championship, 2012

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

Golf, like many other aspects of life, has been affected by globalisation and opportunity. Growth of the game in countries such as Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea, China and Japan has been astounding. The rankings over the past decade show the extent of the talent emerging from 'new' golfing nations across the globe.

Today, women golfers have access to a range of Tours and professional opportunities to compete. While debate continues about the lack of adequate television coverage, which impacts on prize earnings, there is no doubt that women's golf can develop and promote its own superstars such as Yani Tseng, Laura Davies, Annika Sorenstam, Lorena Ochoa, Michelle Wie, and Karrie Webb.

Improvements in equipment, tournaments, sponsorship, female-specific coaching and training have boosted interest in golf, and huge numbers of women continue to take up the sport. The challenge ahead is not about matching the distances, scores or records of male golfers, but rather in growing the increasingly interested audience that attends women's golf. This will help to close the gap in TV coverage and prize purse. Whether a recreational or club golfer, a career amateur, or elite professional, the millions of women players around the world enjoy the combined results of the hard work of their earlier golfing sisters.

The future of women's golf is bright. The reintroduction of golf to the Olympic Games in 2016 will boost the profile and status of the game. It will hopefully encourage more women and girls to take up the sport and write the next page in the history of women's golf.



Laura Davies' Glove and Bal

This year, 2015, the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of S:t Andrews have elected their first women members, including Annika Sorenstam and Laura Davies.

Background: Lorena Ochoa at the Mission Hills Start Trophy, 2010



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Background: Jiyai Shin competing in the Sime Darby LPGA Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur Golf & Country Club, 2012

Right: Jan Stephenson, Catriona Matthew, Lorena Ochoa
Laura Davies, Laura Baugh, Annika Sörenstam
Michelle Wie, Karrie Webb, Yani Tseng





Michelle Wie driving from the eighth tee during the final round of the Omega Dubai Ladies Masters, 2012

British Golf Museum
Bruce Embankment St Andrews,
Fife KY16 9AB, UK
Tel. 01334 460046

Stiftelsen Svenska Golfmuseet
Erikstorp
261 61 Landskrona
Tel: 0418-44 62 60

For more information visit
<http://mgsladiesfirst.moonfruit.com/>



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