

# *Golf and the English Suburb: Class, Gender and Access in a London Club, c.1890 - c.1975*

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This paper, which is based on extensive and original archival work, seeks to use an individual case study to illuminate the wider issue of the democratizing of hitherto restricted sporting activities both in the sense of wider social access and in terms of the rights of male and female club members. It identifies how the ownership of a golf course passed from a private family into the hands of a private club, and how and why the pattern of access to the course changed in the course of the twentieth century. Two issues stand out: the struggle of the female members, who made up

around a third of the total, to gain full access to the course and the club; and the gradual weakening of the system of social exclusion that pertained from the early days; this includes both the methods and criteria for membership and the question of the rights of 'artisans' and 'club professionals.'

Women moved from the confinement of the 'Ladies' course to gain fuller access to the main course around the First World War; what further progress they made (and failed to make) in subsequent years, including the question of segregation within the clubhouse, reserved times at weekends, formal representation and joint events with the men is also discussed. The restricted social base from which both female and male members were drawn and ethnic barriers erected to membership - in so far as they can now be reconstructed - are examined. Gradual easing of access came partly from financial reasons, partly from the re-structuring of share holding as well as from a more general weakening of occupational criteria for membership, the abolition of 'artisan' status for certain members. Finally, conditions of the lease of land from the local authorities entailed making arrangements for open access to the public at certain times.

The combined effect of such measures transformed access to a valuable and attractive recreational space over the course of the century. What was unthinkable to one generation was unremarkable to another, although access and rights still remained restricted in important ways. The Golf Club is a kind of barometer of shifting social and sexual attitudes. Clearly the detailed study of a single club cannot provide the basis for firm generalization. Other clubs had different traditions. But the club chosen, Stanmore Golf Club, was fairly average; neither too small nor too poor but not large or wealthy. Set in the context of the general historical literature available, it provides an account of a kind of suburban life that tends to be neglected in urban studies: the middle classes who do not figure much in work on the popular culture of spectator sport and the participation in sport of older men and women.