

Madam President, Madam Chairman, Ladies,

Isn't it wonderful that we are all here today to celebrate the Centenary of Scottish County Golf. 100 years of County matches and County Finals... of County Clubs and County Champions.... I'm sure the ladies who first met and drew up the Rules for County Golf will be well satisfied with the current set up and pleased with the friendship, camaraderie and competition that present day County Golf produces.

I'm here today to give you a little bit of the background of how County Golf started.

Rather than take you back 100 years to 1909, I want to take you back even further, to the summer of 1899, to a yacht called Lisette becalmed on a West of Scotland loch on a hot July afternoon. Two ladies were on the deck, dressed in the summer clothes of the day, long skirts over petticoats, tight blouses with high collars and long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats tied on with organza scarves, no doubt a parasol keeping the sun's rays from their delicate complexions.

But these were not delicate ladies. The two were Issette Pearson, founder of the LGU in 1893, and her friend and LGU assistant secretary, Mabel Stringer. It had been six years since the LGU had been founded, and it was well-established, with a British Championship, Open Meetings and a pioneering Handicapping and Scratch Score system devised by Issette Pearson which until recently was admired and adopted by many golfing nations. Mabel Stringer was just as adept at organisation as her friend, Issette, and their discussions on board the becalmed yacht were, as usual, on golf.

Golf at that time was growing at tremendous rate. Clubs were being established everywhere. Just think how many clubs have celebrated their Centenaries recently. They all started in the early 1900's.

Women's golf was also stirring and the two friends on board the yacht were pondering on the problem of providing more competition for their LGU members. Something needed to come between the local club level competitions and the British

Championship – remember at that time there was no SLGA, no Scottish Championship, no ILGU, no Irish Championship, no EWGA, and no English Championship.

On that flat calm hot July afternoon, the basic Rules on County Golf were drafted, and were presented to the LGU Council at their next meeting.

14 Counties in England formed clubs in 1900 and the first matches had ten in a team, although this was later reduced to eight. Counties were split into Divisions and challenged each other on a Home and Away basis.

The LGU ran County Golf for that first year but in 1901 County Golf became independent, still affiliated to the LGU, and had its own secretary, who kept records of matches and results. By 1903 there were 19 English Counties involved, and other countries were looking at the system and considering adopting it for their own. In 1903 the Irish Ladies Golfing Association drew up Rules and started matches for 11 counties in 3 Provinces.

Scotland was slow to get started. It wasn't until January 12th 1909 that a meeting was held in St Enoch's Hotel in Glasgow to consider the formation of Scottish County Golf.

Lets go back to 1909.... Streets were lit by gas-light, the horse and cart was more common than the motor car, tram-cars were on the streets of the major cities. The Wright brothers had just learnt to fly in 1903, and Bleriot had yet to make his flight over the channel. Getting anywhere was a real problem. Transport in those days was by train, and the railway companies gave special facilities to the golfers, with reserved carriages and cheap fares.

The women who played golf were middle class; they had servants and did not work; they had the leisure time to spend in pursuit of the little white ball.

But don't think that their lives were comfortable.... Women did not have the vote. Most of the time they were barely tolerated on the golf course.. they were either designated their own women's course or given restricted times on the men's course subject to unreasonable regulations. They had come a long way from the putting clubs of the 1860s and 70s, but they still had a long way to go. The good players had ambition, and in order to gain respect on the golf course they had to improve, push the boundaries, get better through competition, and County Golf filled that space between club golf and international competition, a breeding ground to bring on fresh players and keep the more experienced ones match fit.

Mabel Stringer made the point that in the days when women's golf first became popular there were no young players and no veterans; all the prominent players were about the same age. The first women golfers were pioneers, who had to invent and organise their own tournaments. It is admirable that they did it so well.

The First County Meeting in Glasgow, which had been convened by Mrs Adam of Helensburgh, was well attended, with about 85 present, representing most of the clubs in the southern half of Scotland. They listened enthusiastically to Miss M.E Phillips and Issette Pearson telling them how County Golf was organised in England and how successful it was...

At that meeting the following Counties agreed to start County Clubs... NB. not all did.....

Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire, Clackmannan, Stirlingshire, Argyllshire, Perthshire, Midlothian, Linlithgow-shire, Fife-shire and Haddington-shire.... That's 12....

County Clubs and Associations were formed in the early months of 1909, and by March ten counties had been organised into two divisions..... the South West and the South East.

Argyllshire, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire made up the Counties in the South West.... and Fifeshire, Forfarshire (who changed their name to Angus in 1920), Midlothian, Perthshire and Stirlingshire competed in the South East.

Of the 10 original counties, Argyllshire dropped in and out quite often in the early years, and eventually, in 1956, amalgamated with Dumbartonshire.

And so... 9 of the original counties are celebrating their centenary in 2009.

Can I ask the following Counties to stand and be congratulated...

Angus
 Ayrshire
 Dumbartonshire and Argyll
 Fife
 Lanarkshire
 Midlothian
 Perth and Kinross
 Renfrewshire
 Stirlingshire and Clackmannan

Well done to all these counties!

Over the years various other Counties have joined, and some have appeared and then disappeared. Aberdeenshire joined in 1911, East Lothian in 1924. At that point we moved to three divisions.

The Moray County Ladies Golf Association formed in 1924, was joined in the 1930's by Nairn and after the war by Banff-shire. Later on, in 1967, it was decided that Inverness-shire, and all counties north of there should combine with these three to become the Northern Counties Ladies Golf Association.

Borders, Dumfries-shire and Galloway, after a great struggle to be accepted, eventually formed the South Division in 1973.

And so, for the past 36 years we have had the same 15 Counties playing in four Divisions. Who knows... will it ever change again?!

The original format was 7-a-side singles matches with both home and away fixtures, with some matches being played at neutral venues. We now have teams of eight, three foursomes followed by

six singles format, and Divisions play a Jamboree over three days to produce a winner to go forward to the County Finals, which is also a three day event.

The very first County Match was between Argyllshire and Renfrewshire at Killermont on March 31st, 1909. Renfrewshire won by 4 matches to 3.

All County matches had to be played by the 31st October, and the winners of the two divisions met in the County Finals to be held in November.

Maybe they had different weather in those days... If we suggested holding any competition in Scotland in November nowadays... I know what the reaction would be!

It is remarkable that 39 matches were arranged in that first year... there was one walk-over... remember the County Associations had only started in the January and February, and yet they had got themselves and their teams organised, communicated with their opposition and set up and played their fixtures, all within the space of 10 months.

Lanarkshire beat Fife in the County Finals played over Glasgow Gailes on 2nd November 1909, and therefore became the first County to have their names engraved on the Scottish County Challenge Shield, donated by Issette Pearson and the LGU.

Don't worry... I won't bore you with the list of who won where!

But I will tell you what the current position is....

There is not one County madly out in front of all the others.

Of the 87 County Finals played.... There were breaks for the two world wars.... Ayrshire have won 14, East Lothian and Midlothian are very close having won 13 a-piece. Fife, Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and D&A are not far behind.

Fife are our current Scottish County Champions. They won at Inchmarlo last year.

County Golf until 10 years ago, was always run separately from the SLGA. The Scottish County Golf Association managed its own affairs, collected subscriptions from the Counties and paid out a contribution when Counties went to the County Finals. The First County secretary was Mrs Outhwaite of Elie, and the organisation was ably managed in the latter years by Mrs Sophie Gifford¹, Mary Greig, and then by Margaret Duncanson, who I am delighted to say is with us today.

In 1998 County Golf was amalgamated into the SLGA, and the County Finals, County Open Meeting and Commonwealth Spoons finals have been organised by the SLGA tournament office since then.

To celebrate the Centenary of Scottish County Golf a new trophy has been presented in honour of Miss Kathleen McNeill, to be played for by teams of County players in the two round stroke-play qualifying section of the Scottish Championship. I hope those of you who attend the Scottish will support this new competition.

What a long way we have come since 1909. We now have all the advances in labour saving devices, medicine, communication and transportation that were just a dream in 1909. Our dress on the course, the clubs and the balls we play with, the courses that we play have changed out of all recognition from 100 years ago.

And yet County golf has not changed. It still has the same format as when it first started, the same *raison d'être*. It's the backbone of Scottish Golf, the breeding ground for our Scottish Internationalists the stepping stone between a good club player and that player representing her country.

Many of you here are or have been, County Officials, many more are, or have been, County Players. You should all be congratulated for taking County Golf to its Centenary in such a healthy state.

Ladies please be upstanding and toast Scottish County Golf and the next 100 years.

¹ Apologies to those at the Lunch. I did not mention Sophie Gifford's name, and of course she was a stalwart of the Scottish County Golf Association, serving as Secretary of the Association for 17 (?) years before Mary Greig.