

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CALCUTTA GOLF SOCIETY

When the Membership Books were sent out in 1964 Bernard Owers, the Hon. Scribe, wrote : “.....it was felt that the opportunity should be taken to record for present and future members...the origins of the Society, and to pay, however inadequately, a tribute to, and to commemorate the names of, the founders.”

What follows is based largely on what he wrote, brought up to date by various Hon. Scribes and other members since then.

The idea of forming a Society of ex-Calcutta golfers was started at a lunch in early February 1953 by John Bullock, A.C. Lloyd and W.H.Bramwell. John Bullock had won the Amateur Championship of India in 1922 and the other two had served on the committee of the Royal Calcutta Golf Club (“the Royal”). On February 9th 1953 John Bullock wrote to James Esplen, then Captain of the Royal, to enlist that Club’s support. This was given at once, but matters proceeded rather slowly. By December, however, some forty potential members – fairly evenly divided between Scotland and England – had promised support and at a meeting at Dewar House on December 3rd 1953 the above three golfers, now joined by D.B.Carty, decided to go ahead and draw up the rules of the Society. These were very simple and provided for a Committee and Officers. They also set out the qualification for joining the Society, namely, membership past and present of the Royal, of Tollygunge and of Jodhpur Golf Clubs.

The first subscription was half a guinea a year, which rate was held until 1979 when it was increased to £2. P.C.(Maggie) Margrett, when replying to the original circular from Messrs. Bullock, Lloyd, Bramwell and Carty, had offered to act as Secretary, and he was duly appointed “Hon. Scribe”, so in effect it was this “panchayat” that got the Society off the ground.

In its early days the Society had two Sections, English and Scottish, sharing the same membership but for the most part playing different courses. Courses played by the Scottish Section have included Edzell, Rosemount, Dalmahoy, St. Andrew Eden, Crieff and Auchterarder. The Scottish Section has tended to hold two meetings per annum - and prizes for the winners of these meetings have included the Craigmore Quaich, the Tomson Rosebowl, the Porter Salver, and the Bennett Cup. A feature of the Scottish meetings is that wives of many of the members attend. Visitors from England (one of whom, Tommy Oag, won 1st prize in his year of captaincy), often expressed their admiration at the pleasant sociable nature of the Scottish meetings.

The first match of the whole Society was held on May 25th 1954 at St George’s Hill, and was attended by some forty players, including nine on leave from Calcutta. The Club’s charge was £1 per head which covered two rounds and meals. Caddies were available at £1 for both rounds including lunch money and tip. The meeting was a great success, both in terms of golf and socially, and the Society at once became more widely known.

At the time of this first match the Society’s membership, both English and Scottish, was 54 but within two months it had increased to 100. Ten years later it was 230, and seems to have reached its peak in about 1968 with 244. The increase from the early 1960s was due largely to the initiative and enthusiasm of E.J.Pakes in England, who arranged matches with Walton Heath Golf Club and with Overseas Societies, a number of whose members were also members of Calcutta Golf Society, and of Tom Rattray and Bill Bennett in Scotland. This welcome development however brought with it a considerable burden of administration and a gradual awareness that some change was needed. Accordingly, in 1993 Bill Bennett as Captain of the Society proposed a split between the English and Scottish Sections, with each in future having their own Captain and Committee to organise meetings

and control finances independent of the other Section, while retaining an open invitation to attend each other's meetings. This was approved at the December 1993 AGM with the funds being split on a basis of pro rata to the Membership.

When the Society started, there was a close association with Effingham Golf Club where "Maggie" Margrett was a member. He presented the Margrett Bowl for a match between the English and Scottish Sections but in the event only one such meeting could be arranged so the Bowl was later played for at an annual match with Effingham Golf Club which continued for several years and at one stage included a Dinner. When this match lapsed, the Bowl was lodged with Walton Heath Golf Club where it is now competed for annually at a Spring meeting between the English Section and the Walton Heath Midweek Players.

Matches were similarly arranged with the local clubs of other members. One such game for several years was at Ellesborough Golf Club. Other meetings have taken place at Brockenhurst, Broome Park, Piltdown, Hankley Common, Stoke Poges, St George's Hill, Worplesdon, and Burhill. The Society's current list of games can be found under "Fixtures" on this website, and several of these include matches against Overseas Societies (China, Kenya, Malaya, Latin America, and Ceylon).

In addition, the Society has been fortunate in having "inherited" other matches. For example, up until 2006 members of the Royal had been invited to play against a team from Royal Blackheath Golf Club in August each year, at Blackheath, with the latter as hosts. This fixture started in 1932 and had involved a dinner at the Oriental Club on the night before the game, followed by visits to nightclubs with the result that some of the Royal players were not at their best the following day ! Happily, the match was reconstituted in 2014, and the Society now takes great pleasure in playing an annual game at Blackheath against Royal Blackheath Golf Club. Likewise, the Society very much enjoys an annual match at Rye, against Rye Golf Club, in succession to the game formerly played there by ex-members of Tollygunge Golf Club.

Members have kindly presented prizes over the years, such as the Margrett Bowl mentioned above. James Goby, for example, in 2008 presented The James Goby Cup which is played for at the annual fixture against Littlestone. In 2009 Mike Terrell presented the Burmah Cup on behalf of the erstwhile Burmah Shell Golf Section which is played for at the Society's Spring meeting and awarded for the lowest scratch score. In its inaugural year it was won by Stuart Cameron with a score of 71 strokes. Two further Cups are played for at the same Spring meeting : the Pakes Cup presented by E.J.Pakes in 1968 which allows extra strokes on a sliding scale for those aged over 65, and, the Bramwell Cup presented by one of the Society's founders, W.H.Bramwell, which goes to the winner. In 2019 Richard Grandison presented another Trophy which is awarded at the Autumn meeting held at West Sussex: the trophy comprises a mounted Royal Calcutta Golf Club blazer badge which belonged to his father.

The key roles of Captain, Hon. Scribe, Hon. Treasurer, and Match Secretary have been held by a great number of distinguished members over the years, and our thanks go to all of them. They have had the competence not only to handle the administrative side of running the Society but also the cheerful energy to make things happen : for example, in 2014 the Society launched its website; and in the same year, a framed extract from the Society's annals was presented to Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, describing the connection between golf in Calcutta, and the Calcutta Cup at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews. In 2015 a similar presentation was made to Rye Golf Club, to which the Society also donated a bench in 2018 to replace the bench which had been donated by Tollygunge Club members in 1961. In 2017 another presentation was made to Royal Blackheath Golf Club to commemorate the separate Calcutta Cup presented to Royal Blackheath

Golf Club in the 1870s by Dum Dum Golf Club (which later became the Royal). All the presentations reflect the strong links which the Society has with these Clubs.

In September 2014 the Society, ever active, arranged its inaugural Charity Golf Day at Moor Park Golf Club in aid of Future Hope School, the Kolkata-based charity founded by Tim Grandage. Over 100 players took part and in excess of £14,000 was raised for Future Hope. Further Charity Golf Days were held at Moor Park in 2016 and 2018 with similarly impressive turnouts and sums raised for Future Hope.

Unfortunately, the Charity Golf Day planned for 2020 at Woking Golf Club had to be scrapped on account of the outbreak of Covid-19 which affected the whole country. The same was true of all our matches. The Society nevertheless managed to hold 2 meetings in 2020, one at Woking Golf Club and the other at West Sussex Golf Club. These were very well attended, just by members. In the hope things will get better, our matches for 2021 are already booked.

In 2020 the decision was taken on grounds of cost and data protection to scrap the Membership Books and in their place to transfer key sections to the Society's website. At the same time, in recognition of the gradual decrease in the number of members from the original Clubs in Calcutta, the Constitution of the Society was expanded to include golfers with connections to the whole of the Indian Sub-Continent. It is pleasing to note that numbers in the English Section are holding firm at their present limit of 90 members, but new applications, subject to the Committee's approval, are always welcome.

The Society continues to hold its popular "Christmas Tiffin", usually in January each year. This takes place at the East India Club at the same time as the Annual General Meeting.

NOTES :

1. The English and Scottish Sections marked their 50th Anniversaries in 2004. The English Section celebrated at St George's Golf Club, Weybridge, and the Scottish Section celebrated at The Glenesk Hotel, Edzell, adjacent to the Edzell Golf Club
2. Further history of the Scottish Section can be found in the Membership Books mentioned above. For details of the Books, and for contact with the Scottish Section, please email the Hon. Scribe at info.calcutta@gmail.com