

Way back when

Whether or not to allow Lady Members was a topic of much debate for the club in 1910

WORDS GABRIELLA LE BRETON

In her work cataloguing the Ski Club archive at De Montfort University's Kimberlin Library, Louise Bruton has uncovered a series of documents that have enabled us to piece together a picture of the club during the turbulent years of women's suffrage in the UK.

While the House of Commons debated the Conciliation Bills of 1910-1912 (bills that floated, and dropped, the motion of propertied women being given the right to vote), the Ski Club faced its own battle about Lady Members.

Things kicked off in June 1910, when the club comprised 284 Ordinary Members, 6 Honorary Members and 31 Lady Members. The Agenda for a Special General Meeting contained a proposed amendment to Rule 6 that essentially demoted Lady Members to Associate Members, who would pay half the subscription of Ordinary Members and not be entitled to attend General Meetings or serve on the Committee.

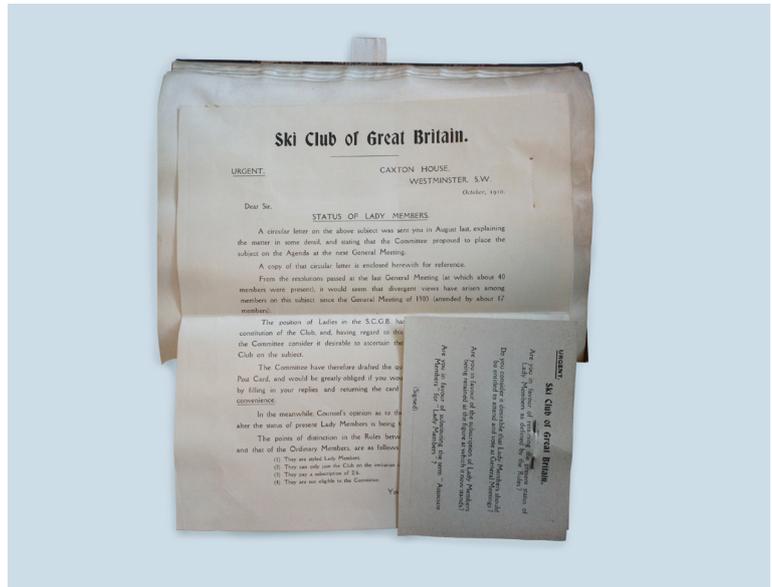
Despite the protests of several Lady Members, the amendment was passed in August, although Committee Minutes show that disagreement about the legality of the decision rumbled on throughout the summer.

A referendum on the 'Status of Lady Members' was called in October 1910, with Members invited to vote on four questions, including: "Do you consider it desirable that Lady Members should be entitled to attend and vote at General Meetings?" The response to all four questions, and that one in particular, was unequivocal, with 82% (including eight of 18 Lady Members) declaring 'No'.

Discontent persisted nonetheless and, in December 1910, a Sub-Committee was appointed to serve as a Commission into the 'question of the Status of Lady Members'. Six months later, the Sub-committee found the issue should be reopened, and a Special General Meeting was held in advance of the Annual General Meeting on 14 November 1911 to pass a resolution that would "amend the Rules of the Club affecting the question in such a way as will, in [the Commission's] opinion, secure a final and equitable settlement of this matter."

The extent of the bad feeling the controversy had created is reflected in a plea on the agenda: "It is earnestly hoped, therefore, that members will cordially embrace this opportunity of amicably settling once and for all a matter which has unfortunately proved to be a fruitful source of dissension amongst members."

Finally, on 5 December 1911, the Committee drafted new rules governing Lady Members, enabling them to attend and vote at General Meetings, but not serve on the Committee. They further ruled that the total number of Lady Members must not exceed 20% of the total membership of SCGB; that Lady Members were entitled to participate in club activities "subject to the restriction that their participation in club tours and dinners shall be at the discretion of the Committee"; and that they pay the same subscription as men.



▲ A voting card to decide the status of Lady Members, dating back to 1910

WOMEN GO FOR GOLD

In the wake of WWI and universal suffrage in 1928, Lady Members gained increasing respect within the Ski Club, and on the international ski racing circuit. This photograph depicts Doreen Elliot and Audrey Sale-Barker as part of the British racing team at the 1929 International Downhill Championships in Zakopane. Although the Polish organisers protested that there was no precedent for ladies to race downhill, Arnold Lunn explained that the British didn't follow precedents in downhill racing, and the duo finished 13th and 14th out of 60 men. Audrey went on to become the first woman to receive the Pery Medal in 1935, and Doreen became the club's first female Vice-President in 1946.



Photo by

THE BRITISH TEAM, ZAKOPANE, POLAND.

[Schubertek, Zakopane.

(Pitman, Nixon, Riddell, Richardson, Miss Sale-Barker, Bracken (captain), Miss Elliott, Mitchell, Maitland.

