

In the Beginning . . .

On the 30th April 1951 Leslie Jones of Benton Park Golf Club called a meeting, it was held in the County Hotel in Newcastle. His proposal was that the clubs in and near Newcastle should form a competitive league.

Present were representatives from Gosforth, Ponteland, Morpeth, Whitley Bay, Tynemouth, Newcastle United, Westerhope, City of Newcastle and Benton Park.

It was agreed by all of the clubs with the exception of the City of Newcastle to form such a league and call it the Newcastle and District Golf League.

The subscription would be One Pound and One Shilling.

There would be six players on each side played under match play conditions without handicap. Two points for a win and one for a draw.

It was agreed that with only eight teams there would be only seven matches. Whoever was drawn at home the first year would play away the following year.

The fixtures were drawn up with the matches being played on Thursdays, the first match to be played on the 24th May 1951.

At a meeting on the 12th September Mr Leslie Jones offered to supply a trophy in the form of a shield.

The first winners of the trophy being Gosforth winning 26 and drawing 7 matches for a total of 59 points.

The first annual dinner and presentation was held in the County Hotel in Newcastle on the 22nd November 1951. The attendance was 75. In 1952 the dinner was again held in the County Hotel the price being Ten Shillings and Six Pence. 96 attended.

In 1952 the number of teams was increased to ten with the addition of Blyth and Backworth. In 1953 the City of Newcastle made it up to eleven and in 1956 Ravensworth made it twelve. In 1958 Benton Park changed their name to Arcot

Hall, then in 1961 Ravensworth resigned and were replaced by Tyneside. Then in 1968 Prudhoe, Newbiggin, Northumberland and with Ravensworth rejoining made up the sixteen clubs in the League as we know it today.

By 1954 the league was proving to be very successful and it was thought that it should receive more publicity through the local press. The secretary advised that he would send the leagues results to the Chronicle each week and also ask the sports editor to write some reports.

In 1956 Benton Park won the League for the third time in succession. They therefore challenged the rest of the League to a match to be held at Arcot Hall on 28th August. The rest of the League won six matches to four.

By 1959 the League was so successful that suggestions were being made such as, having a League for a second team or having a League run on handicap lines or having more teams and splitting the league with a promotion and demotion system. Also the North Yorkshire Union along with the North Northumberland League had approached the league to play Challenge matches. But these were all rejected. As was a suggested change in the points system. The subject was again raised in 1964 when it was suggested to increase the number of teams to fourteen. This was thought to be too big a burden on the clubs and to split the league into two regional sub-leagues would be unworkable.

In 1961 Mr Leslie A. Jones was appointed Deputy President of the English Golf Union. Later to become President.

In 1962 the League played its first friendly match with the North Northumberland League and won the match 5 matches to 1. However by 1969 these matches were discontinued, due to the problems of selection with the increased number of teams in the League. Only to be re-instated in 1972 but finally discontinued in 1980.

In 1971 it was again suggested to split the league into two divisions, once again it was rejected.

After twenty years the annual dinner was becoming more popular with a record turn out of 194. By 1974 this was beaten with 214 in attendance. This was finally overcome by the year 2000 with 238 attending.

In 1972 the Thompson Shield was introduced to show recognition for the Captain's and Vice-Captain's.

Applications were received in 1972 from Hexham, Bedlingtonshire, Wideopen and Stocksfield. But were all rejected as the increase in matches could not be accommodated.

To mark 25 years of playing, a Silver Jubilee field day was held at Westerhope and Westerhope duly won the event with Reg Easton winning the individual prize.

In 1979 individual trophies for the winning team was introduced, six trophies plus two for the reserves.

In 1983 the league designed and introduced the present League Tie. In order to purchase these, the fees were raised from £15 to £20.

By 1984 golf was becoming more and more popular and the amount of competitive golf that was being played by the league players was causing a problem when selecting teams to play the annual fixture between the league winners and the rest of the league. Therefore it was decided to abandon this event.

It was also in 1984 that professional entertainment at the annual dinner was abandoned. It was thought that the comedienne went on too long and there was not enough time to socialise with the other clubs.

The celebration of the 40th year of the League was held at Arcot Hall on the 21st September 1991. With players from all four decades being present. George Mason of Blyth who had played league golf in 1953 was the oldest player in the field aged 78.

By 1994 the same teams had been playing against each other at the same time of the season for many years. Therefore in order to vary this situation it was decided to advance the first matches by four places.

It was also in 1994 that the Dixon Cup was mentioned. This competition is for the five northern leagues. The North Northumberland League, the Newcastle and District League, the Durham League, the Hadrian League and the North Durham League.

In 1995 the player of the year award was first introduced. The first winner was John McCallum of Newbiggin Golf Club with 25 points.

In 1998 the Union Executive Trophy was re-introduced having gone missing for many years. This is a competition for the executives of the five northern leagues. It was won by the Newcastle and District League and then again in the year 2000. In the 50th year of the League it is the Newcastle and District Leagues honour to host the event.

By 1999 the league had extended the player of the year award to recognise a player of the year from each club.

At the millennium celebration this was acknowledged by including the player of the year and the runner-up from each club to play in a special format of the Thompson Shield.

To complete the millennium year celebration and additional competition was introduced in the form of the player's championship. This was for the top two players from each team played over 36 holes.

The first overall winner being winner Steve Anderton of Backworth Golf Club with Kevin Robson of Prudhoe Golf Club winning the best net prize.

