

## Great Depression to Global Conflict: 1930-39

The 1930s began much as the previous decade had ended – with a further expansion of both the School’s enviable facilities, and its reputation as an establishment which produced a good all-round education at competitive fee levels (fees were £44 per term in those days). Despite the parlous state of the country’s economy in the early 1930s, Harry Riley was able to continue his ambitious programme of investments in the building infrastructure at Strathallan.

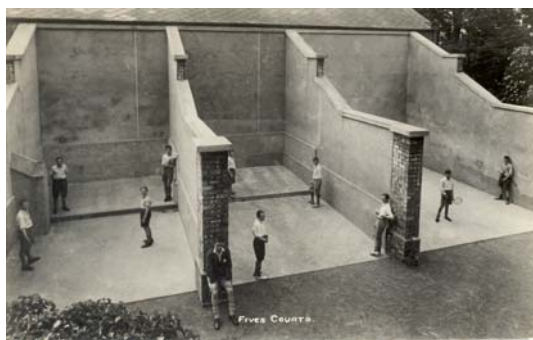


*Harry Riley – ‘The Boss’- in 1937*

The Cricket pavilion was opened in 1930, partly a gift of the India Rubber Company of Inchinnan, and the Melville Trophy inaugurated for the champion House at cricket. At the same time the new hard tennis courts were laid out on their present site, and the library moved to a location in the main building, above the main entrance. A 9-hole golf course was established at the newly-bought Thorneyshades in 1931, and two sets of Fives courts established, both Rugby and Eton.



*Rugby Fives Courts, built Spring 1934*



*Three Eton Fives courts, built onto the back of the gym in the autumn of 1933*

By 1936, the classroom blocks now occupied by the Geography department were open for use, and a new stage full-equipped with curtains and lighting was available for the Saturday night cinema shows and school productions.



*Junior School Form rooms, ca. 1936*



*Middle School Form rooms, ca. 1936*

Also in this year, land was acquired to turn into international size rugby pitches – these later became Big and Little Acres – which required substantial levelling and extending, together with draining. Big Acre was ready for use in 1938, Little Acre the following year.



*The Pond and Big Acre (left)*

All of this, of course, required money, and Riley continued a previous trend of financing changes out of available income rather than entering into debt. His personal parsimony was legendary, and conditions at the school were spartan, though all were well fed and administered to by Riley's sister May and her staff.



*May Riley, the founder's sister and housekeeper in the early years*

Let us all remember that Strathallan at this stage of its development was still a privately owned concern, and not the public school it is today.

This decade saw an increasing number of scholarships won at both Oxford and Cambridge – 5 to Cambridge in 1935 and 12 to the same University in 1937. Education department inspections in the mid-1930s also praised the academic excellence of the teaching at Strathallan whilst recognising that classes were rarely selective. They comment

on the discipline and excellent class behaviour of the boys together with happy relations with the teaching staff, a facet of continuing Strathallan life commented upon in a recent pastoral inspection in the late 1990s.

One of Strathallan's innovations of this period was to teach the final year boys university-level courses in accountancy and economics, actuarial science and mercantile law. Classes were also taught in pure science, medicine, law and engineering. Riley believed that it was his calling to make boys good as well as knowledgeable, and he endeavoured to educate, in the widest sense, each boy in his own particular field so that they would be able to 'accept with confidence the responsibilities of manhood'. Thus he opined that 'everyone likes a good and hard worker, whether the latter is a baker or a barrister – you can easily make your mark in life by just going the second mile'. So, even those who struggled in their academic endeavours were encouraged always to do their best.

The 1930s was also to be a decade of firsts for the School – T. M. Hart, cricketing star of the mid-1920s, became the first Strathallian to play rugby for Scotland (against Ireland and Wales in 1930), then achieved an Oxford Rugby Blue in 1931. He also went on to represent Scotland at cricket in 1936 as a member of the Clydesdale club.

Another Strathallian to play a major role in international sport in the 1930s was J. G. S. Forrest, or 'Springy' as he was known. In his last two years, 1934-6, he was Captain of Rugby, Cricket, Swimming, Tennis Champion and Victor Ludorum. He was also Vice-Captain of School 1934-6.

In 1936 Forrest went up to Cambridge where he won his Blue in each of three years [1936, 1937, 1938]. He was capped three times for Scotland in 1937-8 as a wing-three quarter, scoring two tries against Ireland in 1938. Injuries the following season robbed him of further international honours. He also played for London Scottish and the Barbarians in 1937-8.

As a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve he saw war service, in which capacity he died on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1942 in the Far East. He, along with T. M. Hart, was among the best sportsmen to come out of Strathallan's early sporting days.



**J. G. S. Forrest, died 1942**

The formal establishment of an Old Boy's association in 1932 was a first in the School's history, initially under the presidency of D. O. Melrose, and later Harry Riley made the school over to the Strathallian Club in 1938 under its Trustees John Maitland Cowan and David Bogie. This latter event was crucial in ensuring that the School survived the death of the Founder in September 1942, and emerged from the War years battered but able to rebuild.



**D. Oliver Melrose, first Strathallian President, elected in December 1932.**

This link with the Strathallian Club was very close to Harry Riley's heart. He had always encouraged Strathallians to come back to school at any time to see the progress which had been made, and to reminisce about earlier

days. In this respect the 1930s saw the beginning of fixtures at both Rugby and Cricket between School and Club, together with competitions for swimming and athletics, events which in 1932 were developed into the School's first Commemoration Day, and which have since become Strathallian Day in recent years.

In these days of major sporting and cultural tours to Prague, Spain, Australia and the West Indies, amongst other places, it is easy to overlook the fact that both Harry Riley, his deputy Willie Ward and senior languages master A. J. Shaw themselves took senior boys on trips to the continent in the 1930s. Strathallian Hugh Scott (1936-38) tells us of a trip to the continent at Easter 1938 in Riley's Austin Convertible. *"The route took us from Edinburgh to Rome with overnight stops in the East Midlands, Folkestone, Brussels, Koblenz, Heidelberg, Freiburg, Lugano, Milan, Venice and Florence, finishing with two nights in Rome. In Venice we stayed in the Hotel Royale Danieli, no less, right on the Grand Canal... we attended theatre and opera performances in Freiburg and La Scala, Milan respectively. In the return journey, the idea had been to include Vienna, but Hitler intervened and it was considered imprudent to go there on the very weekend when voting was to take place on the Anschluss between Germany and Austria."*

These trips were a regular feature for boys who could not go home during the holiday periods, and one of them became almost legendary. For, in 1939, according to one Strathallian, on his visit to Poland and the city of Danzig, Riley was suspected of being a British agent and temporarily detained. Shades, perhaps, of a similar incident in 1914 when it is alleged he visited Belgium and Germany.

This trip of Hugh Scott's was disrupted by the threat of a gathering shadow on the European horizon. Riley himself had been badly affected during the Great War by the fate of several Strathallians, and pupils of that period all commented upon his mood being dictated by the state of the war. Now he, and his

School, was to be visited again by the spectre of war and the inevitable resultant casualties. It had always been a source of pride for Riley that Strathallians were to be found all over the world, in business, commerce, the service of the Empire, and in the armed forces. Now, as the war began in September 1939, he was once again to come to terms with the loss of 'his boys', killed in France, at sea, or in the far East.

RHF  
Sept 2003