

Strathallan School: Beginnings



Top left: Glenbrae in 1913. The only surviving photograph from the earliest days of Strathallan School - believed to be a whole-school photograph from 1913.



Top right: Harry Riley at Forgandenny in 1924, just outside the conservatory of the Music Room.

It all began with the dream of a young Schoolmaster

in Bridge of Allan in 1913, confident that he could build up a financially viable alternative to the established boys private school in "Bridgie" - Stanley House. Harry Riley, born at Bradford in 1888, Licentiate of the College of Preceptors, borrowed some capital from the father of one of his former pupils at Kelvingrove, a man called William Smith Nicol, and took out the lease on Glenbrae, a half-villa at the top of Blairforkie Drive. It was a risky venture, but Riley perhaps had an unshakeable belief that he could succeed where others, notably Benjamin Dilworth of Kelvingrove, had failed.

The early days were days of hard work, on the games field, in the classroom, struggling with conditions which seem so alien to those of our School today. These were also years of warfare - the Great War - which threatened to shut the school almost at once. Harry Riley was called before military tribunals on several occasions to plead exemption on account of his colour-blindness, and his moods were often dictated by the fluctuating fortunes of the Allied forces in northern France whose movements he plotted on a map hung in the dining room.

The School flourished in the war years to the extent that by 1918 the numbers were up to one hundred and twelve boys. All of this expansion meant, of course, that further buildings would have to be leased or bought in order to form dorms, a dining-room, classrooms and accommodation for staff. To the original Glenbrae, Harry Riley added Wolf Crag (1918 - Sanitorium), Glen Ranald (1918 - dining), The Birkenward (1917 - classrooms), Grahamville (1919 - dormitories) and, in 1919, Parell House.

With the Great War calling up more and more masters, Harry Riley had to depend upon an almost exclusively female staff for teaching from 1915. On the discipline side Riley had his prefects to turn to, all the more vital since over a mile separated the various School buildings along Abercrombie Drive. By 1917 a master lived in each house but did not interfere with routine, which was the responsibility of the four prefects. Seldom did the prefects have to appeal to their House Masters, although advice was often sought and readily given.

By 1919 it was becoming obvious that Strathallan was out-growing its resources. It was increasingly difficult to accommodate the large numbers of boys and there were two options at Riley's disposal. Either he could erect a new building in Bridge of Allan at some considerable cost or he could look further afield for a more permanent solution. It was rumoured that Riley might be interested in the Dunblane Hydro, but when Freeland House became available in Forgandenny in 1919 there was only one decision. Strathallan School moved lock, stock and barrel to Forgandenny in 1920 and the measure of how highly Riley was regarded is indicated by the numbers of boys and masters who moved there with him. This was a whole new challenge for the young Headmaster, and one which was vital for the School to go from strength to strength in the post-war era.



The house is in Pendreich Road on the fork with Glen Road. Glen Ranald was owned by Captain Ranald Mayne Alexander who lived at Strathallan on the Isle of Wight. It was empty from the death of the tenant Hugh Cumming in 1914, until 1918 when Harry Riley took on the tenancy for two years. Captain Alexander was later to buy Wolf Crag in 1919.



Birkenward House, on Abercrombie Drive near Grahamville, owned by Ms. Charlotte McInroy until her death in 1914, when the house remained empty until 1917. Harry Riley took on the tenancy from 1917 until the house was sold in 1919 to a Mr. William Addison who started the school Glenochil on the premises. The house is the mirror image of that next door called Woodlea, both originally being accommodation for the Airthrey Spa across the road.



Wolfcrag, owned by the heritable creditors of John Ferguson, was situated on Station Road and occupied by a tenant, John Fraser. He died in 1917 and the house remained empty until, in 1918, Harry Riley took on the tenancy for two years. This area of Station Road was renamed Sunnyslaw in 1918.



A house on Chalton Road at the end of Abercrombie Drive which was owned by the trustees of the late David McLaren. Harry Riley took on the house briefly in 1919 when he had to move out of The Birkenward. Parell House was named St. Vigean soon after Harry Riley's departure and was recently re-named Kiscadale.



This is a half villa in Blairforkie Drive in the Sunnyslaw area. Harry Riley became the occupier of the premises to start the School in 1913 and was supported by the then tenant, Marion McIsaac. Glenbrae is the only house photograph to exist from that time. Ferniebank is the name of the other half villa, ascribed in the old School History as the original school premises. This is unlikely as the house was occupied by Margaret Bennet during Harry Riley's time at Glenbrae.



The School called Stanley House was where Harry Riley worked immediately prior to forming his own school. Stanley House was occupied by James Moncrieff, later Lord Moncrieff of Tullebole, who ran the school at the time of the merger with Harry Riley's first employer, Kelvingrove run by Benjamin Dilworth.



Grahamville was a large house built by the Graham family. The tenant was William Smith Nicol who was instrumental in supporting Harry Riley when he started Strathallan in 1913. It is thought that Riley used the premises from 1913, though the tenancy was only passed on by Nicol in 1919 when The Birkenward was sold.



Taken from a Scottish Education Department Inspectors' Report for 1916. This is a whole school photograph, possibly from 1916, showing Harry Riley and his Assistant Master Mr. Fretwell.



Possibly the whole school photograph for 1918, taken at Bridge of Allan.



Whole school photograph for 1919, taken at Bridge of Allan showing the impressive post-Great War growth of numbers, in addition to the existing staff.

