

History of Caithness Football 1886 to 1966

Norman N. Glass

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HISTORICAL REVIEW

The past is always present in football-that unrivalled game. Incidents and personalities are continually recalled and comparisons have caused much discussion and unending controversy down through the years. Honestly though, unanimity of opinion could hardly be expected where, as so frequently happens, the virtues or failings of any team or participant can so readily be gilded or ignored.

How names live in the minds of football folk!

Setting out to follow football in Caithness over four-score years presents an enormous task and there is much that is lost in the shadows of the past and bound to be overlooked. The best intentions can go winky-wonky and a complete review may well be a baby that will never be born. The writer believes, however, that an historical review of the game will appeal to very many besides those of the statistical turn of mind, and this thought inspires the effort.

These writings will concentrate on the early days, on inter-county and inter-town meetings, on prominent players and their records. Only random jottings will be included concerning clubs. To go deeply into their history would mean many years of research, with probably eventual failure, and regrettably cannot be attempted.

Innumerable young men have filled ranks of clubs on the playing fields of Caithness, hundreds have served their town and/or county, and many thousands have gathered in sunshine or in shower- ay, even in storm-to encourage their favourites to give of their best. There has been, too, a host of officials-not forgetting referees-who laboured diligently to maintain and enhance the prestige of club or game. Difficulties unknown to the on-lookers certainly confront the ruling associations and the clubs as well; and only those who have tasted of the trials and tribulations of unpaid football officialdom can possibly realise the amount of work entailed and how very simple it is to err.

Football came to Caithness in the far-away 1887-a year before the foundations of Glasgow Celtic and six years before the use of goal-nets was adopted in Scotland. Old-timers in Thurso averred that when the town's first team started kicking a football (1893) in the "Dammies" goalposts were already there, quite sound but apparently unused for years. These goalposts tapered high above the crossbars and suggested that a form of rugby pioneered the way. Recollection of this was given by prominent Thursonians of former generations. Peculiarly enough, similarly constructed goalposts existed in neighbouring Sutherland and were believed to have

been erected about the time the railway was extended north.

Meantime, though, let's start to stroll together down Memory's Lane and re-live forgotten days.

Early Days

Entertainment was at a minimum in the northern counties in the 1880's. Generally it was self-made. Local concerts there were at intervals but even the gramophone had not come into-its-own. Betting and bingo, cinemas or television were unknown. The working week extended over 50 hours, wages were low, and there was nowt but semi-hunger and privation for the les fortunate. Tatties and herring were the staple diet, and oatcakes with cheese were in high favour. Young fellows walked around in their leisure time or congregated at street corners-some of which were shunned by sensitive pedestrians. Books, newspapers and periodicals were a luxury, and pastimes such as golf, tennis and bowling were unknown to the common people.

Think then what appearance of a big bouncing ball meant to the young and agile. They became enthusiasts at kicking it and were quick to master the art through rules and regulations were of lesser consequence. In those far-off days "hacking" was common and tackles that today would mean "marching orders" hardly raised an eyebrow. But in every era from days of the bow and arrow, the attacked has found a form of defence. So it is with football-the protective shin-guard became noticeable as it was worn first outside and later inside the stocking.

The writer recalls reading the story of a Scottish laird-a street in the east end of Pulteney carries his family name (Kinnaird)-who played in nine national cup finals between 1873 and 1883 and was five times on the winning side. He was a big broad shouldered fellow with a shaggy auburn beard who blossomed in the all-amateur era. Nothing delighted him more, it was said, than to hack an opponent on the shins. Yet the Scottish laird was in the game only for the love of sport and did much to bring order into football in England when he became president of the Football Association.

This laird's playing career may have ended ere a football bounced in the streets of Wick. But popular methods were passed on-hefty charging and tough tackling with "tacketty" boots. O-o-h! That was football at the beginning. Much, very much, has happened since, due in large measure to the formation of clubs. The days of Corinthian style were just around the corner.



The Rovers

The first football club formed in Caithness (in 1887) was the Rovers of Wick. The team enjoyed much popularity during its brief existence, but came to an abrupt and untimely end when its banking account expired. The holding of Highland Games was the real rock on which the Rovers foundered, unfavourable weather in successive seasons leading to financial failure. The Games were held in the Harrow Park and on one occasion in a field on the north road near Ackergill. There's no explanation for the selection of such an out-of-the way site.

Since the Rovers collapsed several clubs have sprung into prominence only to fade in some wretched season and fall to rise no more. The way down seems always to be well greased: the road to recovery akin to climbing a mountain. Yet a few clubs have plodded on, weathering storms which threatened to undermine their foundations, and occasionally riding on the crest of a wave-rarely a giant one.

The Rovers, St. Fergus and Victoria of Wick have long since become defunct, but their descendants survive-Pulteney Thistle (founded in 1888), Wick Academy and the John O'Groat F.C. (both inaugurated in 1893). These three have competed annually (and latterly Lybster Portland) with varying success in the local Wick League since it was formed in 1896. They have soared and receded again and again on the tides of Time and Fortune but have survived every vicissitude to sprout in each succeeding autumn.

Thurso Thistle was the pioneers of football in that town, no doubt convinced that anything Wick could do, Thurso could do better. The Thurso League was

instituted in the winter of 1894 when the clubs interested were Thistle, Rovers, Victoria, and St Clair. All four clubs passed into oblivion many years ago, but the competition goes on with Academicals, Pentland, Swifts, and Dounreay Athletic as contestants

The personnel of the Caithness teams changed completely from generation to generation; stars have shone in our little football firmament and lost their lustre with the passage of the years. But many have left memories behind and their names and their talents are not forgotten. Throughout these articles the accepted task will be to ruminate on bygone memories and re-live some of the more thrilling moments.

The Pioneers

Because they were pioneers in the far north, the Rovers are worthy of special attention. The game quickly spread, and to defeat the Rovers was considered no humble feat in those quiet Victorian days. Proud indeed were all who succeeded. A highlight of the season was an annual visit by a team from the Highland Capital under the name Inverness Pilgrims.

William Georgeson, who was an assistant in Rae's bookseller shop (now MacKay's in Stafford Place), was Rovers' first secretary, and it is obvious they did not lack for players. There were indeed many aspirants for places. Names coming into the reckoning would (in number) satisfy the needs of a much more ambitious club. Little is known of individual merits but from the following list (in alphabetical order) several will still be recognised and remembered:-

Alick Miller of the Inland Revenue was captain; William Alexander (printer), Tom Baikie (plasterer) famed for his long throw-in; D. Bremner (saddler), Alex. Calder (cooper), Willie Calder (mason), James Campbell (plumber), William Coghill (music-teacher), William Cuthbertson (tailor), Willie Davidson (postman), John Deerness (printer), Alex Fraser (tailor), Dan Georgeson (printer), Glenday (inland-revenue), John G. Hood (founder of the Boys' Brigade in Wick, who became the longest serving B.B. officer in the country); Roderick Mackay (plumber), John Macleod (cooper), D. Malcolm (moulder), Alex Miller (baker), Dominic Mulraine (tailor), Robert Oman, George Phimster (printer), Duncan A. Sinclair (sculptor), Joe Sinclair (plasterer), William Sinclair (baker), Addie Sutherland (hewer), Alex. Tait (sawyer), Dannie Tait (baker), John Tait (tailor), Robert Tait (fish-curer), John Tulloch (printer), Dan Wares (mason), James Wares (printer), Harry Williamson (sawyer).

So far as known to the writer there is but one surviving link with the old-time Rovers-Duncan Sinclair, then a youthful millwright and later an engine room artificer in the Royal Navy. Happily he's still hale and hearty though in his 94th year. William Coghill and James Campbell had come to work in Wick from Edinburgh, where previously they had experience with city teams.

Three Generations

Two names in the list given above should interest readers of all ages—those of Dominick Mulraine and Dannie Tait, both of whom when playing days over were regular spectators at games all the years that health permitted. Mulraine was born in Erin's Isle but passed most of his days in Wick. Three generations of both families have been active participants in local football affairs. Two outstanding figures were Bill Mulraine, the Groats' dynamic leader and prolific scorer, and George Tait ("Rover" to everyone) artist on the ball, noteworthy referee, secretary of Academy F.C. and first elected president of the local Association. Descendants of the families appeared quite recently in town teams so that in each case the connection with the game has extended over four score years.



William "Bill" Mulraine (Groats)

The Rover lads were the fellows who started the game way up here, but they had imitators and soon found worthy opposition. It was particularly strong from the east end of Pulteney where the young fisher folk of that area enthusiastically adopted the game and became rather expert. The Thurso Thistle, too, was a noteworthy combination and Castletown were at times the equal of the town teams. Judging from the local press, there were rhymers and versifiers in plenty of the calibre of ". . . the ba' that Charlie Shaw he never saw." Yet every thing helped over the initial years to popularise football and the spectators increased in number.

"Dangerous"

Conditions and even public opinion may have been against the game. It was alleged to be "dangerous"—presumably on account of minor accidents. Men in public office did not favour football; the press alluded to some of the players as brutes. And maybe physique was a commendation. The scene behind this sentence culled from the long ago can be imagined: "From a centre by Murray, C--- obtained a second goal, MacLean putting through while M- attended to the goal-keeper." Or again: "There was no rough play, nor any swearing, and the referee's decisions were always recognised." When the absence of rough play, swearing and arguments was worthy of comment—well, such outgoings must have been prevalent.

The matches were remarkable for the amount of club enthusiasm and the energy the players expended during a game. Straightforward, hefty charging with the shoulder—called physical contact nowadays—was a predominant feature, and occasionally collar-bones were cracked. Players were not sufficiently safeguarded by the rules of the game, and these were tightened as the years advanced. There were no goal-nets, and no local cup or trophy to play for—but oh, how they played! Only the reputation of the team

was at stake and right loyally the players strove to uphold it. It is recorded of a team that they were strong in defence-but not the strength that comes from knowledge of football, but the strength common to alike to men and to brutes. It may well have been that the press in the eighteen eighties was a little less than neutral.

Bleaching Green Pitch

People in high places were against the game. An instance: Even in 1889 when the "Crown" club applied to Wick Town Council for permission to use a portion of the Bleaching Green for playing football "as they had no other park, and they were very much annoyed by the police," sanction was refused. A Bailie (Geddes to name) expressed the popular arguments of the day when he remarked that "football was a very dangerous game and many accidents happened." Probably he did not survive to see public grounds devoted almost solely to football.

The Council's 1889 decision may well have been influenced by rowdy behaviour in the streets when these were commonly used as pitches. Shouting, shoving and struggling for

Possession by "beastly furies" in steel shod boots would disturb any neighbourhood and be distasteful to law-abiding citizens and local authorities. At the time there was but one policeman patrolling Pulteneytown and one across the bridge maintaining order in Wick.

Actual footballs were scarce in those days and this is somewhat tempestuous street pastime was indulged in by pursuing a much less expensive object. Animal bladders were constantly in demand and these were inflated by means of a clay-pipe shank pushed into the bladder's opening. Lung-power did the rest. The football pioneers had their own difficulties!

St. Fergus' Debut

Research for bygone football facts can be tedious and unrewarding when the events of long-ago are tackled. Little could be gleaned but it is known that St. Fergus Club was founded about 1888 and had a playing pitch at Willowbank, opposite Roseberry Terrace. It is on record that this team defeated the Rovers by two clear goals and drew a game with Thistle at the South Head. Their star was a very humble fellow named Har. Davidson. St. Fergus made a sudden and curious exit. The club had gone to fulfil an engagement at Thurso, and what came over them on that jaunt history does not reveal. But two facts remain: they were beaten 4-0, and the club died out that night. Senior and junior clubs sprang into being as time advanced, one under the fascinating name Electric Sparks.

The "Trades" team-a combine of young tradesmen on the Wick side of the river about 1888-was an enthusiastic one, and each member "hained" enough to buy his own rig-out as was the custom at the time. Their favourite emporium was a pawn shop at the Camps owned by a Mrs McCann. The club colour was white. Almost every Saturday the team light-heartedly came swinging down Tollbooth Lane carrying goal-sticks, flags and ball with "all the exuberance of untrammelled youth" making for Dunvegan at the other end of town, to play the Victoria. It has been said that never once did the Pulteney team cross over the river to play on their opponents' ground. The Trades must have been real sports. They were strategists, too! Headquarters were in Coach Road, and they contrived to keep in good graces of the then tenant of the ground (George Bain) by appointing his son "Lal" captain of the team.



PULTENEY THISTLE

Winners - 1894-95 Leitch Cup

Formed in 1889, Pulteney Thistle F.C. since its inception has more or less found encouraging support in the east end of the town and its ranks has been adorned mainly by members of our fishing community. The club earned early prominence and grew and thrived exceedingly well even unto the present day.

Thistle's first ground was situated at the South Head, probably Parkhead, to the immediate south of Pulteney House. The "big hilly" at the east corner and just outside the ground provided a convenient grandstand on a sunny day but kept gate drawings at an unwelcome minimum. In the early days Thistle found an excellent nursery in Pulteney Victoria, a junior team that flourished more than 70 years ago. During its long and eventful career many distinguished players have donned the Thistle colours (blue jersey and white pants). It may be unwise to select a few names from among numbers that would fill pages but notable among the old brigade were-Murdo Macleod, John Miller, Daniel Moonie and Neil Miller, a centre-forward whose equal old-timers freely and firmly asserted has never been seen on the playing fields of Wick.

For years Thistle shunned the services of incomers to the town, affirming that they had never made a really good capture. They utilised

local lads. A glance at the team names in the 1890's had a most familiar ring-four had the surname of Bain, three Miller's, a Macleod, Swanson, Robertson, Baikie and Dunnet. That's real "Old Pulteney"! Yet two of the most polished and finished wing-men to come to the district assisted at different periods-Eddy Norton and R.L. Brown.

For the long term of 28 years (beginning in 1924) Peter Bain was president of the club, until he resigned from office. He was succeeded by William Miller, and David Geddes took over as secretary and treasurer in place of John More (resigned). That would be 1952.

Judging principally from team photographs, another who gave unswerving lifelong support to Thistle, was George Clyne, a modest Pulteney skipper who never sought the limelight. Like many other staunch clubmen his praiseworthy record is blurred in the hoary years of yore.

Early Honours

Probably the player and committee member longest with Thistle was Frank More-faithful in attendance at meetings both club and association. As a player he served the club in the first years of the century and developed into the most consistently reliable defender in the county. Several honours went to Pulteney in this early

period. The Groats' membership card, records that they were county champions in 1904. That season Frank More and club mate Hughie Henderson, along with Alex. Macleod, Artillery (who happily still survives) had joined the Groats and the team enjoyed an unprecedented run of successes. In fact Frank More had played in 33 consecutive games without tasting defeat. He soon returned to Thistle and with them "kept right on to the end of the road." Playing days over, he became a foremost referee locally. Early in the second in the second war when a Wick eleven played a Services team in the local League and was minus a goalkeeper, Frank More stepped into the breach-and finished on the winning side. That was 36 years after he had been in Harmsworth Bowl matches-only the veteran had a son helping to beat the Services. Thistle certainly had many loyal and wholehearted servants-too many to detail, but the names of those who rose to prominence will appear in the honours list to be appended. Thistle made a more handsome contribution to town and county teams than their contemporaries, apart from Thurso Acks. Fortyseven of the boys in blue have played for Caithness and 113 for Wick.

League Tournament

When the Wick League tournament opened on November 10th 1896, Thistle and Academy were

the first teams engaged. The weather was beautifully fine and the game was witnessed by a good turnout of spectators. The Academy had a complete win over the Rovers in a friendly game the week before (5-1 being the score), and they entered the fray full of confidence but found the Thistle made of sterner stuff.

Robertson of the Academy (brother of Colonel J.J.) was the player first to set the ball a-rolling in League football in the County and to John Davidson (the Academy captain) belongs the honour of registering the first goal. This he did With a swift low shot amid great cheering. Thistle played better football than did their opponents and scored through Neil Miller and Daniel Moonie "amid great hurrahs from the East-enders". But they enjoyed the lead for only 15 minutes as Davidson notched his second and equalising goal "with an un-saveable and exceedingly fine shot."

The players who took part in this historic game, which at the time characterised as one of the best and quietest matches ever played in Wick were:- Academy-P. Gunn; Ross and D. Banks; Nicolson, R. Farmer and Wares; G. Banks, A. Farmer, Robertson, J. Davidson and W. Eddy. Thistle-Murdo Macleod; Thomson and Bain; Forbes, Farquhar and J. Miller; D. Miller, Daniel Moonie, Neil Miller, M. More and A. Miller.

Mr Charles Fletcher, M.A. was referee.



JOHN O'GROAT F.C. XI
Circa 1893-94

Back Row L to R: W. Cowper, James Green, Dan Baillie, J. Bremner, Alex "Coey" Tait.
 Middle: John More, Mr W.G. Miller, William Thomson, Mr Alex Miller, Alex Mackay.
 Front: Sinclair Manson, Ake Miller, J.E. Wares, David Manson, Jim Tait.

THE GROATS

Youthful members of Milton Cricket Club (comprised mainly of pupils of West Banks School) caught the football fever in 1893 and inaugurated the Wick club known as the "Groats." The cricket club's funds were transferred to the formation of a football team, and the greatest difficulty that confronted the founders appears to have been the selection of a name. "Wick Athletic F.C." "The Viking F.C." and other suggested names proved unacceptable, and after a lengthy discussion at the original meeting Alex. Mackay timorously put forward "John O'Groat F.C." Maybe to his surprise, this name found favour.

Their first choice of jersey colours were maroon with a white sash across the left shoulder but are better known now for their dark red shirts.

Fortune smiled on the new club at the beginning: the Rovers became defunct and their young players linked up with "the Groats; the Britannia (a skilful and comparatively strong junior side) passed out of existence, and some of

the players also joined the Groats, who themselves, were a few years in the junior ranks.

Indeed the club's first honour two years later was the junior championship, won without tasting defeat. They were so overjoyed with the success that they held their first social gathering in the Rifle Hall. To this function they invited a choice selection of "our fairest damsels," and the affair-presided over by Mr W.Gow Miller-was one of the most successful of its kind that had been organised in the town. Dancing was kept up with much youthful vigour until six o' clock next morning.

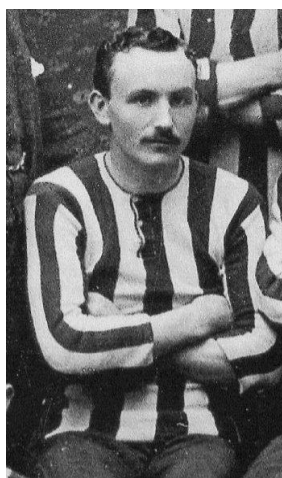
First to Use Goal Nets

To the John O' Groat F.C. belongs the distinction of being the first football team in Caithness to use goal-nets. They were also the first northern club to penetrate into the adjoining county of Sutherland in search of fresh honours. At Brora the Wick club met the renowned Rangers of the village and an interesting game resulted in a draw of one goal each.

The Groats, too, had the unique honour of being presented with the Harmsworth Bowl—still played for between Thurso and Wick—to mark the outstanding patriotism of the club. Eleven members had volunteered for service in the South African War. (This will be referred to later in this series).

In 1896 the John O’Groat F.C. competed in Wick Senior League when first formed and have done so yearly since that distant date with varying results. They had a playing pitch at Gallowhill situated just beyond the burgh boundary on the north road and now incorporated in the aerodrome.

An early Groats team: Dan Baillie; James Green and J. Bremner; John More, Wm Thomson and Alex. Mackay; Sinclair Manson, Archibald ‘Ake’ Miller, James E. Wares, David Manson and Jim Tait. Looking over these names, it may be remarked that the club’s original goalkeeper and leader of the team (D.W. Baillie) was an enthusiast who belonged to Mid Clyth. He was a man of fine personality and character. Both he and Sinclair Manson, a speedy wing-man, immigrated to South Africa.



Dan Baillie (Groats)

Jim Tait was one of three brothers with the Groats, the others being John, who went to Canada, and Alex. (“Coey”) who collapsed and died while refereeing a match in Harrow Park. Jim was reckoned among the best of his time, and left behind the prized reputation of having “played the game.

“Coey” was a good club-man. A rare trier, he would cheerfully fill any team gap no matter what position on the field. Archibald ‘Ake’ Miller was a splendid type, too. Speed and enthusiasm were among his assets. In the ‘twenties he became chairman of Wick F.A. and a highly respected administrator. He finally immigrated to New Zealand.

Several of the Groats mentioned above were with the club when it entered the senior ranks. Others who joined were Roderick Mackay, Andy Wares, and Alex. Miller (baker), John Christie, Addie Sutherland, and sometimes Falconer (from Thurso) assisted. Later James Doull (“Jimit”) was signed as goalkeeper and gave appreciated service for long a period of years. He was Wick’s first custodian in the inter-town football and held the position on 14 occasions, making his last appearance in 1910. At the beginning of the century goalkeepers were allowed to carry the ball up field without restriction and “Jimit” was especially good at making progress this way. His thrilling, mazy runs were enlivening and at times an amusing feature of many contests.

In pre-1914 days the clubs issued membership cards at a shilling each. These entitled the holder to “all the privileges of the club,” whatever that meant, and gave a list of club honours. Apparently such cards are still issued, but bear no price or state any ancient privileges. Examining the Groats’ membership card for 1965, its honours page is found sorely crammed with cups collected between 1899 and 1964. Twice they held the Miller Cup (open to Caithness and Sutherland), 1936 and 1939; twice they won the county championship, and five times were winners of the County League. Local trophies have been captured on at least 44 occasions.

The Groats have given 47 players for inter-county matches and 110 have been chosen by Wick selectors for inter-town matches.

Harry Clyne might well be the player who continued the longest in competitive football locally. He was 43 when he retired from the game. Harry started with Thistle about 1904 when a mere youth, changed his affections to the Groats (apart from one season, 1910), so that he took part in many of the club’s triumphs. He was Wick’s outside-right in one of the town’s brightest seasons (judging by results: aggregate score 8-nil). The year was 1907. Altogether he was honoured 16 times by the Association, the last in 1923. He won medals with Groats in 1921 and 1926. Of the versatile type, in four successive games he essayed a different role, playing right-back, centre-forward, outside-right and inside-right. Harry Clyne is still moving around and all interested in the game might well salute him for an exceptionally long and untainted football career.



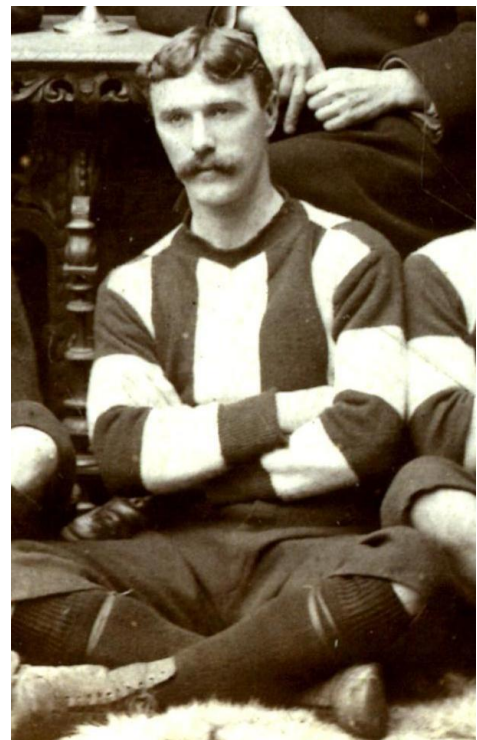
Wick Academy XI
Season - 1895-96

Back: Neil Miller, J. Ross, Peter Gunn, David Banks, I. Anderson.
Middle: A. Nicolson, J. Bain, D.B. Davidson, Robert Farmer, George Banks.
Front: George Doull, Alex Robertson, John Davidson (Captain & founder), J. Reid,

WICK ACADEMY

Wick Academy F.C. was inaugurated in the autumn of 1893 and had a very meagre beginning, having exactly eleven players at its command. Yet from its formation onwards Academy has filled the niche in Caithness football, and its record is unique in several respects.

The first captain (or “leader” as the position was then called) was John Davidson, teacher, who, with young Willy Eddy as partner, introduced to the north the wing combination game and for a time bewildered opponents. Eddy immigrated to America and Davidson ultimately moved to a headmastership at Plockton. These two non-natives foreshadowed club policy to some extent as down through the years Academy have introduced numerous excellent players on their arrival in Wick. Names spring to mind, such as A. Ogilvy, Wm Leys, Bill Morgan, Tom D. Wylie, A.H. Davidson, W. Murie, Sid Toman, Alex Clark, D. M’Garrigle, R. Peterson, D. Warnock and player-coaches John Cowie and A. Haggerty-all of whom shed much sweat on our playing fields. But there must be a host of others.



John Davidson

The first Academy captain and one of the founders of the club.

Though few in number at birth, Academy were pretty rich in ability and even the first season was a notable one-losing only two in ten games. It was 1898-99 before the teams name was inscribed on silver-plate: in that season three trophies were won-Senior League, Sunlight Cup, and Junior League. Academy were to become League champions 17 times before 1960, County champions six times, and Charity Cup holders on 13 occasions; the Duncan Cup was won in four seasons.

Many Honours

Between the years 1908-13 Academy acquired many honours and were more or less in a class by themselves locally. Encouraging results prompted successful application to compete in the Scottish Qualifying Cup in 1911 and for a lengthy period Academy were the only team north of Inverness to enter. (Q.C. ventures will be recalled later in this series)

Seventy-five years ago the surname Banks occurred three times in the Academy eleven. They were brothers-Alick, David, and George-who faithfully served the club and on occasion formed the half-back line. David assisted Queen's Park when he moved south.

When the Harmsworth Bowl competition was instituted George Banks led the Wick attack, and although he was then (1901) in the veteran stage as a football player the outstanding feature of that year's contest were seven goals headed home by the Wick chemist during the two games-a feat never bettered over the years. George Banks was an exceptionally good all-round gamesman and earned distinction in almost every realm of northern sport and pastime. He had four sons in Academy ranks in later years who ably maintained the family tradition-John, David, Harold, and George, and a grandson now figures in Wick football. John was outside-right in Caithness on two occasions, and appeared for Wick 17 times; David took part in 15 inter-county tussles and wore Wick colours 28 times against Thurso.

Five Brothers

Another family name indelibly associated with Academy is Skinner. At least five brothers-Willie, Jimmy, George, David, and Frank-have donned the blue and white stripes, and all were first-rate craftsmen. Probably the brightest star of the family was George who burst into the football scene as a speedy and forceful outside-left and later developed into a most talented defender. His partnership with Wm Houston (an immaculate player) was reckoned among the best ever club pairs.

Few honours were available in their generation but between 1906 and 1913 they were automatic selections. Houston (sharp, neat and tricky, with never an off-day) appeared 17 times against Thurso and Skinner (a bundle of power and energy) had 13 outings for Wick. They probably were the backbone of Academy's all-conquering seasons. David Skinner was a shrewd and clever manipulator and before 1914 played in two successive years for Caithness and was five times chosen for Wick representative elevens. His career unfortunately was shattered in France. The youngest brother (Frank) was twice selected for Wick-once in Harmsworth Bowl (H.B.) and once in the Wilson Cup.

Six from One Family

Worthy family performances bring to mind that in the early 'twenties Academy introduced a wiry little half-back named Willie Miller. Nothing unusual in that till it was mentioned that he was followed in Wick football by five brothers-David and Jimmy (Academy), Sandy (Thistle), John (Thistle and Groats), and Marcus (Thistle and Groats). Willie had a place in the town team on three occasions. John did better with 13 appearances for Wick, and Marcus best of them all with 17 games for Wick and four for Caithness. Jimmy was chosen for Orkney when resident in the Islands. A grand record indeed and it may be added that the Miller brothers, like the majority of our players, were eminently fair. Forty Academy players have been in Caithness representative teams, and those called upon for Wick number



Well known players in this, Artillery team, from 1907 is Alex "Sach" Macleod (back row second from the right) and George "Rover" Tait (middle row second from the right).

THE ARTILLERY

After the turn of the century there was a fourth senior club in Wick-Artillery F.C., who latterly say (1911) used as their home ground a park in Willowbank and named it Meadowside. Artillery enjoyed mediocre success. They had some talented players in their ranks, including (from memory)-Alex. Macleod (Sach), Combe (who worked in town for a while), Johnnie and James Sutherland, Art Bruce, Bobby Durrand, Dada Davidson, Dadda Brims, James P. Bain, Ackie Manson, and it was with the club that Rover Tait and Dan Bain started their playing careers. The Artillery outside-right was John Stephen who later was Hon. Secretary of Wick F.A. for two separate periods of years-altogether about 20 years of appreciated service. At rare intervals they had the assistance of David Blackburn, an

Accomplished half-back, whose annual sojourn to Wick was always too short. Sergeant-Instructor Burgess, John Christie and Willie Robertson were among the active officials. For some reason-probably the passing of the Artillery as a local unit-the football club of that name did not revive after the First World War.

Artillery's first season (1904) results showed: Played 10, won 5, drew 1, lost 4, scoring 18 goals against 11. The first eleven fielded were:-Bain; R. Tait and A. Macleod; H. Nicol, Combe and Mowat; J. Sutherland and A. Sutherland.

Fourteen Artillery players have appeared for Wick. The number may seem relatively small but when the club existed representative matches were few and far between.

THURSO CLUBS

The story of Thurso football is akin to that of Wick or anywhere else. The victorious and the vanquished, the tall and the small, the swift and the not-so swift, the fair and the foul, flitted across the football stage generation after generation until the winds of Time and Change stiffened the limbs. The veterans passed out of the arena with a sigh; leaving their places to be filled by younger and more supple if less crafty performers. It was not always easy to supersede experience for the young man generally is slow in acquiring the priceless gift of personality that counts for much. But members of the old brigade are ever with us-if not actively associated with one or other of the clubs, they can be found among the cheering or criticising crowds that regularly visit the Harmsworth Park or Sir George's Park. The welfare of local football is one of the chief concerns of these

grand old sportsmen. And so it will go on!

Anything Wick can do, Thurso could do. That spirit was uppermost even 80 years ago when football first came to the forefront in the county. Thurso Thistle F.C. was the earliest eleven in the west-end of the town whose existence can be traced. Closely identified with the team before the turn of the century (probably 1893) were several whose names linger on: Donald Brims, Ack Calder, A. Campbell, John Cormack, Donald N. Falconer (Capt), John Mackay, Don Rylie, James and John Tulloch, James Sinclair, T. Sutherland, and John Swanson. Mr H.W. Brock was secretary. The Rovers of Wick were described as their "famous rivals", but this Thurso team enjoyed a remarkable record and the first visitors to lower their colours were Wick Academy who was jubilant at gaining a 2-nil success.

Junior Teams

Junior teams in Thurso in the 1890's were forward under the club names of Victoria and St.Clair. In 1894 Thurso Victoria won the county championship (junior), defeating the Groats at Wick. An exultant crowd thronged the railway station when the players returned home by train. They were chaired and piped through the streets. There was unbounded enthusiasm and a local poet actually penned an ode of 28 verses in honour of the occasion, each verse ending with the line-"none can beat the Victoria."

Although, Thurso had but a population of between four and five thousand, it soon boasted of four clubs-proof positive that there was no lack of enthusiasm. Indeed football became an all-absorbing topic among youth, and it has been said that lads engaged in the games six days in the week-and discussed on Sunday's, despite the stern discipline of those far-off days. When they travelled (which may have been seldom) the old timers, too, paid their fares and bought their own meals.

Local League Formed

November, 1894, is an important date in Thurso football history, for it was then that representatives of the four clubs in the town held a meeting in the Café to consider a proposal to institute a local league competition. Those present at the meeting were:- Messrs D. Brims and James Tulloch (Thistle), James Munro and Charles Docherty (Rovers), D. Campbell, R. Stratton and James Oliver (Victoria, and Harry Swanson (who became the League's first secretary) and D. Tait (St. Clair). That was the initial move towards competitive football in the town, and although all four clubs represented at the opening meeting have passed into oblivion, "the League flag then unfurled still stutters in the breeze."

Sir George's Park

Eighteen months prior to the introduction of League football in Thurso, Sir Tollemache Sinclair had handed over the free charter of "that piece of ground adjoining Sir George's Park, formerly gifted to the town in 1871-both to be used in perpetuity as a park for the recreation of the inhabitants, and to bear the name of Sir George's Park." The park was to be managed by the Police Commissioners and was not to be let or built upon, but kept in a permanent pasture. The proceeds were to be disbursed by the provost and magistrates to the poor of the town not on the Parochial Board, and this distribution, subject to an annual payment of one penny of feuduty, was to take place on the 28th day of August annually, "that being the birthday of Sir George, the honoured father of Sir Tollemache." The provost (also Sinclair to name) and the magistrates accepted the gift of the park, which amounted to ten acres and was "suitably situated within easy access of old and young."

"What's worth doing is worth doing well" may have been a saying known to Sir Tollemache. At any rate before the League tournament commenced the worthy baronet supplied "a much-felt want in connection with Thurso's handsome public playground" when he defrayed the cost of the erection of a "neat little house for dressing purposes." The neat little house did duty for cricket and football for decades. It has been replaced by a more conventionally centred stone pavilion, and the town council now take a parental interest in the ground. Yet who can estimate what Thurso football owes to the generosity of Sir Tollemache Sinclair of Ulbster?

Years ago, Orkney reversed the usual order of things by playing its football matches in summer. Thurso followed suit. Giving a try-out in the recognised close season, the change was a marked success. Instead of shivering in the depths of winter, players and spectators enjoyed the warm evenings and the gate drawings improved appreciably. Wick still clings to tradition.

First League Match

The first League match game was played in January, 1895, when Victoria and St Clair were contestants. The latter went down 4-nil-and were displeased. They lodged a protest on the ground that the game was not played in accordance with the rules of the League, "the teams not having played in their registered colours." The result, however, seems to have been allowed to stand. The players in this initial match were:-

Victoria-J. Brims; R. Macleod and G. Irvine; G. Macpherson, James Oliver and J. Beattie; H. Morrison, J. Murray, J.Sinclair, W. Stratton, R. Stratton.

St. Clair-D. Mackay; J. Falconer and T. Sutherland; J. Miller, H. Swanson and G. Dunnet; A. Sinclair, D. Leith, J. Mackay, W. Sutherland and W. Murray. Referee-H Macaskill, Castletown.



Thurso Thistle

Back: J. Mackay, T. Sutherland, A. Campbell, John Tulloch, Don Rynie.

Middle: D. Brims, A. Calder, N. Falconer, John Swanson, J. Cormack.

Front: James Tulloch and James Sinclair.



Back: D. Tait, G. Tait, Gordon Grant, J. D. Millikin.
 Middle: G. Swanson, G.D.W. Millikin, A. Robertson, W. Gunn, C. Swanson.
 Front: J. Makaskill, J. Christie, Don Ryrie, William Stratton, G. Y. Shearer.
 This is the first known photograph of the Academicals.

THURSO ACADEMICALS

Thurso Academicals are a team with a long pedigree. They have amassed many honours, including (frequently) championship titles. The club when originally formed (in 1898) was known as Thurso Academy F.C. The players were teachers and pupils from the school. Taking the names from the photograph, the players in the first Academy team (in alphabetical order were):-J. Christie, W. Gunn, J. Macaskill, J.D. Millikin, G.D. Millikin, Don Ryrie, G.Y. Shearer, W.W. Stratton, C. Swanson and D. Tait. In 1901 the club was renamed Academicals F.F. and the same year annexed the Thurso League championship. They did not again capture this title until 1906-and then they held it in four successive seasons against the strong challenge of Britannia. Mr Peter Anderson was president in 1910, Mr W. Robertson secretary, and the players included D. Cairnie (Capt.), D. Campbell, D. Dunnet, R.C. George, H. Gerry, A. Macleod, J.D Millikin, D. Ryrie and James Sutherland who, when he emigrated to Canada was, "universally acknowledged to be the finest half-back in Caithness and probably had few equals in any of the northern counties." Also among the players was a young laddie named David Ross, who became a

prominent figure in town and county football. Before the First World War, Academicals were a cricket as well as a football club, and for a time also had a social club in the old Masonic Hall. In those days Acks' players all wore scarves in the club's traditional colours-blue and gold. Foremost Clubs

Acks have competed in every local senior tourney since the beginning of the century and earned recognition as one of the foremost clubs in the north of Scotland. They've had a flair for gathering trophies. In 1926, when first a cup was made available for the team championship of Caithness, the trophy went to Acks and has been regained several times. Sometimes they have made a clean sweep of all five cups locally and taken the county championship as well-a feat accomplished in successive seasons. A most memorable season was 1950-51 when they won the Mackenzie Shield (the Caithness and Sutherland championship trophy), the Caithness county cup, and all the Thurso competitions. Among the players for this successful team are found the names:-G. Campbell, W. Cowie, Murray Elder (Rooker), Hamish Horne, D. Macdonald, R. Macivor, D. Mackenzie, G. Malcolm, F. Morrison, G. Ross (Capt.), G. Sinclair,

Leslie Sutherland and R. Sutherland. The combined counties championship trophy is still cared for by the Acks at the time of writing. Early in 1966 the players were presented with inscribed silver miniature replicas of the trophy. As there was no juvenile competitive football in Thurso that season, Acks entered their youngsters at Wick where they won both cups offered by the local J.F.A.

Academicals fittingly celebrated the club's diamond Jubilee in 1958. Mr John Elder was chairman on that

historic occasion. Mr Jack Mowat was club secretary and Mr J.H. Meiklejohn treasurer-both held similar offices in the year of Acks golden jubilee. Bailie Walter Sinclair president, John Maclean captained the team that season and George Dobbie led the 2nd XI. Acks have had more players called upon by town and county associations than any of their rival Thurso clubs. The numbers are round about 46 for the county and 130 for Harmsworth Bowl and Wilson Cup games.



Thurso League Champions – 1899-00

SWIFTS-OLDEST SURVIVING

Actually, Swifts are Thurso's oldest surviving club. They came into being a year before Academicals but were moribund a few years between 1900-10 and later again dropped out for seven seasons when adversity became to regularly severe. Swifts in their dark days found it hard to retain promising young players who naturally preferred to find places in a winning combine and on occasions failed to muster a complete eleven. Previous to the First World War Swifts tasted honour now and again-for instance, they were cup holders in 1903-04 and again in 1909-10, and held the Charity Cup in 1913. In their earliest years they had the services of a first-rate goalkeeper, William Hunter to name. He was a painter to trade and in the winter when work was slack he moved as a professional footballer with St. Bernard's, then a first-class team. Indeed, they were Scottish Cup holders in 1895. As a goalkeeper he was described in one word, "magnificent". This Willie

Hunter sometimes assisted Castletown Rangers. He was followed in the Swifts goal by Tom Sutherland and D. Leith, both of whom were good enough to be selected as custodian for the town team between 1901 and 1911. Other well-known Swifts of the period were Dan Manson and Sinc. Manson, both of whom transferred to Britannia; Wm. Miller, H. Morrison, James Sutherland, A. Sinclair, W. Murray; and around 1912 there were D. Macdonald, G. and W. Geddes, T. Melville, Andrew Oag, John Mackay, John Bremner, John S. Swanson, Bildie Smith, Alex. Morrison and William Brotchie.

Dan Manson ("Coll") was with Swifts during most of his playing days. He was a sturdy back with a powerful left foot that had the knack of readily finding position favourable to defence. He avoided tackling as much as possible. Dan was a friendly fellow, and frequently appeared in Thurso town teams. He formed

an outstanding defensive partnership with Alick Gunn for both Swifts and Thurso. Another Swifts' defender of merit before 1914 was Andrew Oag, and A. Morrison, who came into the ranks that year, had a distinguished career until the twenties, when Ted Shearsmith, too, gave his valued services. Writing of Swifts' defenders brings to mind two stalwarts of post-war years-Wm Phimster and Adam Dundas. Both were loyal club servants and won much recognition by local and county selectors. Indeed, Dundas donned Thurso colours on 28 occasions and appeared for Caithness in 16 games. A grand record by a grand player.

Post-war Success

Swifts came back with a bang in post-war years to achieve (for them) unparalleled success. They were in the ascendancy in the League-an honour they had not attained for 38 seasons. This distinction was especially welcome as the club celebrated its jubilee. Swifts inflicted on Pentland that club's heaviest defeat (10-2) in its 27 years. Altogether in 1947-48 Swifts were winners of all four local trophies; they won two cups the following season, and three in 1949-50

At the time Swifts were under the presidency of James G. Mackay (a former goalkeeper) and the team's consistently good performances were fittingly appreciated by the committee. Mr A. Begg, an original member, had a place of honour at the jubilee dinner; Mr Mackay himself was later honoured for invaluable services rendered over 36 years to Caithness football. He was an ex-chairman of the County F.A. Mr C. Shanlin was the Swifts' secretary, and Mr J. Macgregor, a grand old man of Thurso football, trainer. Among the players who made club history

were:- J. Cameron, G. Campbell, T. Cook, A. Dundas, D. Farquhar, W. Gunn, R. Hannah, Wm. Phimster, N. Sinclair, M. Sutherland (a centre for a passion for goals) and Wm. Swanson. Jacky Cameron came into the Swifts side as a young teenager in 1937 and established the enviable record of taking part in every club game over a period of 15 years.

A Marathon

Here it may be appropriate to recall a marathon contest in 1950 when Swifts were matched with Wick Thistle in a Mackenzie Shield county competition. Played on the home-and-home principle, the first game (at Thurso) was won 5-nil by Swifts; at Wick, Thistle held a 6-1 lead (after extra time, leaving the teams level on goal average. Swifts won the advantage at the toss for venue of final, but the teams' finished 4-4. Hence a fourth game was played at Wick when the teams were finally separated by only the narrowest of margins (2-1) in favour of Swifts. The winning team that blustery day read: - Morrison; Phimster and Dundas; Macleod, Malone and Cameron; Budge, Maclean, Sutherland, Mackay and Cook. Sutherland & Cook were the scorers.

An individual feat that came to notice was a hat-trick in each half by Ronnie Mackenzie, Swifts centre-forward, against Groats in the County League; a performance repeated within a month in a Thurso League Cup encounter with Acks. In a previous game against Pentland, Mackenzie counted four times. Good going, the year was 1964.

Approximately 25 Swifts have played for Caithness and 90 for Thurso.



Thurso Pentland
Season 1921-22

Back: David Sutherland, John Rosie, Neil Mowat, Alex Inrig, John Macdonald, Alex. Manson.

Middle: John Sutherland, Jimmy Rosie, Sinclair Henderson, John Sinclair, Albert Edwards, Colin Morrison, William "Bildie" Smith.

Front: Donald Henderson, Robert Smith, Jock Smith, Angie Munro.

Pentlands first season in the Thurso F.A. was a very successful one as they won every trophy open to them

HOW THE PENTLAND STARTED

The foundation of Pentland F.C. was unwittingly laid by returning ex-servicemen round about 1917 when they grouped together to provide opposition for Naval ratings. If the sailors were keen to play, so were Thursonians glad to something like peace and pleasant pursuits after years of turmoil. Hence one game led to others. The sailors were enthusiasts-they even shouldered goal-posts from Scrabster. But at this time their Thurso opponents were nameless and appeared in jerseys of which remarkably few were alike.

In 1918 this band of brothers-some of them had been wounded in the war-came under the chairmanship of Mr Donald G. Murray and turned out in royal blue jerseys as Thurso Club. This name had to be dropped with the advent of season 1919-20, when the other local cubs resumed activities. The players, however, wanted to keep together and at a meeting under the chairmanship of Mr Walter Forbes decided to seek membership of Thurso F.A. under the name Pentland.

The club's first minute book records that Pentland were formed on 19th November, 1918, and the office-bearers were; President, Robert A. Manson; Vice-president, William Morrison, ; secretary and treasurer, Alfred Miller; committee-D. Murray and A. Cowie; captain, J. Smith, vice-captain, D. Sutherland. At the end of the first year the cash balance was £8 5s 2.5d.

The honour of captaincy was first held by John Smith. Here was a steady, unflurried half-back or forward who's form was appreciated by selectors in both northern counties. He wore the Caithness colours on six occasions between, 1920-24, and later played several times for Sutherland. He did duty for Thurso in 15 inter-town contests. For a time he resided in Golspie and assisted the village club; and when he returned to Thurso he often travelled by motor cycle to play for Golspie Stafford. In one season alone it is estimated that he covered about 2000 road miles. John ("Jock to his associates), whose pastimes were golf

and swimming, was the very essence of good sportsmanship and a most likeable companion.



John Smith (Pentland)

His younger brother Robert (familiarily known as “Robbie”) led Pentland’s attack. He was an outstanding figure in the realm of sport but probably best known for his prowess on the football field. He collected 12 goals in eight games against Sutherland (1921-26) and 48 for Thurso in 30 outings against Wick in seven seasons. His biggest afternoon bag was six. At sports meetings he excelled in running and jumping events and speed and timing were among his soccer assets. He had no equal locally at billiards. This quiet, unobtrusive sportsman of so many achievements

passed away when only 40 years of age. A third brother (“Bildie” of Swifts) also played for Thurso town before 1914.

Unprecedented Success

In the twenties Pentlands enjoyed unprecedented ascendancy over other competing clubs and were perhaps the most capable team in the northern counties out with the Highland League. They won all five local trophies in three successive seasons, losing only one game in that time. Such pronounced superiority detracted interest from football locally. There were several consistently good supporters to support the natural abilities of the brothers Rosie and the brothers Smith. For example, there was Colin Morrison, who later immigrated to Australia. During the war he was severely wounded; the night he was carried down the line none of his comrades at the front thought he would survive. But he made an astonishing recovery and in post-war years was prominent and respected figure in Caithness football and athletic circles. He appeared on more than 30 occasions in Thurso’s representative team in the year 1920-27, and seven times for Caithness. Like club mate Smith (R), he also assisted Wick Academy in Qualifying Cup matches.

Although formed much later than the other Thurso clubs already mentioned, Pentland players have been selected on many occasions for representative games and played a remarkable role. About 45 of them have appeared in inter-county tussles and 84 have been honoured by the local Association.

DOUNREAY ATHLETIC

In recent years a fourth senior club was welcomed in Thurso. This was Dounreay Athletic and one of its representatives (Mr A. Lunney) became president of Caithness F.A. in 1960.

Like so many other things in Caithness, football was affected by the impact of the Dounreay atomic energy project. Several of the county clubs’ regular players, for instance, found employment there and thereafter their customary services were not always available. This led to frequent changes in the teams, owing to uncertainty; there were occasions when clubs had to find last-minute substitutes. Some of the local lads joined the new club.

Dounreay Athletic introduced new and sometimes talented players and this had an effect by the widening interest. Athletic’s first taste of silverware came in the

1962 Inter-County Miller Cup competition where they battled through to the final and faced Golspie Sutherland in the two legged final. Winning the first leg 4-1 in Golspie, Athletic finished the job in Thurso with a 5-5 score-line to take the cup 9-6 on aggregate and added the Thurso F.A.’s, League and Stratton Charity Cup for good measure.

Last year (1966) the Dounreay eleven became County League champions when on a June evening they thrashed Pentland 10-1 in their penultimate game. Dounreay’s first player to take part in a representative football was J. Douglas, included as outside-right in Wilson Cup games in 1958. Since then eleven Athletic players have been chosen for county teams and 19 have appeared for Thurso.



**Watten POW Camp 165 Guards
Season 1945-46**

NON-CAITHNESS PERSONELL

When the second war ceased Caithness had many hundreds of service personnel stationed in several districts in the area and on the aerodromes. Football was everywhere-even in the German prisoner-of-war camp at Watten and they were allowed to compete in the Wick F.A. Duncan Cup competition, which they were to go on and win, this would be 1946 or 1947.

Games with nothing at stake were arranged-sometimes hastily-before organised leagues were resuscitated. In 1946 Caithness F.A. instituted a rule that no club would be allowed the assistance of more than three "stranger Servicemen" in one match and that only players of British nationality would be permitted to participate in competitions conducted under their auspices. This meant that Polish

Players-and there were many of them-were debarred from local teams. Some had previously been with Thurso clubs and took part in friendly matches. There was nothing though to prevent local clubs meeting foreign opposition in non-competitive contests and such games were frequent in the towns. In the summer of 1947 Thurso F.A. included Dounreay Polish Camp team in the ballot for the Miller Cup competition, run on cup-tie principles. Actually, they had no right to do so as the trophy was gifted specifically for competition between Thurso teams only. The Poles had Swifts as opposition and the local lads won 4-1. Two Polish players were ordered off and one retired injured so that they finished with only eight players on the field. Swifts, however, were leading 3-1 when both teams were at strength.



Keiss Football Club

First winners of the Caithness North East Rural Football League in 1930

Back: Willdie Budge, Willie Leith, Franker Bain, Jim Mowat, Jim Bremner.

Middle: Jamesie Mowat, Ben Inrig, Addie Bremner.

Front: Roderick 'Rory' Bremner, William Robertson, Alex B. Henderson, Davie Henderson, George Walsh.

VILLAGE CLUBS

Sixty odd years ago football clubs existed in the villages of Castletown, Dunbeath and Lybster. The two first-mentioned clubs went by the name of Rangers, and Castletown boasted a junior as well as a senior eleven. The Lybster team adopted the district name of Portland. Nowadays there is a Rural League (which started in 1930) in which the districts of Bower, Castletown, Halkirk, John O'Groats, Keiss, Staxigoe, Stirkoke and Watten participate in the summer months. The old-time Castletown Rangers, however, provided stern opposition for any team in the county. Names that survive include Bill Hunter, the custodian who faced Glasgow Rangers in a Scottish Cup final; Johnnie Manson, reckoned the best defender in the county around 1895; the brothers Murray, one of whom later became a prominent politician in South Africa; and Cuthbertson, then a sprightly lad.

Sixty-two years ago (1906), the Parish of Latheron aspired to the county championship by sending a challenge to the Wick Football Association

representative team. For the "big parish" it had been claimed that it produced the county's "best brains"-but its challenge as regards twinkling feat failed on the football field. In fairness, though, they were adjudged worthy rivals who, with the practice and opportunities available in the towns, would have proved more dreaded opponents. The Latheron team on that occasion were:-J. Paterson (Lybster); D. Sinclair (Dunbeath) and A. Sutherland (Lybster); G. Sinclair (Dunbeath), P. Gunn (Lybster) and J. Sinclair (Dunbeath); D. Forbes and J. Gunn (Lybster), J. Mackay (Dunbeath), F. Sutherland and D. Gunn (Dunbeath). Wick won 3-1.

Later these "up'e coast" villages contested between themselves for possession of the Parish of Latheron Mackay Cup generally won by Lybster. The competition lapsed for some 22 years before 1950 when Dunbeath attempted again to wrest the cup from Lybsters grip. The scores, however, were discouraging to them, Lybster, winning 10-nil at home and 6-1 at Dunbeath.



An undated team photo of Lybster Portland

LYBSTER PORTLAND

Ultimately Lybster Portland moved into county football and gained an enviable niche. The village club first came into real prominence in 1955 when they carried off the County League championship, a feat repeated the following season with Wick senior trophy as well-in both cases with an undefeated record. In the County League they notched 53 goals and conceded seven. In a total of 30 competitive games they suffered only two defeats-and each cost them a trophy. The villagers showed an excellent team spirit and a dogged determination that was most marked when against strong opposition. Season 1956-57 also produced a long series of victories and three trophies-the Wick League (for third consecutive season), the Duncan Cup, and the combined counties Miller Cup for which honour they defeated Brora Rangers in the final.

In 1956 Lybster had six players in the successful Wick eleven, and their short spell in senior football have supplied 16 players for inter-county and 21 for inter-town engagements. Their most "capped" player was Jacky Dunbar, who made 24 appearances in a

county eleven and 23 for Wick-a particularly good record over ten years. Other often honoured Portland lads included Billy Mackay, a clever wingman (13 games for Caithness and 24 for Wick); Don Gunn (a goalkeeper from Wick), Jimmy Miller (also Wick and meantime Brora), Harry Coghill, Robbie Gordon, George Mackay, and backs named Falconer and Sutherland. Seasons mentioned above are quoted, but not definitely, as Lybster's brightest.

FIVE BROTHERS

What can be recorded is that each year the side included five brothers-Eric, William, David, Robert and Stanley Larnach-and on occasions Jimmy and Sandy. The father Magnus Larnach, was a member of the management committee. Several of the family caught the experience and discerning eye of the town and county selectors (Robert, for instance, turned out 14 times for Caithness and on 11 occasions for Wick) and altogether they established a record which they excusably are proud.

FIVE BROTHERS



The Larnach brothers.

The players from the left (in order of age) are as follows: Stanley, David, Sandy, Bill, Eric, Robert, Jim and father Magnus.

THE HARMSWORTH PARK



A match at the Harmsworth Park, Wick – circa 1930's

The Harrow Park (now the Harmsworth Recreation Park) has a long history. More than one hundred years ago (1866) the Wick Parochial board, to whom it then belonged, considered a proposal to divide the ground in half-acre lots. The Board had acquired it as a considered suitable site for the erection of a poor house, but the project abandoned. Later the park was purchased as a site for a private residence—a residence that never was built. The only relics of this enterprise are the rounded entrances in Harrow Road, presumed to be turning points for intending carriageways.

The Town Council later became proprietors with a view to building a slaughterhouse within the grounds. This scheme, too, went a-gley and in Edwardian days Wick Academy held the tenancy. In Harrow Park this club set and maintained a fine tradition in northern football.

When the 1914-18 war broke ended football in Wick as elsewhere had to be reorganised. A football Association was formed early in 1919 with the object of resuscitating the game locally. The members were :- President, John Stephen; vice-president, John Duchart; secretary, Mr Norman N. Glass; treasurer, Alex S. Begg; committee—James Anderson, Dan W. Bain, Alex “Sach” Macleod, James H. Miller and George Skinner.

This Association faced peculiar and exceptional circumstances as public recreation grounds and indeed almost all grounds suitable for football were under cultivation. Harrow Park remained but was available only by consent of the Town Council, who had it let for grazing purposes.

The use of the ground had to be applied for whenever needed and was generally granted, albeit grudgingly on frequent occasions. The park was the venue, too, for Highland games and livestock shows and the playing pitch suffered sadly in consequence. The independent Association, however, had football restarted and the local clubs were resuscitated and reformed their own Association on accepted lines.

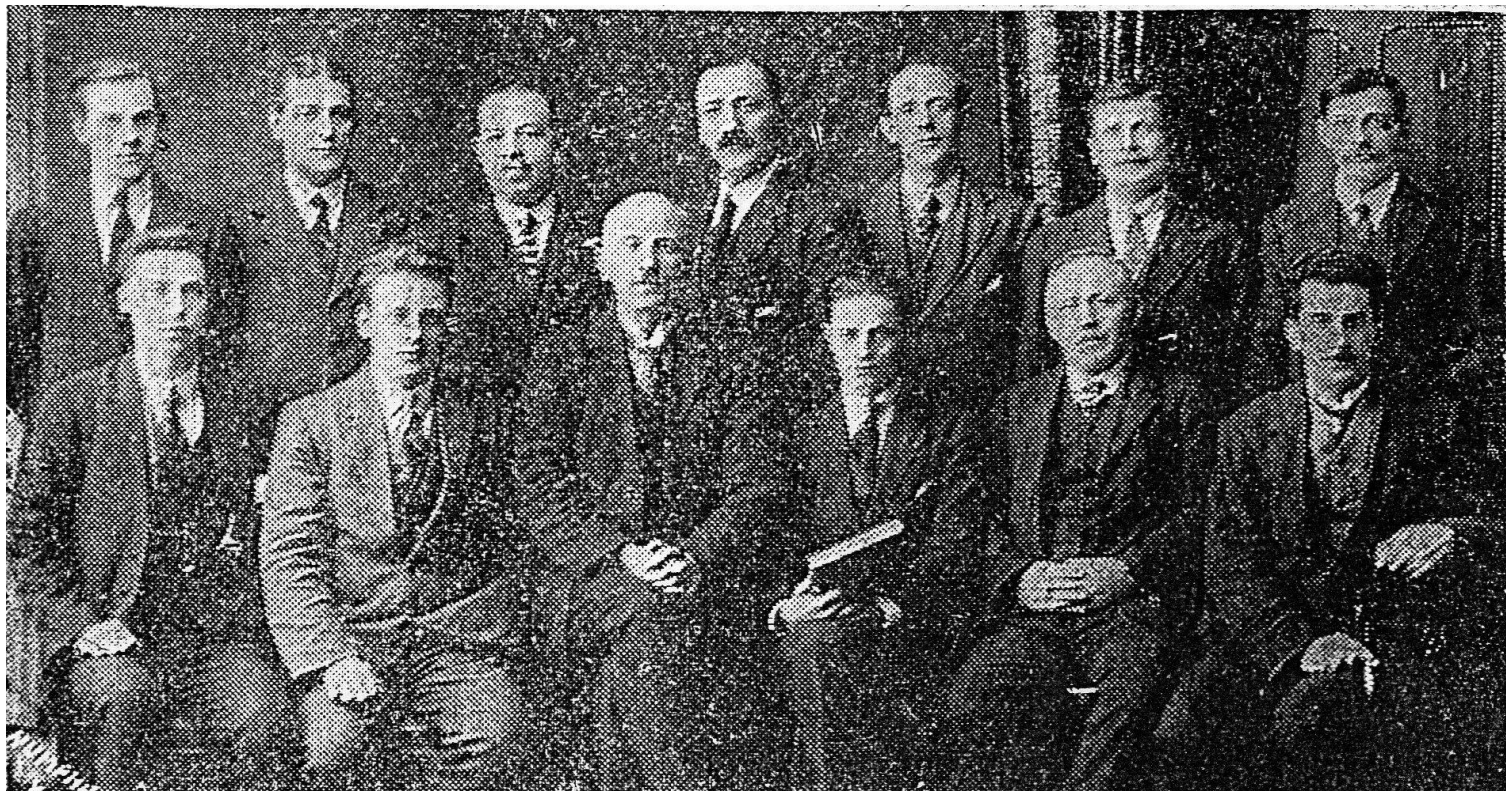
The whole set-up as regarded Harrow Park was anything but satisfactory. The ground, too, was often a quagmire in parts. It was then in (late 1919) that the

F.A. communicated with Sir Leicester Harmsworth, who replied that Association representatives should interview his son (at the time resident in Wick) and his agent, Mr D.W. Georgeson, solicitor. The Association appointed three representatives (one from each club) viz.—Messrs James H. Miller (Academy), Dan Dunnett (Groats), and Mr Norman N. Glass, Association secretary (Thistle, at request of that club). It was joy to their ears when, after the first meeting, young Mr Harmsworth gave the assurance that “Dad will buy it.” The negotiations, however, extended well into the summer of 1920.

Harmsworth Gift

Sir R. Leicester Harmsworth had been Parliamentary representative for Caithness for 19 years and was noted for beneficence constantly bestowed on constituents. Wick was out-with his constituency yet he responded readily to the appeal and generously acquired Harrow Park for £4000 as a recreation ground. The first draft of the proposed conditions of trust, however, was unacceptable in an important part to the Wick Football Association and was amended. Thereafter the administration and management of the park fell to a committee comprised of four representatives of the Comrades of the Great War, three from the Football Association, and three from the Cricket Association. Mr A. Kiddie was secretary. (The Wick F.A. representatives were James H. Miller, Academy; Dan Dunnett, Groats, and Frank More, Thistle). Any of the governing bodies failing annually to appoint representatives automatically dropped out, and the remaining body or bodies observing the provisions became entitled to elect the full number of members. (The F.A. alone survived but a few years ago, because of heavy upkeep expense, approached the Town Council to take over as trustees and a new management committee was formed.

Park Committee Formed



Harmsworth Park Improvements Committee

**Back: John Budge, George Mackenzie, Alex McCutcheon,
James E. Wares, Jessan Ross, James M. Anderson, Sinclair Mackay.
Front: Norman N. Glass, Hugh Henderson (treasurer),
Mr William "Bill" Smith (Chairman), Sewart Kilpatrick (Secretary),
John Christie, James H. Miller.**

The first Park Committee were without funds –and maybe enthusiasm. Finally (in 1920) an indignation meeting of local footballers and cricketers was held in the Carnegie Lybrary anent the deplorable condition of the playing pitch which had completely lost its surface. The outcome was the formation of an Improvements Committee. The first chairman-a genial chairman indeed-was Mr William Smith, headmaster of the South School; Mr Stewart Kilpatrick was secretary and Mr Hamish Henderson, treasurer. For the record, the other members of the original Improvements Committee were: Messrs Sinclair Mackay, who became an ever-active secretary; James E. Wares, who later succeeded Mr Smith in the chairmanship; James M. Anderson, John Budge, John Christie, Norman N. Glass, Alex McCutcheon, George Mackenzie, James H. Miller, Jessan Ross, David Sandison and James S. Swanson. This was the most open-minded committee on which anyone could serve. There were representatives from all clubs but they mingled freely for one purpose and no more agreeable and enthusiastic body ever existed in the town. The club spirit may still have been there but it never came to the

surface (apart from humorous allusions) and all were "Bill Smiths bairns."

By arrangement, this new committee temporarily took over Harrow Park and met the annual burdens (£28 at the time). Probably this led to the Management Committee ceasing to meet accordingly to constitution; anyhow that body became inactive and the management passed into the hands of a much more interested group of sportsmen.

The Improvements Committee raised money (more than £1000) in various ways by voluntary efforts and had the ground thoroughly drained, levelled and resurfaced, and damaged surrounding walls restored. During the process more than 2500 cart-loads of dressing were applied, the playing pitch thoroughly rolled and turfed, and rolled again. Later (probably 1926) they had a new pavilion erected-the existing rickety wooden shed had little o commend it-and the building was sighted near the north-west corner so that water could be introduced more conveniently. Altogether they wrought an astonishing transformation within the walls of the old Harrow Park.



Academy (stripes) take on old rivals Thistle at the Harmsworth Park.

Outbreaks of vandalism have been discouraging over the years as the park has at intervals been the target for destruction. In the autumn of 1948 players and tradesmen devoted much leisure time to the enlargement and improvement of the dressing pavilion. An addition was made to include shower-baths and toilets. Electric light was installed and the interior of the dressing-rooms repaired and repainted.

For some evenings the scenes of activity in the old park signified clearly that that football still had its charms and the result of the labours showed that voluntary services could be accounted among the best performed. Everyone interested in the welfare of football locally remain indebted to the talents and enthusiasm of those who worked with such goodwill.

Deserved Tributes

Two members of the Improvements Committee deserve an especial word of praise—James E. Wares and Sinclair Mackay, both of whom have now passed on. Mr Wares was a member of the original John O Groat team, and was among the more enthusiastic, the

more ambitious, and the more generous in a body that did such splendid work in the interest of sport. Nothing was too much for “J.E.” to undertake, and he moved with a will that few could muster. He unanimously succeeded to the chairmanship and certainly accomplished much of the youth of the town.

Mr Sinclair Mackay, is so happened, was also connected with the John O Groat club. “Connected” may not be the correct word; he was long years an active secretary who never flagged nor failed, and must have written volumes in performing secretarial duties. He was for a similarly lengthy period secretary of Wick F.A., of Caithness F.A. and of the Park Improvement Committee. He was indeed Mr Football in this area if ever there was one. No fellow gave of his services more willingly or for so long. The afternoon Mr Mackay collapsed and died working voluntarily in Harrow Park, football in Wick lost its most genuine servant. The Mackay Cup fittingly commemorates his association with the game since he came to Wick in 1911.



Sudden Death of Wick Football Official

Mr. Sinclair Mackay

There was widespread regret in the town and throughout the county when it was learned on Saturday that Mr Sinclair Mackay, retired civil servant. West Banks House, Wick, had died suddenly that afternoon in the Harmsworth Park.

Mr Mackay, who was in his 69th year, had gone to the local football ground which was being prepared for a friendly match between a Caithness select and a North of Scotland Select (drawn from Highland League clubs) in the evening. As secretary of the Caithness Football Association Mr Mackay had made all the arrangements for the game and, like the faithful official he was, he was in the park making certain everything would be in readiness. About 3 p.m. Mr Mackay collapsed. An ambulance was summoned and he was removed to Bignold Hospital where it was found he had already died.

His sudden passing is deeply regretted by the whole community whose sincere sympathy is extended to his wife and family.

Mr Mackay started his career as a clerk on the railway. Afterwards he joined the staff of the Ministry of Labour and was employed in the Wick Exchange. He then transferred to the Inland Revenue Office, where he worked for the greater part of his life, retiring two years ago.

Mr Mackay gave long and devoted service to the community in a voluntary capacity. While his main interest was sport he was ever ready to help in any local cause and was a member of various committees who valued his experience and advice. In football circles, Mr Mackay was known throughout the North of Scotland.

His secretary-ship of the Wick Groats Football Club, extended to almost 40 years, must be a record for the county. He was no ordinary official; all his energies were bent on the success and prosperity of his club. At the same time he did everything he could to foster football in all aspects.

He was one of the founder members of the Wick Juvenile Association inaugurated shortly after the First

World War and which did so much to promote the game among the youth. Mr Mackay was secretary of the Harmsworth Park Improvements Committee which was formed early in the 1920's and raised thousands of pounds to make the Harmsworth Park pitch one of the finest in the North.

Mr Mackay was secretary of Caithness Football Association for many years and for a period was secretary of the Wick Football Association. He was one of the most active members of the Riverside and Town Improvements Committee, being convener of the Gala Sports Committee.

In the First World War he served in the Royal Artillery and in the last war he gave his services to various voluntary bodies.

Mr Mackay is survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters, his eldest son, Mr Donald Mackay, died as a result of an accident while at work a few years ago.

The funeral, which took place to Wick cemetery on Tuesday, was largely attended. Members of the Groats football team carried the coffin from the hearse to the grave

The services were conducted by Rev. W. N. Scott whose tribute at the cemetery was most appropriate. His friends would remember Mr Mackay not as an old man but as one young at heart, said Mr Scott. He gave freely his services to the community and when others were not prepared proceed he was willing to go it alone.

Pall bearers were :-William Mackay, Squadron-Leader A. J. Mackay and R. Mackay (sons), A. Macleod (son in law), D. Mackay (grandson), J. Malcolm (brother in law), D. Campbell and A. Keith (cousins).

Among the many floral tributes were wreathes from the Groats, Academy and Thistle Football Clubs, Caithness and Wick Associations, the Harmsworth Park Committee, the Riverside Committee and the Thurso Football Clubs.



The Duke of Portland Bowl
Caithness v Sutherland

Drenching rain and a near gale wind ushered in a preliminary inter-county match between Sutherland and Caithness at Brora in April, 1913. Sutherland generally contrives to do things in style and on this occasion had the game set a-going by Lady Betty Butler. The referee was J.A. Fraser of the “Sutherland Times”, who at the time was secretary of the Sutherland F.A. What colours Caithness wore is not recorded but the Sutherland colours were gifted by Captain T. M. Hunter of Brora Woollen Mills-green jerseys with the County coat-of-arms (the “Cat”) in red on the left breast.

Things were not so bright near the end. Indeed, there were ugly moments when the referee granted Sutherland a penalty for handling. Mr Fraser appears to have been undecided in this decision and made the award only after consulting the home linesman who, a newspaper report ungenerously stated, took full advantage of the “opportunity.” So did D. T. Sutherland, Golspie, and the game ended in a 2-2 draw.

This 1913 tussle whetted the Northern appetite and on behalf of the teams in Caithness and Sutherland Mr. W. Cowper of the “John O Groat Journal” approached His Grace the Duke of Portland seeking a trophy for annual between the counties. His Grace responded and generously, presenting a silver quaich (to become known as the Portland Bowl) and in addition offered an annual donation of £5 to help with expenses. So far as known, the gift of money was never needed.

First Match for Trophy

The first match with the trophy at stake took place in Wick (Harrow Park) on New Years Day 1914, on a muddy ground. The Sutherland team travelled by special train and arrived in Wick accompanied by 140 followers. The game was a good one, crowned with excitement. Here’s a quote: “It was anybody’s game with the score at 3-3. Ding-dong was the order of the play. And then Begg, who was playing a magnificent game, was penalised for carrying the ball. The foul was close-in, and the ball was literally rushed through the goalposts being wrecked in the melee. Sutherland wins! So the Cattanachs became first winners of the Portland Bowl and the inter-county championship. Teams that contested were:-

Caithness – John Begg (Academy), George Mowat (Lybster Portland), George Sutherland (Groats), Don Ross (Groats), J. Laurie (Acks), D. Miller (Thistle), James H. Miller (Academy), David Ross (Acks), William Macniven (Groats), David Skinner (Academy), W. McPherson (Britannia).

Sutherland – W. Macdonald (Brora), W. M. Munro (Golspie), Cecil Ross (Brora), J. T. Matheson (Helmsdale), John Stewart (Golspie), D. G. M’Culloch (Dornoch), D. Macdonald (Brora), G. A. Sutherland (Brora), J. A. Fulton (Golspie), H. Woodhouse (Dornoch), T. Munro (Lairg).

The referee was Jack Waters (Wick).

The goal scorers for Caithness were the same as in 1913-W. McPherson and James H. Miller, the third

was an own goal; J. A. Fulton had all four goals (one from a penalty) for Sutherland. This Gillespie centre was a flying cyclone—a big fellow with an upsetting dash. Unhappily, he was blinded on the battlefield. The finest forward on the field though was Geordie Sutherland, the Briar Wizard, who was an architect in Wick and played for the Grouts. He helped Academy and the town teams on occasions. Like at least three of the team—Beg, Minivan and Skinner—he was regrettably killed in action on the WW1 battlefields. For Caithness Jimmy Miller sparkled on the right wing and it was said that in that position he had no equal in the North. He returned after the intervening war to give his town and county equally distinguished service as a centre-half.

The Portland Bowl was first presented to the winners in Ball's Station Hotel in Thurston Street where the Sutherland team and officials dined after the match and when several Caithness representatives were present. Mr W. J. Dudgeon, Creaking, presided, and Mr Wm. Cowper, on behalf of Caithness F.A., handed the trophy to G. A. Sutherland, captain of the winning team. Several appropriate speeches were made and the chairman, in proposing the health of The Duke of Portland, described him as “the finest sportsman in the world”.

To begin with, the holders had only to draw the following year's game to keep possession of the bowl. When the home-and-home principle was introduced one win was still sufficient for the holders; the opposition required three points from the two games to win back the bowl. This peculiar arrangement continued until April, 1932, when the competing associations decided that goal average over the two matches would be the reckoning from 1933 onwards.

First Post-War Match

When the games between the counties were to restart in 1920 Caithness pressed strongly for a two game contest. Sutherland were agreeable but confirmed the change only in a telegram. Before that season's contest at Gillespie commenced the Association secretaries of Caithness (Wick F.A. & Thurston F.A.) met with the Sutherland secretary and was given an assurance of a return game. That undertaking was fulfilled but in an astonishing way.

The game at Golspie finished 2-0 in favour of Sutherland and the Caithness contingent were bewildered to learn from the Monday newspapers that the trophy had been presented to Sutherland as winners on the Saturday evening. The Caithness team and officials were in the Sutherland Arms Hotel that

evening (and most of Sunday), yet no representative was invited to the ceremony and a man from Dornoch spoke for Caithness. This came as shock news when it leaked. The teams in this first post-war contest played in a fine spirit and at unusual pace, were:-

Sutherland – Don. Macrae (Golspie), J. Landles and Cecil Ross (Brora), D. G. M'ulloch (Dornoch), W. Mackay (Golspie), R. Sutherland (Brora), J. G. Macdonald (Golspie), J. Macdonald (Dornoch), A. Ross (Embo), C. Brown (Golspie), Andy Macdonald (Brora).

Caithness – Hugh Doull (Acks), A. Morrison (Swifts), James Rosie (Pentland), Don Ross (Groats), James Bremner (Acks), John Matheson (Academy), George Forbes (Acks), George “Rover” Tait (Academy), John Smith (Pentland), J. D. Millikin (Acks), David Ross (Acks).

Referee – G. Baillie, Brora.

A second game did take place at Wick as arranged but Sutherland for some reason regarded it as a “friendly”. That game will rank as among one of the finest contested in the Harrow Park. The afternoon was favourable, and high praise was given to the Wick mid-line of Don Ross (Groats, and years later to become chairman of Thurso F.A.), James H. Miller (Academy) and Sandy Bremner (Thistle), who immigrated to Canada. By the way, won by the only goal of the game, credited to John Smith (Pentland). Had it been 2-0 what a rumpus there might have been between the rival Associations! As it was, Sutherland was entitled to the trophy on goal average. The Sutherland team showed two changes from that success at Golspie, and in the Caithness side James Farmer (Wick) was in goal and other three Wick players James H. Miller, Sandy Bremner, and John D. Gunn at outside-left.

The first inter-county game played at Thurso was in March, 1921, when the gate drawings (£30) constituted a record for the town and a well balanced team had an emphatic victory-5-2. Sutherland though was handicapped that day in that five Brora players called off. The Caithness side was :- Hugh Doull (Acks), George Rosie (Academy), James Rosie (Pentland), James Cormack (Academy), James H. Miller (Academy), John Bremner (Groats), George Forbes (Acks), Robbie Smith (Pentland), John Smith (Pentland), George “Rover” Tait (Academy), David Ross (Acks). The scorers were Jimmy H. Miller (2), G. Forbes, Robbie Smith and George “Rover” Tait. Mr John T. Macarthur, Wick, was referee



Above is the Caithness team which defeated Sutherland by five goals to two at Thurso on the 26th March, 1921, thus bringing the Portland Bowl trophy to Caithness for the first time. The group includes, reading left to right:-

Norman N. Glass (secretary, Caithness F.A.), Magnus More (Wick, reserve), George Forbes (Acks), Alan Ross (Wick), George Rosie (Academy), S. Kilpatrick (Wick F.A.), John Bremner (Groats), James Rosie (Pentland), James H. Miller (Academy), Frank More (Wick F.A.), Hugh Doull (Acks), Clarence Omand (Wick F.A.), Robert Smith (Pentland), H. Manson (Thurso F.A. linesman), David Ross (Acks), H. Henderson (Wick F.A.), George "Rover" Tait (Academy), John Smith (Pentland), Donald Shearer (Wick F.A.), James Cormack (Academy), Alex M'Cutcheon (Wick F.A.), and John T. M'AArthur (referee).



The Sutherland team that faced Caithness in 1921 match in Thurso.



Sutherland – 1923

Players only L to R: R. D. Macdonald (Golspie), Frank Macpherson (Helmsdale), Alex Sutherland (Cavaig), Macintosh (Dornoch), J. Landles (Brora), Macrae (Golspie), Murdo Maclean (Dornoch), Andy Macdonald (Brora), J. C. Macdonald (Golspie), George Melville (Golspie), George Ross (Brora).

When the home-and-away fixtures were introduced in 1924 Caithness had a well merited win 4-2 at Brora and drew 3-3 in Wick. Robbie Smith (Pentland) had two goals in each game. Prior to the commencement of the game at Wick, several members of the Sutherland team declined to have their photo taken despite the

persuasion of some of their comrades and others to face the camera. What was the explanation? Perhaps excessive modesty but more likely a superstitious strain had come to the surface-The victorious Caithness team pictured below.



Caithness – 1924

Portland Bowl winners

Back: A. Macutcheon (Wick F.A.), John Smith (Pentland), Robert Smith (Pentland), Robert Tait (Academy), David Tait (Acks), A. Brazier (Wick), Colin Morrison (Pentland), Unknown.

Front: Unknown, Sinclair Henderson (Pentland), James Marshall (Groats), Peter Grant (Thistle), George “Rover” Tait (Academy), Angus Munro (Pentland), Mr William Brotchie (Thurso F.A.)

Caithness was lucky to be two goals up in the early stages of the first encounter in 1925 when Wick was the venue and finally retired winners by four goals to one. Goal getters were Geordie Rosie (Pentland), John Rosie (Pentland), Robert Smith (Pentland) and Donald Shearer (Groats). Weather conditions that day were deplorable, snow falling heavily throughout the play. Sutherland was willing to postpone the match to a future date but Caithness would not accede and the captains decided on a 70-minute game-35 each half.

Snowbound

The players who, against their better judgement, braved the blizzard on the field were – J. Best, Charles Sutherland and Alex Sutherland (all Brora), H. Innes and David Sutherland (both Helmsdale), d. Macdonald, J. Smith, George Melville and J. C. Macdonald (all Golspie), Don Sutherland and J. Mackintosh (both Dornoch). Leaving Wick that evening at 6:30pm they had a most trying experience on a bitterly cold journey home. Near Berriedale, because of the depth of snow, it was found impossible to proceed. The leading car became embedded and without suitable implements it was an arduous task to get it moving again. This accomplished, the cars returned to a secluded part of the road where they remained until daybreak.

Around 5a.m. the majority of the players decided to walk to Helmsdale; the others returned to Wick by car. The trek across the Ord battling through huge soft snowdrifts was one of endurance and those who braved the storm did remarkably well to struggle through the drifts and reach Helmsdale after a four hour tussle with the elements. At Helmsdale a car was made available and the trekkers reached Brora, Golspie and Dornoch, victims of an unhappy experience that must be recounted as the most exhausting in the annals of northern football.

Sutherland won each game by a goal in 1927 to recapture possession of the trophy after being with their opponents for six successive years. In fact the Caithness deficiency of but a solitary per game in 1927 was only attained with a last second conversion of a penalty taken by Peter Grant.

Such is the whirligig of football that the following March Sutherland sustained the heaviest reverse until then in the competition. Before the opening game in Golspie the Sutherland selection was said to be unpopular locally; after the game, we knew it was! Through the brothers Rosie of Thurso, Caithness scored five goals-“Joey” had three and Jimmy two. Notes say that the main factors contributing to this decisive victory were the winning of the toss that gave the visitors first advantage of a driving wind, a

commanding intermediate division, a quick moving attack that got its inspiration from behind, an opportunistic inside-left, and, above all, a team which blended beautifully

Four Thurso Brothers

There were four brothers Rosie-John, Jimmy, George, and Alex (killed in the 1914-18 war)-all talented in the art of football. Altogether, they aggregated 39 representative games for Caithness and 122 for Thurso town.

Jimmy was outstandingly gifted and as a cultured footballer and leader could be best described in one word: magnificent. When pace is allied to unusual skill brilliancy is attained. That was Jimmy Rosie. For years he gave distinguished service against heavy odds to Academy in important games and was a favourite in Wick.



George "Joey" Rosie (Thurso Pentland)

Geordie or "Joey" as he was commonly known, too, assisted Academy in Q.C. matches. He usually figured at inside-left and was a sharpshooter extraordinary-often lashing the ball home with the outside of his boot. He accumulated 70 goals-an excellent achievement-in representative matches (11 in six games in 1925) and goodness knows how many for Thurso Pentland in local football; checking 1929 alone, he was that year credited with 38. "Joey" was 26 years in senior football in Thurso and had a son (also George), as a team mate in 1947.

Returning to 1928, only four members of the humbled Sutherland side retained places for the return bout at Wick, seen by about 1000 onlookers. The changes, however, had little effect as Caithness easily brought their two-match goal aggregate to 10-1. The goals here were shared by G. Rosie (2), J. R. Miller (2), and William Mulraine-all in a forward line that was described as a "goal thirsty quintette." The losers'

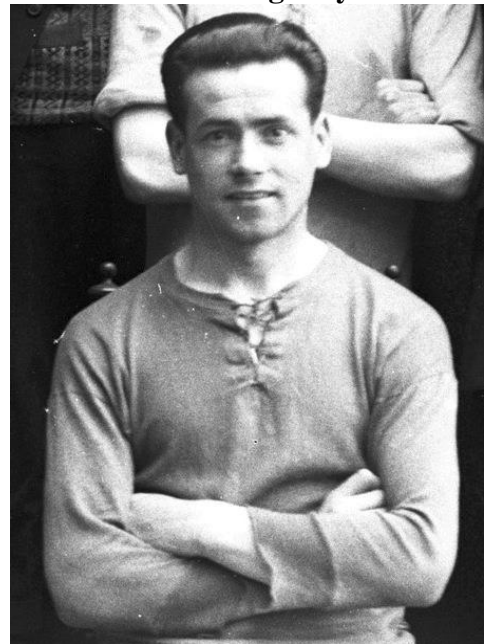
and worked in unison. The Caithness team were said to have given "the best exhibition of real football seen in Sutherland for many years"

score was made by G. Sutherland, the Brora Rangers centre.

This record-making team was unchanged and read :- Pat Gunn (Academy), Peter Grant (Academy), John D. Gunn (Thistle), Jack Shearer (Acks), James Rosie (Pentland), William Thomson (Groats), J. R. Miller (Acks), Sid. J. Toman (Academy), William Mulraine (Groats), George Rosie (Pentland) and Angus Munro (Pentland).

G. Baillie, Brora, refereed the Golspie game and William Miller had charge of the second.

Outstanding Player



James R. Miller (Thurso Acks)

James R. Miller was stated to be "the outstanding player of the 22. He was a fleet-footed and sure-footed wing man." Indeed he was-all that and more. He was enthusiastic, untiring and quick to seize an opening with head or either foot. Thirty four goals were scored by him in representative matches-five for Caithness and 29 for Thurso. In 1929 with a total bag of 45 he was the highest individual goal-getter in the County that season. "James R." was a natural player, stylish and sure, and fit to rank among the best. He was in 53 representative teams-sometimes in the defence-and gathered 15 goals in six successive seasons in Harmsworth Bowl matches.

The following season (1929) Caithness continued its winning way with a 4-nil result at Thurso, where there was a record attendance of 1100, including 200 from Wick. Gate drawings were £54. The ref. was Robert Smith, Thurso, the speedy centre who used to collect goals. All four goals were scored in the opening 30 minutes by James R. Miller (Acks), George "Joey" Rosie (Pentland), William Mulraine (Groats) and

William Thomson (Groats), and while Caithness were facing a brilliant sun. The men of the match were the rival pivots-Jack Shearer (Acks) and Alex Sutherland (Brora Rangers).

Return Match

Shearer and Toman were unavailable for the return game at Helmsdale and D. G. Macleod (Thistle) and David Oag (Thistle) came into the team. Nothing went as wanted by Caithness on the peculiar Castle Ground and they were lagging 4-1 when with less than 20 minutes to go the visiting captain (James Rosie) exchanged places with Macleod (centre-half). What a transformation! The whole course of the game altered completely due to Rosie's command in the middle and his judicious forcing play. Three goals came in ten

Sutherlands Double Win

Munro was at left-back in 1930-a year in which Sutherland had a double win. At Brora it was a treat to see a young Sutherland select take command-they were too fast and confident for opponents who did not settle until the last half-hour. By that time there were four goals against them and they were 5-2 behind at the finish. Bill Mulraine and Geordie Rosie were again the Caithness marksmen. In the second match (at Wick) the home team failed to score and Sutherland won by a penalty goal converted by A. Urquhart (Brora Rangers). It was considered by some that Caithness was hanging on too long to its veterans. (Only three of the team retained places in 1931.) The Association though introduced a new referee and one who would give praiseworthy service-D. B. Cowper. He blossomed first with Thistle as an outside-left, was selected 24 times for Wick and had one county game in 1926. Later he became a member of the Juvenile Association and chairman of the Referees' Association when first formed. "D.B." won wide respect as a referee, not only in Wick but in Thurso. Someone once daubed the referee the autocrat of the soccer field-Mr Cowper was just that and enjoyed the confidence of players and officials.

The year 1931 produced topsy-turvy results with Caithness a goal adrift on aggregate. At Thurso succeeded 5-3 after leading 5-1 with 14 minutes to go. Yet the final score gave a much better reflection of the play. Bill Mulraine (Groats, 2), Angie Munro (Pentland, 2) and Don Mackay (Acks) scored for the winners.

Munro's penalty goal should not have been allowed to stand. Willie Thomson had moved into the box in his leisurely way to take the kick when Munro darted past him and belted the ball into the goal. That incident created a rumpus but the referee wrongly allowed the goal to stand.

For the fourth successive year Pat Gunn guarded the Caithness goal and loomed largely in the picture whenever disaster threatened. "Three times (we read) he saved when the opposing centre-forward was clean through and within a few yards of goal, and once he

minutes, and Sutherland had to defend desperately towards the end to escape defeat. The Caithness goals were shared that afternoon by "Joey" Rosie and "Bill" Mulraine with a brace apiece.

With John Rosie at back that season it was unique to find three brothers perform in the County eleven. Again "Joey" had Angie Munro (Pentland) as a forceful partner on the left. He was noted for spectacular runs and drives with which he was wont to raise thrills around the barriers. What better testimony to his good qualities as a footballer than to emphasise that Thurso selectors relied on him for 17 years and that he made a record-making 67 appearances in the town team. The county used his services on 18 occasions.

dived at the feet of Mackenzie (Brora Rangers) when he was in the act of shooting. This was the tit-bit of the match. It was a lightning-like movement on the part of the goalkeeper, and his cap flew into the air. Lying prone on the ground with arms outstretched he held grimly to the ball against the full force of the boot. No better save has been seen on the park."

When Pat Gunn came to Wick he made an uncertain debut in Academy's goal but quickly developed to be numbered among the most brilliant custodians who have thrilled northern crowds. He was young, tall, strong and agile and thrived on work. Pat set a new high standard in goalkeeping locally, and when he appeared in Inverness was carried shoulder-high from the field after a flawless exhibition. The Invernessians were proud of his performance-a performance on his part that was commonplace for Academy, for Wick and Caithness over several years.

William Thomson was the mainstay of the Groats. He accomplished much-very much-in a seemingly leisurely way. A peculiarly lengthy stride made his speed deceptive; his sense of timing and position was the qualities that distinguished him from his fellow players. The effortless power he could get behind a ball was remarkable from one of his physique. For a season he assisted Inverness Caledonian. He wore the Caithness colours in a dozen games and appeared for Wick 27 times.

At Dornoch

The return game at Dornoch (Sutherland won 5-2, Mulraine and Oag scoring for Caithness) took place on a day of strong wind and heavy rain. Of Caithness it was said the county "could never do worse." To be fair, however, the selectors juggled with the players and Wick boys Robertson and Sinclair (both Groats) collided awkwardly near the beginning, resulting in the former becoming a "passenger" on the wing. Yet twice they captured the lead but were nowhere after the interval. Some became peeved at decisions given by the referee and there was resentment when he adjudged the goalkeeper to be behind the line when he stopped the ball that gave Sutherland an equalising goal. It was one of these decisions that could be argued

forever. When Sutherland obtained their fifth goal the visitors' defence again protested vehemently that it was taken from an offside position. An unpleasant situation arose when the referee, rightly or wrongly, turned aside the appeal; a few of the Caithness team assumed a silly attitude by sitting down and refusing to go on with the game. Was sitting down childish? Maybe. Should an amateur show dissent when seeming injustice follows seeming injustice? The referee, that that now far-away day was George Baillie, Brora, who had previously handled five inter-county games and deservedly earned widespread confidence and respect. Referees make mistakes but banish the thought that they deliberately err. Happily, the Caithness lads did not persist in their fooling and the game proceeded.

Inter-County Match Records at Golspie

Mr Baillie officiated again at Golspie in 1932 on a day that two records were established. There was an attendance of 1700 (receipts-£61 11/6 and the aggregate score of eleven goals-Caithness had six-was

the heaviest "crop" in these representative tussles. The same team did duty for Caithness in both games that season, viz,-William Murray (Pentland), Peter Grant (Academy), Dan Thomson (Academy), David Banks (Academy), Alex "Pud" Miller (Thistle), William Thomson (Groats), David Oag (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), James R. Miller (Acks), Bill Mulraine(now Thistle), Angie Munro (now Acks). Ferguson scored a hat-trick at Golspie, and the other scorers were Oag, Mulraine and Munro. At Wick the game ended in a 1-1 draw, Willie Thomson converting a penalty kick.

The referee at Wick on that occasion was James I. Page. The award itself was hotly disputed by the Sutherland players. Whenever Mulraine burst through (as was his habit) defenders had two options: adopt the fouling tactics or enjoy the netting swell. A defender named Macdonald chose the first option. No one contested the infringement; the contention was that it occurred outside the goal area.



A Caithness and Sutherland select XI line up for the opening match of Brora Rangers new ground, named Dudgeon Park, in 1932.



Caithness Select
27th November 1932
Sutherland v Caithness

The official opening of Brora Rangers new ground Dudgeon Park.

Back: Jimmy Hull (Groats), Dan Thomson (Academy), Will Murray (Pentland), David Rosie (Groats), William Thomson (Groats), Jack Evans (Groats), Robert Tait (Coach).
Front: David Oag (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), Markie Miller (Thistle), George "Joey" Rosie (Pentland, Angie Munro (Acks).

Prolific Goal Getter



William "Bill" Mulraine

Bill Mulraine was a bustling centre and did not indulge in frills. He played it hard and took many knocks in the process. Not many bouquets came his way although he was given more town (52) and County (23) "caps" than any Wick player. He was the most prolific goal-getter the county has known. Some of his successes were among the most spectacular seen here-or anywhere else for that matter.

For Wick, Mulraine totalled 59 goals, for Caithness 25, and in that collection notched five on two occasions, four in two games, and had five hat-tricks for-by. In the Harmsworth Bowl competition he scored in nine consecutive seasons; he also scored in 13 successive Wilson Cup games (1933-38), namely-21231112 21312.

In 1928 (mainly an outside-left) he scored 23 goals in 12 consecutive games. His figures read-22221112132 and he also had one in an abandoned game at Wick. The five goals were not got when the opposition was strongest-at Thurso in an inter-town Wilson Cup match. In the previous game at Wick Donnie Miller,

the clever Academy centre, had accomplished the hat-trick and Thurso defence concentrated on him in the return game. But Wick had brought in Mulraine at inside-left and with Millers movements being closely shadowed by anxious defenders Mulraine got more than usual scope for his deadly shooting. He took full advantage of opportunities presented and set up an individual scoring record for such games.

Checking 1929 as an ordinary season, Mulraine is found with 28 goals in local football and 42 in 1935. With Academy in 1938-39 he had 32 goals (apart from representative matches) made up thus-33321214112414. He lasted 16 years and altogether must have topped the 400 mark. In sterner games in the Q.C: he was also on the dot and his feats included an astonishing hat-trick at Dingwall against Ross County. Belated congratulations to Bill Mulraine on compiling a notable scoring record. There was something dynamic about him. "Watch Mulraine" became by-words locally.

Double Wins for Caithness

Caithness had a double win in 1933 – a 4-2 win at both Thurso and Helmsdale. The successful team was made up of :- William Murray (Pentland), David Rosie (Groats), Dan Thomson (Academy), Don Sutherland (Pentland), J. Evans (Groats), Alec Macleod (Groats), David Oag (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), James R. Miller (Acks), Geordie Rosie (Pentland) Angie Munro (Acks). Fellow townsman Don Mackay (Acks) took the place of Sutherland in the away game, and William Mulraine and W. Macleod (Wick) formed the left wing. Ferguson had two goals in each game and J. R. Miller singles. Although Sutherland fought doggedly they could not match the teamwork of their opponents. It was in 1933 that the new rule deciding the contest on goal average was introduced. It did not require to be applied until several seasons ahead.

Caithness again earned two victories in 1934 with scores of 5-4 at Brora and 3-2 at Wick. The team at Brora put up a great first half display and deservedly held a 4-nil lead at the interval. After the turn-around Sutherland rallied and was the top team. It took all the skill and steadiness of a strong half-back line to deny them more than four goals (one from a penalty) until Joey Rosie succeeded with a rocket shot-his second count in the match. Hull, Munro and Miller also scored. The team:- Will Murray (Pentland), A. Macleod and J. R. Miller (Acks), Jimmy Hull (Groats), Jack Shearer (Acks), J. Cowie (Academy), David Oag and Markie Miller (Thistle), Geordie Rosie (Pentland), William Thomson (Groats), Angie Munro (Acks).

For the return game (at Wick), Dan Thomson (Academy) came in for Macleod and Alex Ferguson (Thistle) and D. Henderson (Thistle) for Miller and Rosie in the forward line. Two factors contributed to the attendance being the lowest ever-rain accompanied by a blustery wind and an international broadcast (a novelty at the time). Young David Henderson and Ferguson had scored for Caithness but when Sutherland equalised at 2-2 the home players from the re-centre manoeuvred the ball right through the Sutherland defence without them touching it for Oag to place it in the net.

David Christie

That was the year that Sutherland came back to play a “friendly” to help make good financial loss. It was the year, too, that a tiny laddie from outlandish Altnaharra burst upon the scene and became a problem to Caithness for three successive seasons. He was David Christie, and there must have been a sigh of relief on this side of the Ord when this mighty atom signed for Queen’s Park and created a sensation in Scottish League football through his outstanding skill and energy. Christie appeared several times in Scottish Amateur International teams. With the famous amateurs of Glasgow he developed into a tireless

inside-left and just before the outbreak of war in 1939 signed for Aberdeen.

The Portland Bowl returned to Sutherland in 1935 by means of a double triumph and the following season it stayed there when the holders-with sides level on goals-retained possession by a margin of two corners (five against three) in extra time played at Wick. Mulraine, who had a couple of goals, retired after the interval; the other scorer was W. Robertson (Pentland), who also had a goal at Golspie.

This was a most peculiar match (at Wick). For instance, Caithness donned red jerseys (Sutherland’s usual colour) instead of black and amber stripes, and Sutherland turned out in black and white stripes because Brora Rangers had declined to loan their outfit and two of their players withdrew from the county team in sympathy with their own club, who were unhappy on account of the Association upholding a protest from Dornoch and ordering the final of the Stafford Cup (won by Brora at the first attempt) to be replayed. Billed to commence at 3:30, it was after four o’ clock before the county teams lined up, the delay being caused by the late arrival of a special train from Sutherland with the team and supporters. Then, with an extra half-hours play, the match did not finish till about 6:30. Caithness had some bother, too, in that both selected backs-John Miller (Acks) and Dan Thomson, (Academy)-were unfit to play.

Team that afternoon – George Campbell (Acks); Eddie Shearsmith (Pentland), Murdo Swanson (Acks), David Banks (Academy), Jimmy Hull (Groats), Anthony Haggerty (Academy), David Oag (Thistle), William Hair (Pentland), William Mulraine (Groats), W. Robertson (Pentland), Angie Munro (Acks). Mr Alex Gray, Wick, was referee, and he also officiated in 1937 and 1938, when again he had to apply the extra time rule to decide the destination of the trophy. Reports state that Jimmy Hull was the outstanding player on the field

Season – 1937

Next season (1937) the Caithness team was pretty much the same with George Ross (Acks) and Dan Thomson (Academy) at the back to the exclusion of Shearsmith and Haggerty. Mulraine smacked home a couple of goals at Thurso to separate the teams at the end of a clean and interesting game, and on Couper Park a 2-2 draw took place. The display by the rival goalkeepers –George Campbell (Acks) and A. Ross (Dornoch) provided really good entertainment.

Outstanding “Player of the year”



Jimmy Hull (Groats, Wick & Caithness)

According to newspaper reports – and pseudonymous writers are generally not addicted to superlatives – the Caithness “player of the year” in three pre-war and three post-war seasons was Jimmy Hull, firm favourite with Wick fans. He was a staunch, judicious half-back with the knack of creating space for himself before initiating attack. Hull first played for Caithness in 1934 and by 1948 had taken a prominent part in 15 Portland Bowl matches. Frequently he led the Wick team against Thurso and in 20 such games displayed good judgement and accomplished much hard work. Peculiarly enough, he never appeared in a Caithness team against Orkney. Whatever the reason, it certainly wasn't lack of ability.

Peter Craigmyle, the distinguished Scottish referee, controlled the initial game (at Brora) in season 1938 and the home team were considered somewhat lucky to gain an equal share of four goals. David Oag (Thistle) and Tommy Tait (Groats) snapped scoring chances for the visitors.

Drawn Game in Gale

There was an icy, near-gale force wind when the teams met in Harmsworth Park. They battled away for 90 minutes to again share four goals, Oag and Mulraine counting for Caithness. In the dying minutes the home eleven seemed set for victory until R. Macleod, the Lairg centre, snatched an equaliser against the gale. In the extra period Oag restored the Caithness lead. The winners owed much to a brilliant performance by R. Applegate (Thistle) in goal. He made several saves that merited all-round applause.

Here are the names of the winning team:- R. Applegate (Thistle); George Ross (Acks), Adam Dundas (Swifts), Alex Macleod (Groats), Jimmy Hull (Groats), Don Macleod (Academy), David Oag (Thistle), Tommy Tait (Groats), William Mulraine (Groats), Anthony Haggerty (Academy), Roy Manson (now Acks).

William Robertson (Pentland) and William Macleod (Thistle) formed the left wing at Dudgeon Park.

Murray Harper (penalty), Manson and Oag gave Caithness three goals to win 3-1 an unexciting but sporting tussle at Thurso in 1939, but they were defeated 4-3 (Mulraine shot two and David Banks the other) at Golspie when Mr Craigmyle again was referee. D. B. Cowper had charge at Thurso when the Caithness lined up:- James Durrand (Groats); George Ross (Acks), Dan Thomson (Academy), David Banks (Academy), D. G. Macleod (now Academy), Wm. Phimster (Swifts), David Oag (Thistle), “Jock” More (Thistle), William Mulraine (now Academy), Murray Harper (Academy), Roy Manson (Acks).

Thomson, Phimster, Oag and More did not play at Golspie and their places were taken by Adam Dundas (Swifts), Murdo Swanson (Acks), J. Sutherland (Swifts) and Ronald Mackay (Acks)-all of Thurso. The players had done enough to hold the trophy for the fourth successive season.



Caithness line up at Golspie in the 1939 Portland Bowl game.

Back: Unknown, David Banks (Academy), George Ross (Acks), James Durrand (Groats), Unknown, Adam Dundas (Swifts), Ronald Mackay (Acks), J. Sutherland (Swifts).

Front: Murdo Swanson (Acks), Murray Harper (Academy), William Mulraine (Academy), Roy Manson (Acks), Don G. Macleod (Academy).

FIRST POST WAR MATCH

Competition for the Portland Bowl was resumed in 1946 after being in abeyance for six war years. Only three of the previous players found places in the Caithness team-Dan Thomson, Jimmy Hull and David Oag. At Brora, His Grace the Duke of Sutherland attended the contest, which ended 2-2. Caithness team was:-W. Angus (Thurso), Alistair Cormack (Groats), Dan Thomson (Academy), Jack Robertson (Groats), Sgt. Corbett (Thurso), Jimmy Hull (Groats), David Oag (Thistle), James Corner (Academy), W. Reid (Thurso), Andy Farquhar (Academy), Thomas Cook (Swifts). Referee was William Macdonald, Brora.

There were two changes and a reshuffle of positions for the next match at Wick. Sutherland won easily by three clear goals. The bowl was handed over to Sonny Miller, captain of the winning team.

The following season each county won 4-3 at home. Peter Craigmyle, Aberdeen, was in charge at Dudgeon Park and had William Macdonald and D. B. Cowper, who refereed the Thurso game, as linesmen. The home team were three goals in front (one from a penalty) at one stage but Caithness recovered sufficiently to be on level terms and (it was stated) it was against the run of

play that a well-planned movement, finished by W. Coull' left Caithness behind but ahead in science.

Controversial Goal

The Caithness eleven at Thurso (as at Brora) were:- Christie Duncan (Thistle), H. Anderson, Adam Dundas (Swifts), Andy Farquhar (Academy), William Phimster (Swifts), A. Jack (Thistle), George Lyall (Groats), William Miller (Thistle), Jack Gunn (Thistle), A. Durrand (Academy). With less than twenty minutes to go Caithness enjoyed a 4-1 lead. Then a "was-it-over-the-line" goal that caused much controversy revived Sutherland and changed the course of the game. Scorers for Caithness-At Brora: Lyall, Miller and Durrand (direct from a corner); At Thurso: Miller (3), and Lyall. (William Miller was a promising laddie who moved to Africa early in 1948 and in the summer of that year was chosen by the Football Association of Kenya for the European eleven which opposed a team selected by the Arab and African Sports Association. A crowd of 10'000 watched the game in the African Stadium and saw Miller make the only score 12 minutes after the interval. The Europeans were counted fortunate to win. Miller's away-going was a blow to Wick football).

Thurso Gate Record

More than 3000 spectators attended the second game on a beautiful and the gate drawings amounted to £93 3/6 (believed to be a Thurso record). Most of them left Sir George's Park somewhat dissatisfied; only few-very few-were aware that Sutherland retained the bowl though the counties were equal on goals. Why was the rule of the twenties inoperative in 1947? No clear explanation can be found.

Apparently the rival Associations were unhappy, too, as they met immediately after and decided that when the teams were equal on goal average, extra time would be played in the second match, corners to count if necessary. This seems only a reversion to a pre-war rule-applied in 1936 and again in 1938

Season – 1948

A new name came into the records in 1948 and came in with a bang-in fact five bangs. A lad David Grant from Dornoch led Sutherland attack in both fixtures with commendable success. At Wick he shot four goals (Sutherland won 5-3) and when the teams engaged in extra time in Dornoch he secured the decisive goal in the closing minutes. Robbie Larnach (Groats) had a "hat-trick" that season; J. Farmer (Thistle) scored two and a single, and Johnnie Bremner had a single in each game. Into the list of scorers, too, came Robbie Shearer (Groats), actually the beginning of a lengthy and distinguished career in inter-county matches. Indeed, he made 13 appearances against Sutherland in the ten years onwards, and nine against Orkney. He played in 32 inter-town games. As an inside-forward he was an automatic choice whenever available. Robbie Shearer was no stalwart physically and depended solely on artistry. He was a selfless purveyor with a seeing eye who shrewdly built up attacks and created chances for colleagues. Even as a schoolboy he was notable for unusual ball control and distribution and developed into one of Wick's most prized possessions on the football field. Modest though he may have been he established enviable record of playing for Caithness. In doing this though, he was only keeping things in the family. Between 1919–1930 his father Donald Shearer, also of Groats, appeared in 38 games for Wick and eight times for Caithness and had 32 goals to his credit. Robert scored 21 but how many he "made" cannot be estimated.



Robbie Shearer

(Groats, Wick & Caithness)

Not only was he a goal scorer, but a creator of many other goals for his colleagues. A gem of a player who was invaluable to his Club, Town, and County.

High Scoring

Twenty goals in two games were registered in 1949-Sutherland 11 (eight and three) and Caithness nine (five and four), and Mr A. T. Boyd handed over the trophy. Caithness gave a convincing first half display at Helmsdale and the home team enjoyed a scoring spree after the interval and finished with a record eight goals. George "Rosser" Ross (Acks) scored three goals in these games (two and one), Durrand (Academy) had one in each, and M. Sutherland (Swifts) two.

Old-time fans shook their heads at the standard of football served up in 1950. Wick Girls Pipe Band was the brightest thing seen in the Harmsworth Park on a very cold and boisterous day. At Brora the talking point was an increased admission charge (1/6) considered exorbitant-and there was more interest in a suggested boycott than in Sutherland's goal win following upon a draw at Wick. Gate drawings were £77. Mrs Paynter, wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Sutherland, presented the trophy to Steve Cole, captain of the successful team.

Post-mortems among old timers reckoned the Caithness 1951 team (trounced 7-1 at Thurso) among the poorest representative sides they had seen. The home forward line (it included three juveniles) was the smallest and lightest quintet that ever donned the county colours. Four of them averaged 5ft (the fifth was a giant at 5ft 6ins) and weighed no more than 8 stone apiece. Though lacking in physique and handicapped by extreme youth, they were clever ladies and helped to return more respectable results in future

years. Indeed, altogether they accumulated 69 county caps and 129 for the towns; they were directly responsible for 83 goals in representative football. The five for the curious-Ian Macdonald (Groats), George "Rosser" Ross (Acks), Ian Munro, Robbie Shearer and Geordie Munro (all Groats). The big fellow of the line retired injured and it was after he left the field that Sutherland scored five goals so the game was actually not as one-sided as the score suggests.

That was the second of that seasons games-the first was lost 3-1 at Golspie. Mr Calcott Innes, Wick, was the referee.

Caithness Regain Bowl

Caithness deservedly regained possession of the Portland Bowl at the seventh annual attempt in post-war years-they had not held it from the early stages and depleted further to nine for a time, this winning team (the score was 5-2) moved with clockwork precision and opportunism and never gave up the initiative. The injured player was Bert Robertson (Groats) who made a gallant attempt to carry on but had to be removed to hospital suffering from a fractured bone in his ankle.

Sutherland football was said to be in the doldrums and Caithness were quicker and combined better and returned from Dornoch with a second victory (4-3). The bowl was accepted for the Association by Mr A. T. Boyd. Around 3000 watched the 1952 games and the combined gate drawings totalled £136.

The Caithness team comprised: R. Munro (Academy); Forbes (Lybster Portland), Adam Dundas (Swifts), Herbie Lyall (Groats), Hamish Horne (Acks), Robert "Bert" Robertson (Groats), Ian Macdonald (Groats), George Ross (Acks), Robbie Larnach (Lybster Portland), Robbie Shearer (Groats), M. Campbell (Pentland). Miller (Thistle) was custodian in the Dornoch match. Campbell stepped back to left-half and Geordie Munro (Groats) took the vacancy on the wing. The referee's were Messrs W. N. Manson (Dornoch) and W. Robertson (Thurso).

By the way Robbie Larnach had a "hat-trick" at Wick and a single at Dornoch. George Ross scored in each game, and Robbie Shearer had two (one from a penalty) when the second tussle was won. This wee inside support was ace schemer-in chief and was here, there and everywhere for the whole 90 minutes.

The bowl made the biggest sojourn in Caithness and Mr Boyd handed it back again in 1953. No wonder:

the team succumbed at Helmsdale and Thurso by an aggregate score of 9-1 against. Need any more be said? Oh, yes: wee Herbie Lyall's thirst for work was a notable feature in a poor Caithness side that was faced by fast and hard hitting opponents. A fellow named Craigen, from Brora, scored three spectacular goals in nine minutes in the closing stages. A Caithness boy, Alistair Rosie, Thurso, was at right back for the winners.

Dark clouds greeted what proved to be an uninspiring tourney in 1954. The bowl (handed over by Mrs Janson of Uppat) remained in Sutherland through an own goal inadvertently scored by a defender. Newspapers once again give as a feature of the games the studied moves by Robbie Shearer.

At Thurso

The counties played a quiet but entertaining game at Golspie in 1955 and there was little or nothing between the teams at Thurso except that the home team registered a winning goal. The trophy was accepted by James Macdonald, the Caithness captain. (This Pentland player had an enviable record: he appeared 27 times in a Caithness team and was in the Thurso town eleven on 32 occasions). Quite a feature of the game was very accurate passes along the ground by Clair Manson, the Caithness inside-left. This lad was a stalwart for years and a valued servant of the Groats. Another player who earned praise in 1955 was D. Macdonald (Acks), right-half.

After a 1-1 draw at Wick, Caithness had a comfortable win away at Meadow Park, Dornoch, in 1956. The winners gave a display of crisp, purposeful football that put disappointing opponents decisively in the shade. The win was a personal triumph for Lybster's outside-right Harry Coghill, who had three of his side's goals. Robbie Larnach, also Lybster, added one to his respectable total (finally 33 in representative matches). There was an own-goal, too.

The team was stated to be one of the best the county combines seen in action for years. Here are the names: _ Don Gunn (Lybster Portland), T. Reid (Academy), J. Macdonald (Pentland), J. Harper (Thistle), Hamish Horne (now Academy), Sinclair Manson (Groats), Harry Coghill (Lybster Portland), Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland), Robbie Larnach, (Lybster Portland), Herbie Lyall (Groats), William Farmer (Thistle). The referee's that year were Messrs W. N. Manson (Golspie) at Wick and William Riddoch at Wick.



Caithness – 1956

Back: Unknown, Thomas Reid, J. Macdonald, Don Gunn, Hamish Horne, J. Harper, Sinclair Manson.

Front: Harry Coghill, Jimmy Dunbar, Robbie Larnach, Herbie Lyall, Billy Farmer.

Pendulum Swings Again

The pendulum swung again next season (1957), Caithness losing by a late goal in a dreich match at Wick and scoring three against Sutherland's deserved six at Helmsdale. Two Lybster lads-Robbie Larnach and Jimmy Dunbar (2) shared the Caithness goals. Maybe our boys could not settle after being introduced to, what was for them, their first Football Queen, Miss Sheila Mackenzie, Lairg, who kicked off. Calcott Innes, Wick, was referee. By the way, Macaulay (Acks), a former Helmsdale player, was on the Caithness right wing.

Both games in 1958 were marred by adverse weather. Honours were shared evenly at Wick, but Sutherland won by three clear goals at Golspie. Again Mr Innes was in charge, and again the visitors met a Football Queen-this time Miss Elizabeth Sutherland, Helmsdale. With Ben Bhraggie in the back-ground, heavily shrouded in rain clouds, (spectators and gate returns were almost halved) were already wringing

water from garments before everyone settled down in inevitable discomfort.

It was in 1958 that Dounreay Athletic players first found places in the county team. There were two-B. Holliday and J. Douglas.

Success returned to Caithness in 1959-although only a goal separated the teams. On Dudgeon Park and again in Sir George's Park, Sutherland recovered from a frightfully unimpressive start and in the second encounter actually twice held the lead towards the end. Twice Caithness equalised via the penalty spot, Alistair Stephen (Academy) converting. Later he (as captain) accepted custody of the bowl.

The Caithness eleven who obtained a 5-4 win at Brora were:-J. Fleming (Swifts); David Mackay and J. Reid (both Academy), A. Manson (Acks), Alistair Stephen (Academy), G. Gunn (Thistle), Wm. Bruce (Thistle), J. Douglas (Dounreay Athletic), William "Bill" Mackay (Thistle), Billy Farmer (Thistle), John Beales (Groats).



Bill Mackay (Thistle, Wick & Caithness)

Centre Scores Four

It was in the Brora game that Bill Mackay, the Thistle centre, earned real prominence by notching four goals. Here was a jewel of a centre. He was fast-moving, darting intelligently into open spaces, and commendably accurate with head and feet. Unselfish, too and with equally alert colleagues, this boy from Keiss would have puzzled and penetrated any defence. As it was, he led the county team on 29 occasions (16 times against Sutherland) and finished with 30 goals to his credit-the happy average of one per game with one to spare.

Seventeen of his goals were against Sutherland and 13 against Orkney. He had 27 games for Wick and notched 39 goals.

That was the first season, too, that a Sutherland eleven were chosen without a Brora player, though at home one (John Pryde) occupied a place as a reserve.

See-Saw Results

Just what see-saw results the county contests produced is emphasised again by the fact that Caithness successes in 1959 and 1961 were sandwiched by a double defeat in 1960, the year that Miss Eleanor Menzies, Brora, Sutherland's Queen, handed over the bowl to Ian Innes, Helmsdale, captain on the field.

Billy Murray, Golspie's goalkeeper, was the hero of the 1961 match on Couper Park. Apart from saving a penalty kick, taken by Dunbar, he played superbly throughout and prevented a really severe defeat.

Murray's and MacKay's

There were three players named W. Murray and three named W. Mackay in the teams that faced each other in the return match. That day Caithness were down

two goals early on and were behind 2-3 at the interval but finished winners by adding four goals after the turn-around. Sutherland were unlucky to lose the services of A. Macrae, left-half, who sustained a facial injury and was conveyed to hospital. Bill Mackay the Thistle centre, had two goals in each game and his namesake Billy Mackay from Lybster, had a hat-trick. W. Davidson and T. Kennedy (both Acks) also had goals to their credit that season.

Three games, with extra time in the second and third, failed to separate the teams in 1963 and the spin of the coin finally decreed the bowl remain in Sutherland hands. Each side that season won by four clear goals at home with extended time at Thurso. The final at Golspie ended in a 2-2 draw. Extra time gave a 4-4 result. It was then that the coin was used.

Our friends from Golspie, G. MacGregor (3 and 1) and A. Macrae (2) had much to do with keeping the scores level. So, too, had Billy Murray, who gave an inspired display in goal on his home pitch. The second game was described as a crazy affair. Bill Mackay (then Pentland) and Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland) shared equally the four goals scored. Allan (Dounreay) and Robinson (Acks) were outstanding performers. The score remained unaltered despite 30 additional minutes play. So a third game in which the most notable personality was Jimmy Davidson in the Caithness goal. Here again regulation time was extended and although Caithness then were granted a penalty the lad Murray diverted Robinson's shot. Willie Alexander, Jimmy Dunbar, Bill Mackay and a Sutherland defender each gave Caithness a goal in the final. For the first time a Dounreay representative handed over the bowl. He was Mr A. J. Lunney. The 1963 games were refereed by George Fair-weather, Thurston; John Mowat, Gillespie and A. Stewart, Wick.

Caithness Win in 1964

Caithness hoped for better results in 1964 and got them-but just having won an aggregate score of 6-5. The bowl was really won at Wick where a young replacement goalkeeper-Cowrie from Helmsdale-was the star of the afternoon. This seemingly frail youth dived and lunged to prevent many likely goals until ultimately he was carried off with an injury. Strange to relate that it was during his enforced absence that his comrades broke away and scored their only goal.

The winning team:-Jimmy Davidson (Rovers); Donnie Shearer (Grouts), Jackie Falconer (Lobster Portland), Ronald Mackenzie (Swifts), John Macdonald (Doorway Athletic), Jimmy Dunbar (Lobster Portland), A. Thomson (Doorway Athletic), Andrew Fuqua (Rovers), Tommy Reid (Swifts), Donald "Doers" Mackay (Pentlands), Willie Alexander (Acks). Ref: W. G. Mackay (Gillespie). Four goals were obtained by Fuqua (2), Mackay and Alexander.

Four changes were made for the return match at Helmsdale-Sutherland (Thurston) at back, Jimmy Miller (Thistle), A. Macleod (Rovers) and Bill Mackay (now Grouts) coming in for Falconer, Dunbar, Thomson and Reid. That team was defeated 4-2. Macleod getting the second goal in the final minute and Macdonald had the other.

Only one goal of difference in 1965-only this time Sutherland was in the ascendancy. Playing first on a cold windswept plateau on the heights of Lairg. Caithness surprisingly surrendered the game in the second period while playing with the wind advantage. The return game at Thurso was often exciting and always interesting until even the last kick. That was a penalty against Caithness and turned aside Gordon (Pentland) to preserve an equal score.

An extra 30 minutes play followed and it was then that the young legs of the Sutherland had a decided edge and justice was done when Grant of Dornoch hit a spectacular shot that raged past Gordon. Scorers for Caithness-A. Macleod (2), Tommo Reid and John Macdonald (pen). The Refs were A. Norman (Lybster), and I Keith, Brora.

Ten Thurso Players

There were ten Thurso players in a county team that scorned numerous scoring chances before finally winning 3-2 in Harmsworth Park in 1966. With one goal advantage from the Wick game, Caithness had a 4-1 lead at the interval, after a brilliant attacking display in the opening 45 minutes at Golspie, but they slumped dramatically afterwards and finally defended desperately to escape with a 4-4 draw. In each game G. A. Trail, Helmsdale's left-half, shot a late picture goal from fully 20 yards. The 1966 team was made up of:- A. Gordon (Pentland); Ackie Falconer (Dounreay Athletic), J. Macdonald (Rovers), Thomson (Dounreay Athletic), Jack (Acks), Jenkins (Swifts), Campbell (Dounreay Athletic), D. Allan (Acks), Tommo Reid (Swifts), John Macdonald (Dounreay Athletic), D. "Dokers" Mackay (Pentland). The only change at Golspie was Farquhar (Groats), at outside left. Scorers-Allan 3, (2 and 1), Reid (2), Campbell 2 (1 and 1). Messrs I. Innes, Helmsdale, and Calcott Innes, Wick, were the 1966 whistlers.

The Messrs Innes again officiated last summer (1967) when Caithness was twice victorious by the same score-3-1. Sutherland provided only mediocre opposition with a team comprised mainly of Helmsdale players. Caithness team:-Murray Mackay (Acks); A. Stephen and J. Macdonald (Rovers), J. M'cAlpine (Thistle), A. Thomson (Dounreay Athletic), Fleming (Dounreay Athletic), Alex Geddes and Andrew Sinclair (both Thistle), Jack (Acks), Ken Green and Gunn (both Rovers) Chadwick (Pentland) and Murray (Acks) took the place of Jack and Gunn in the second game, at Wick. Ken Green had a goal in each outing-one via the penalty.

83 Matches in 53 Years

Statistics compiled show that Caithness and Sutherland teams have contested 83 Portland Bowl games between 1914 and 1967-41 in either Wick or Thurso and 42 on grounds over the Ord. The competition has ever been keen and most markedly even over the period. Indeed after 43 years' play only five goals divide the teams. Each county has enjoyed more than 20 successful seasons. Altogether 461 goals have been scored. Sutherland's share totals 229- exactly three less than Caithness with 232. Yet Caithness has actually won more games (35) than were conceded, and 18 ended evenly. On home grounds Caithness county teams registered 23 wins and suffered 11 defeats, scoring 119 against 96 goals; playing away, they won 12 and lost 19, recording 113 goals and conceding 133.

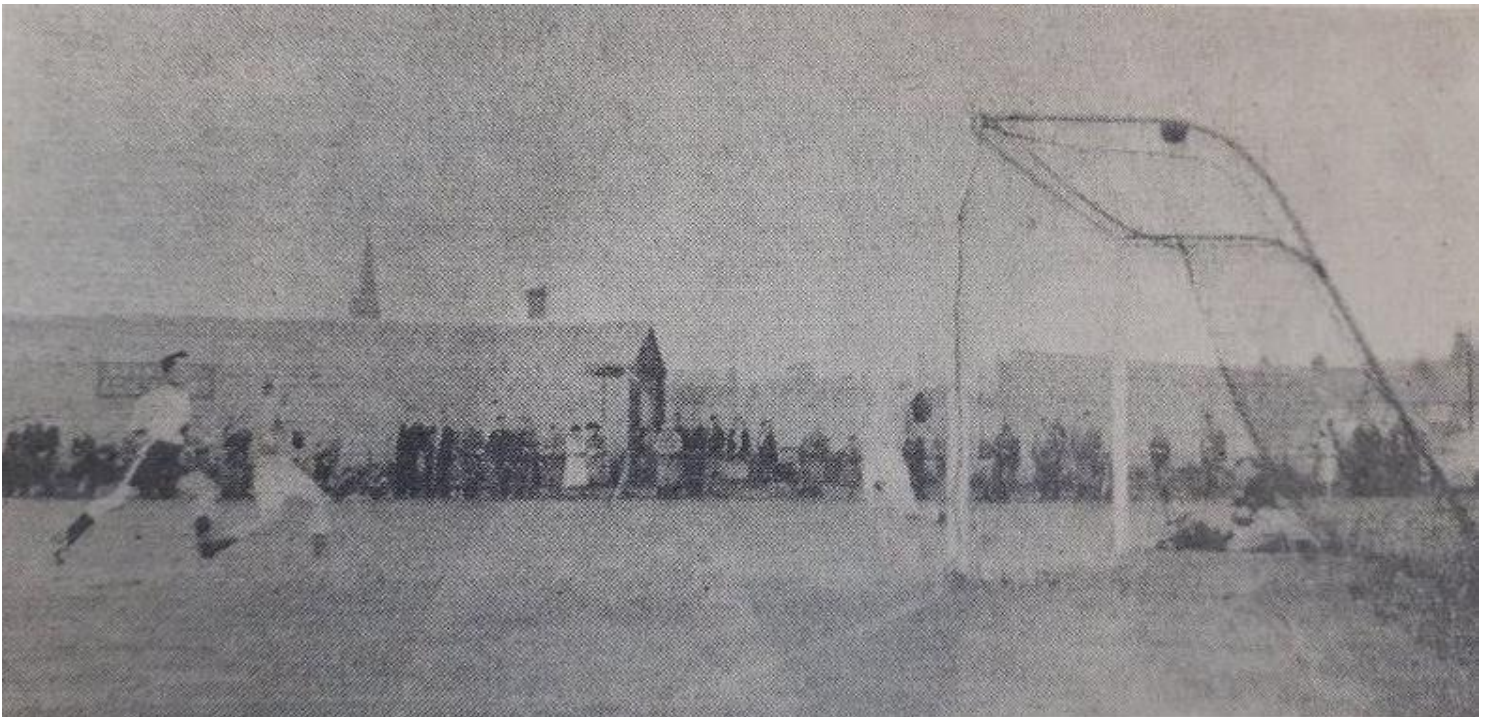
Since the competition was resumed in 1946, Sutherland has overhauled their opponents' pre-war statistical advantage. In the 21 years before 1939 Caithness had held the trophy 14 times and Sutherland on only two occasions, scoring 114 goals against 91. That ascendancy was established mainly 1921 and 1929 when they were winners in eight seasons. They won nine of those 15 games and drew four. As results go, their best season was 1928 when Caithness won

decisively by a goal aggregate of 10-1-5-0 at Golspie and 5-1 at Wick.

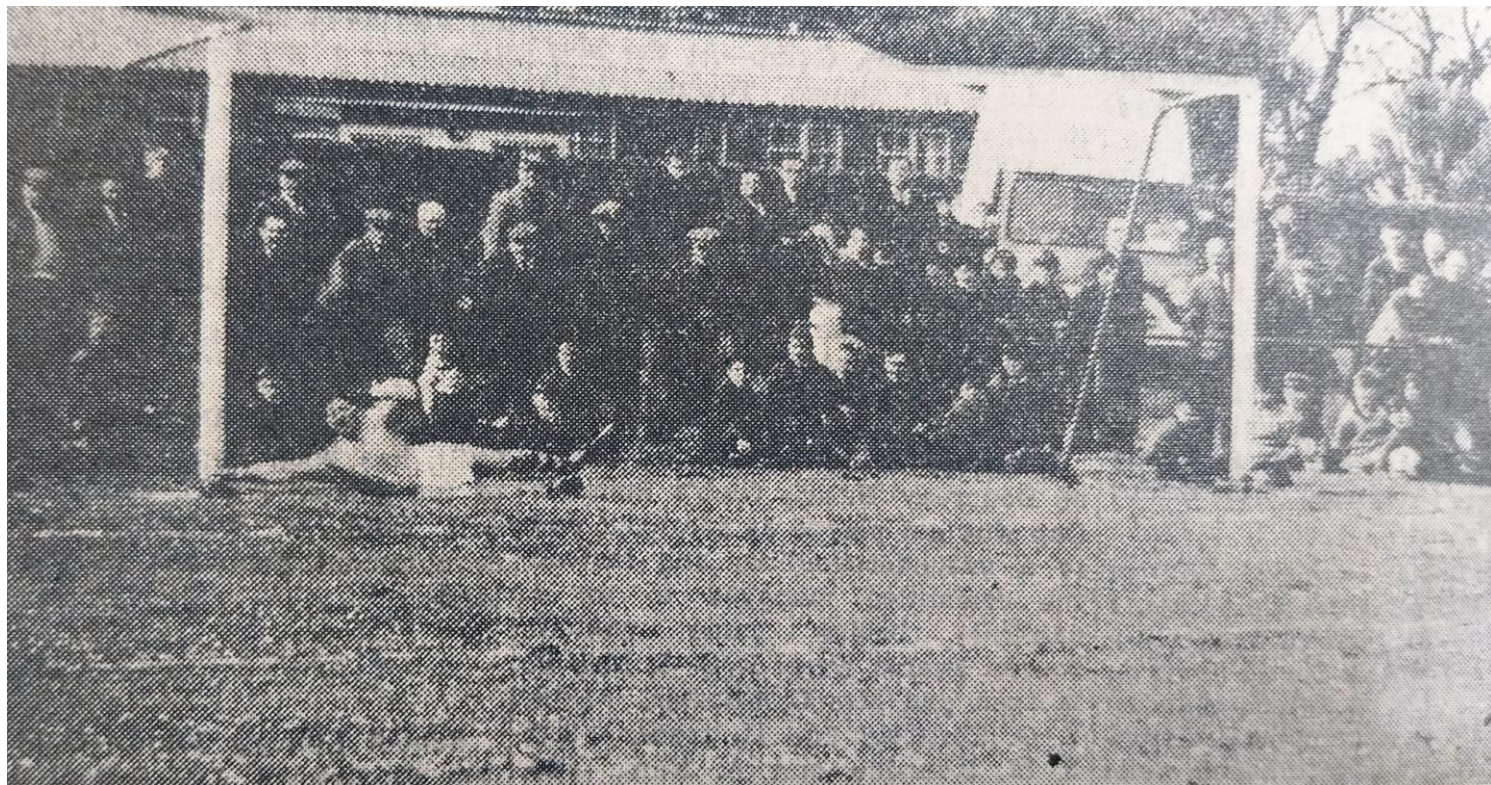
In post-war years Sutherland annexed the Portland Bowl in 1946 and retained it in six successive seasons and in 14 altogether compared with eight for Caithness. A complete reversal and a remarkably fine performance considering the unavailability of Brora Rangers players in recent years. The Cattachs' best wins were both in Thurso-7-1 in 1951 and 5-1 in 1953. For all that, Caithness teams have fared slightly better on Sir George's Park than at Wick where the wins recorded were 12 and 11 respectively although there were six draws at Wick and only one at Thurso. In post-war years the Caithness "for and against" columns have undergone change. From 114 against 91 in 1939 they look much less satisfactory at 118 against 138. The actual figures for all games read:

CAITHNESS

At	P	W	D	L	F	A
Wick	23	11	6	6	61	50
Thurso	18	12	1	5	58	46
Total	41	23	7	11	119	96
In Sutherland	42	12	11	19	113	113
Total	83	35	18	30	232	229



Caithness forward Bill Mackay (white shirts) attacking the Sutherland goal during their Portland Bowl tussle at Sir George's Park, Thurso. The match was played on 20th May 1961.



Sutherland goalkeeper Billy Murray dives to save a goal in the Portland Bowl match against Caithness on Saturday. The match was played at the Harmsworth Park, Wick. Unfortunately for Murray the ball just crept inside the post for a goal scored by Thurso Acks player D. Allan for Caithness.



Sutherland County XI
1963

Back: Ian Sutherland, Duncan Bethune, Alistair MacRae, Billy Murray,
John Sutherland, Dennis Pryde, Trainer Andrew Sutherland.

Front: James Mackay, John Mackay, Grant MacGregor, Davie Gunn, Don Sinclair.

Although not a clear photograph, this Sutherland County select XI line up for a game in Balintore against their East Ross-shire opponents. The

1963 Portland Bowl contest with Caithness that season went to a third match, due to the first two matches ending with both teams tying on equal

goals over the two matches. With 30 minutes extra time being played at the end of the second match there was still deadlock.

A third match was played at Golspie and again the teams were tied 2-2 at the final whistle.

Thirty minutes extra time was played and the score ended 4-4. A coin toss was then used to

determine the winners and came down in favour of Sutherland. Sutherland's classy goalkeeper Billy Murray was in outstanding form throughout all three games, saving a penalty in the final match.

The Duke of Portland Bowl

Winners

1914 – Sutherland	1947 – Sutherland
1920 – Sutherland	1948 – Sutherland
1921 – Caithness	1949 – Sutherland
1922 – Caithness	1950 – Sutherland
1923 – Caithness	1951 – Sutherland
1924 – Caithness	1952 – Caithness
1925 – Caithness	1953 – Caithness
1926 – Caithness	1954 – Sutherland
1927 – Sutherland	1955 – Caithness
1928 – Caithness	1956 – Caithness
1929 – Caithness	1957 – Sutherland
1930 – Sutherland	1958 – Sutherland
1931 – Sutherland	1959 – Caithness
1932 – Caithness	1960 – Sutherland
1933 – Caithness	1961 – Caithness
1934 – Sutherland	1962 – Sutherland
1935 – Sutherland	1963 – Sutherland
1936 – Sutherland	1964 – Caithness
1937 – Caithness	1965 – Sutherland
1938 – Caithness	1966 – Caithness
1939 – Caithness	1967 – Caithness
1946 – Sutherland	1968 – Caithness

The Archer Shield



Caithness v Orkney

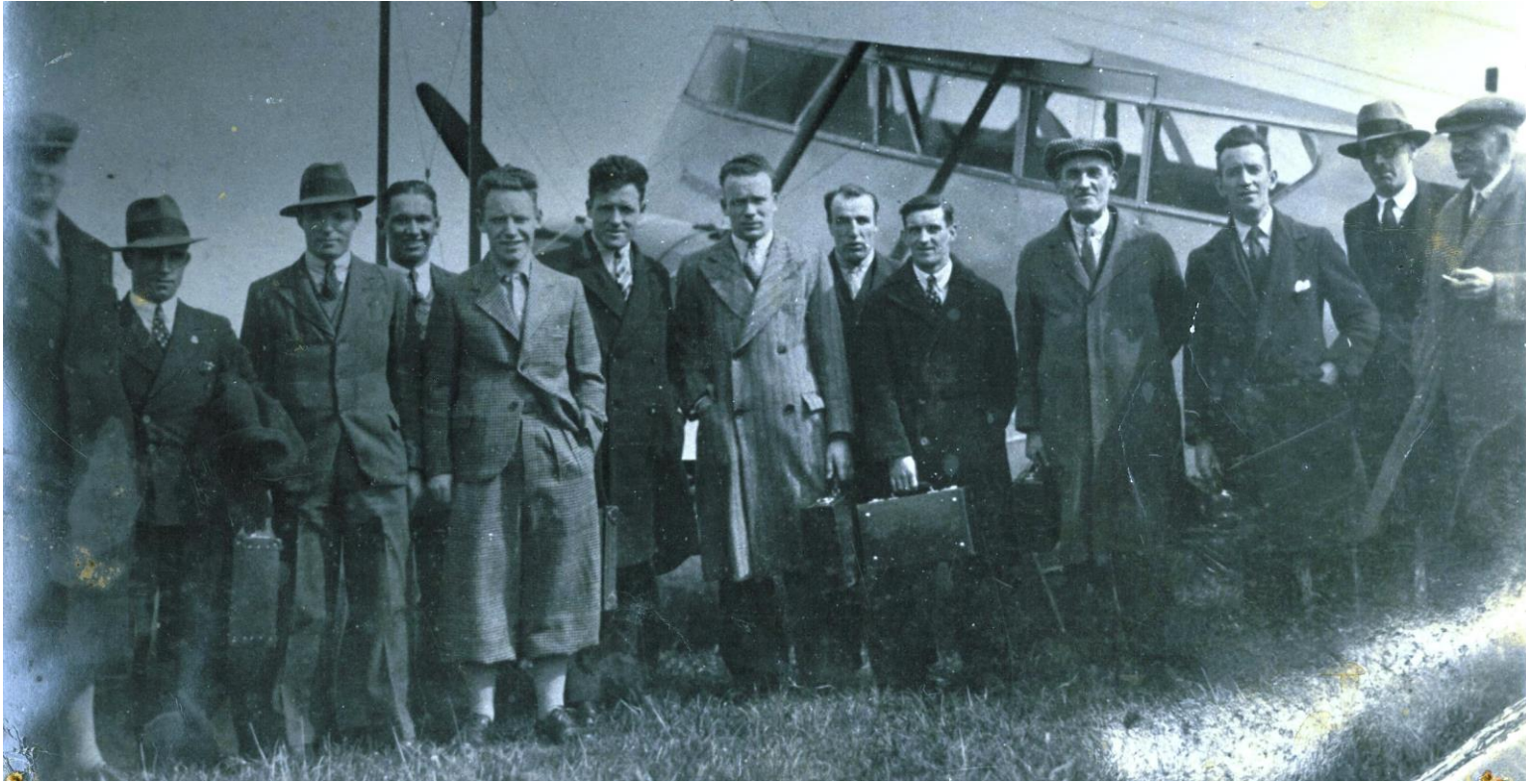


1935 to 1968

Presented by
Mr Gilbert Archer
Chairman of Gardens Ltd, Kirkwall

For annual competition between the representatives of the counties of
Caithness & Orkney

FIRST VISIT TO ORKNEY FOR TWENTY YEARS Wick Football Team Fly across the Pentland Firth



Report from the Orkney Herald

“Last Wednesday, for the first time in over 20 years, a football team from Wick visited Orkney. It was a historic visit in more ways than one.

The Wick Football Association Select footballers crossed the Pentland Firth by aeroplane, thus establishing a record as the first football team in the British Isles to travel by air to a fixture. Their enterprise has startled some of the big football clubs in the south, according to a sporting scribe in a famous daily newspaper, and their example is one that is likely to be followed next season.

The party travelled to Orkney numbered fifteen, and the Highland Airways' plane which conveyed them, made two trips from Wick to Wideford, carrying seven passengers on the first flight and eight on the second.

Fine weather prevailed during the day, and the flights were made in an average of twenty minutes. Many of the Wick party had never flown before, but all of them were thoroughly delighted with the experience, and voted flying the ideal mode of travel.

Members of the Orkney Football Association met the two sections of the Wick party, the first which arrived in the forenoon, and the second early in the afternoon.

The Wick footballers and the handful of “fans” which accompanied them spent an enjoyable sojourn in Kirkwall, and during the afternoon were shown around the places of interest in the town. Mr Alex Clark, right-back of the Wick select, had many old friends to visit in Kirkwall, where he was resident until just over a year ago. Among the Wick party was Councillor T. W. Anderson, the “firebrand” of Wick Town Council, who is a very enthusiastic follower of Wick football.

In the evening the Wick team were given a rousing reception by a crowd of over 2000 Orcadians, when they opposed Orkney's football select in the Bignold Park, (The game which ended in a draw of three goals each, is fully reported on page 2.)

After the game the Wick visitors were guests at a very successful dance held in the Town Hall under the auspices of the Orkney Football Association. Speeches were made in the course of the function.

Mr John Learmouth, President of Orkney Football Association, said that on behalf of the Association he would like to extend a very cordial welcome to the Wick party. He trusted that they enjoyed their short stay, and would continue to do so throughout their visit. (Applause.) It was many years that they had had a visit from a team from Wick, over twenty years in fact, but he trusted this match which they had that evening would be the precursor of many other games. (Applause.) To start the ball rolling they proposed to make this match an annual event such as they had with Shetland.

Concluding, the speaker called for three cheers for the Wick party, which were enthusiastically given.

Mr Thomas Farmer, captain of the Wick Select, thanked the Orkney F.A., and the Orkney and Kirkwall people in general for the very kind reception accorded his team. They had enjoyed the game immensely and hoped to meet again in the near future.”



Wick F.A. XI – 1934

Back: W. Banks, Jimmy Hull (Groats), Alec Clarke (Academy), Eric Swanson (Academy),
David Rosie (Groats), David Banks (Academy), James Bremner, A. Banks

Front: Unknown, David Oag (Thistle), Marcus Miller (Groats), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), Thomas Farmer (Groats), Bill
Budge (Academy), Don Macleod (Academy).



Orkney XI – 1934

Back: A. M. Morgan, (Orkney F.A.), A.J. Grant (Orkney F.A.), J. Norquoy, R.O. Watson (Secretary Orkney F.A.), A.
Fraser, J. Bews (Orkney F.A.), G. Sinclair,
R. Findlay (Vice-President Orkney F.A.).

Middle: J. Brown, T. Cooper, G. Clouston, W. Collier, F. Buchanan.

Front: J. Bews (Capt), J. S. Marwick, J. Sinclair.

The Archer Shield – Caithness v Orkney

In May 1934 a Wick F.A. select team flew over to Orkney to fulfil a friendly fixture. The match ended in a 3-3 draw and from that match the Orcadians expressed an interest to have an Inter-County contest started with Caithness.

Mr Gilbert Archer, Leith, chairman of Gardens Ltd, Kirkwall provided a beautiful ebony shield embossed in silver – to be known as the Archer Shield – for annual competition between the Counties of Orkney & Caithness.

The games were arranged for alternate years on Orkney and in Caithness. Harmsworth Park, Wick, was the venue for the opening game for the Archer Shield in 1935. Orkneys team had a stormy crossing to Thurso on the St Ola that day, an ominous sign of things to come perhaps?

Under the charge of Alex “Ackie” Gray, Wick, the following teams lined up:

Caithness – James Robertson (Wick Groats), Dan Thomson (Wick Academy), Alec Clark (Wick Academy), David Banks (Wick Academy), Ian Mackay (Thurso Pentland), Thomas Reid (Wick Thistle), David Oag (Wick Thistle), William Hair (Thurso Pentland), Wm. Mulraine (Wick Groats), Ronald Mackay (Thurso Acks), Murdo M. Mackay (Thurso Pentland).

Orkney – T. Thomson (Kirkwall Hotspurs), G. Sinclair (Kirkwall Rovers), W. Marwick (Kirkwall Hotspurs), J. Marwick (Kirkwall Hotspurs), J. Brass (Kirkwall Rovers), W. Groundwater (Stromness Athletic), N. Robertson (Stromness Athletic), J. Bews (Kirkwall Rovers), T. Cooper (Kirkwall Rovers), F. Corsie (Kirkwall Hotspurs), F. Buchanan (Kirkwall Rovers).

Caithness Forwards Shine

Caithness was in fine form that day and their forwards especially proving deadly.

Bill Mulraine, flanked by the fast and tricky Murdo Mackay & David Oag, scored four goals in the match that finished 7-0 to Caithness. W. Hair a former Glasgow Rangers player, stylish and accomplished, was the main inspiration behind the home team’s dominance.

Caithness captain Alec Clark was presented with Shield from Mr J.T. Christie, Kirkwall.

Alec Clark was no stranger to playing against Orkney having represented Shetland in six Milne Cup (Shetland v Orkney) matches from 1919 to 1924. Only on the losing side once against the Orcadians; he captained the Shetland team on five of those occasions.

David Oag scored the first goal in the Archer Shield contests.

He was an outside-right and appeared in 24 Caithness County teams between 1929 and 1946, (scoring 31

goals in total), in Archer Shield and Portland Bowl matches as well as having 44 inter- town (Wick v Thurso) appearances.

Oag also helped out Wick Academy in their Qualifying and Scottish Cup, as well as their exhibition matches, with professional opponents. Fleet of foot, he moved with a confidence that often helped elude many a challenge. His long career remained unblemished. Although he helped out Academy on these occasions, Oag was a one club man and gave allegiance to Wick Thistle who as a player or captain he led the Thistle in some of its most successful seasons.

First Kirkwall Match

Caithness had a good crossing on the St Ola to Stromness before arriving in Kirkwall for the 1936 and first Archer Shield match to be held on Orcadian soil.

It took the Caithness side some time to get used to the smaller Bignold Park (Kirkwall) pitch but eventually got in to their rhythm to earn a second successive victory (2-4). Tommy Tait (Wick Groats) 2, Wm Mulraine (Groats) and Ronald Mackay (Acks) one each, were the scorers. The trophy was handed over by Provost J.M. Slater to R. Johnson (Wick Thistle) centre-half and captain of the side.

Football firsts was the order of the day in 1937. That was the first time that an Archer Shield match was staged in Thurso; the first time that an Orkney team came over by air, and the first time that Orkney had their name inscribed on the trophy as winners. Caithness held a 2-1 interval lead but succumbed in the end 3-6.

Prominent in this game (and in all four pre-war contest) was Tom Cooper, the tall light footed Kirkwall Rovers forward, who upon leaving Orkney played for Raith Rovers, netted twice for the visitors to take the Shield back across the water.

Provost Slater handed back the shield the following season when G. Ross (Acks) captained the Caithness side that won in extra time. Orkney leading 4-3 until late in the game Caithness equalised, before grabbing the all important goal in the extra period to emerge 5-4 winners.

Caithness we’re all set to meet Orkney in Wick in August 1939, when the outbreak of war enforced cancellation due to the call-up of the Territorials. The team that had already been selected but never got the chance to play were: James Durrand (Groats), G. More (Academy), Dan Thomson (Academy), E. Shearsmith (Acks), James Hull (Groats), Murdo Swanson (Acks), David Oag (Thistle), Jock More (Thistle), Wm. Mulraine (Groats), Murray Harper (Academy), and George Rosie (Thurso Pentland). Reserves were Frank More (Thistle) and Wm. Robertson (Pentland).



Archer Shield winners Caithness line up in 1938 before kick-off.

Back: Ackie Gray (Referee), G. Bannerman, Hugh Sutherland, Jock More (Thistle), Ronald Mackay (Acks), James Durrand (Groats), Eddie Shearsmith (Pentland), Sinclair Mackay (Caithness F.A.), Murray Harper (Academy), Unknown.

Front: Don Macleod (Thistle), Dan Miller (Groats), Tommy Tait (Groats), George Ross (Acks), David Banks (Academy), Roy Manson (Acks).

Post War Years

Ideal weather conditions and a large crowd greeted the resumption of the Archer Shield competition in September 1947. Caithness ran out 8-5 winners after extra time again was needed to separate the sides. Orkney were hampered much by the injuries sustained to three of their players, two of which suffered after colliding with one another.

The game was a personal triumph for Ian Bremner (Wick Thistle), who joined a small select company with the distinction of registering four goals in a competitive County match. The other scorers being Johnny Bremner (Academy), Jack Gunn (Thistle), George Lyall (Groats) and own goal.

The Caithness team comprised ten players from Wick with only Adam Dundas (Swifts) from Thurso. Gordon Grant (Thistle) a native of Dornoch had the previous year played for Sutherland county against Caithness in a Portland Bowl match.

Trophy Whereabouts

In the lead up to the resumption of the Archer Shield contest in 1947 there was a scare. The Caithness Association advertised for the whereabouts of the trophy. It was considered as missing. It was known that the Shield should be in Caithness it had last been won in 1938. But where?

However all was well as the Shield was found. Mr James Mackay, Thurso, the Association President called on Mr Boyd to present the shield to Andy Farquhar the Caithness captain, a never say-die player who gave unstinted service to team, town and county for several seasons. The family name Farquhar was to flourish in local football down through the years.

Caithness retained the Shield in 1948 despite the strong bustling tactics of the home forwards upsetting the visiting defence and it was only in the last half-hour, when 3-1 down, that Caithness rallied to fight back and run out 3-4 winners. The trophy was handed to Caithness captain Wm Phimistar (Swifts) by Mr Stanley Cursiter, C.B.E., and

R.S.A., who complimented both sets of players on the sportsmanship displayed throughout the game.

James Sinclair (Academy) 2, George Ross (Acks) and Ian Bremner (Thistle) got the goals.

Orkneys Dominant Win

Only three of the successful 1948 team were retained for the next seasons match at Thurso, which was a highly entertaining match in every way bar the score-Caithness 0-6 Orkney. Thurso Pipe Band were in attendance to entertain the large crowd (gate receipts were £93 7s) before and during the half-time break.

Jimmy "Dook" Donaldson was in imperious form as he destroyed Caithness with a four goal burst, ably assisted by his brother John Donaldson and Mugga Tait to complete the scoring and send more than a 100 travelling Orkney supporters home with delight. The Orcadians were physically strong and possibly the tallest team ever seen in the county at that time. Only the inside right Dave Fox lacked height, but more than made up that difference with great qualities and bite to his game.

The 1949 team has arguably been debated as the best ever Orkney representative team assembled? As also that season Orkney trounced their "owld enemy" Shetland 6-1 at home in the Milne Cup encounter.

The much respected match referee Mr Peter Craigmyle, Aberdeen, and post-match prophesised that it would be a long, long time before the shield would return to the Caithness mainland.

(Caithness regained possession in 1952).

Orkney registered their first home-win in 1950. The Caithness party had a stormy crossing and did not arrive until 15 minutes before kick-off. It was a test of endurance against high wind and torrential rain on a pitch that became the proverbial "sea of mud". Around 300 hardy souls braved the atrocious weather and witnessed the match, which was reduced to 80 minutes, and 3-1 Orkney win.

Caithness was unable to make the ferry crossing home the following day due to the adverse weather conditions making it unadvisable for the boat to sail across the Firth.

Orkney came to Wick in 1951 and retained possession of the Shield by means of a 2-1 score-line against the un-fancied home team, who yet gave a fine performance in an enthralling contest.

Hamish Horne (Acks) came in to the team as a reserve and was outstanding in defence while Robbie Shearer (Groats) was the star forward on the field. Davie "Davo" Fox (Orkney) and Hugh "Herbie" Lyall (Groats) were both little fellows with big hearts and their wholehearted tussles were welcomed by the spectators. Fox was experienced and full of tricks but young Lyall put up a very creditable performance.

An Orkney journalist had high praise for this losing Caithness team. He saw them as young, competent and clever, and forecast that the shield would shortly be back on the mainland. How right he was!

Regained By Caithness

Twelve months later Mr Jo Grimmond the Liberal Party Leader handed over the shield to Caithness captain Hamish Horne in what was a surprise win. Orkney dictated play early on and were soon two goals up. Caithness retaliated strongly and goals by Robbie Larnach (2), G. Mackay and Geordie Munro and an outstanding defence performance against a persistently strong attack by the home team in the closing stages to run out 2-4 winners. Gate receipts were £108 15s, the crowd numbering 1500.

After the match an idea that was first mooted by Caithness representatives four years previously, the possibility of arranging home and away seasonal games was considered and approved at a dinner at the Kirkwall Hotel. The suggestion that evening came from Rev .T. Scott, president of the Orkney F.A., but the suitability of May and August caused some concern to the Caithness Association on the basis that Orkney played summer football and Caithness adhered to the winter season. Orkney officials appeared to rate the annual Archer Shield match of secondary importance to their Inter-Island's clash with Shetland.

Home and Away System

Caithness was soundly beaten on both occasions when the new system came in to play in 1953. The first leg in Kirkwall ended 4-0 to the home side, who then followed that up with a 3-7 score-line in Thurso to have an overall aggregate score of 11-3.

A prominent player in both matches was Orkney's custodian Stewart Craigie. He was strong, quick-footed and had a remarkable sense of anticipation. His counterpart at the other end in Caithness side (Bobbie Munro, Wick) faced a more penetrative set of forwards but performed commendably well. Three hundred supporters

accompanied the winning team to Thurso that day.

Goalkeeper Munro excelled in both games the following season and could take much credit for wresting back the trophy. At Wick a penalty save, which later turned out to be all important, as Caithness first won 4-2 at Harmsworth Park, Robbie Shearer (2), D. Stewart & I. Macdonald the scorers.

In the Kirkwall match Caithness found themselves five goals down in 20 minutes but recovered to a final score of 6-4. Extra time was necessary then to decide the destiny of the trophy. Although the lighter team, Caithness lasted the pace much better and finally Shearer cleverly outwitted the home defence to give Bill Mackay an opportunity he accepted to give Caithness an aggregate lead they would hold on to. Scorers were Bill Mackay (Thistle) 2, W. Mackay (Thurso), Robbie Shearer (Groats) and Geordie Munro (Groats). Jim Donaldson of Orkney repeated his 1947 tally of four goals in a game.

Caithness got good service from their wingmen Ian Macdonald and George Munro, a pair of

consistently clever lads who first blossomed with Lousbrough United in the Wick Juvenile League. The team at Wick :- Bobby Munro (Academy); T. Reid (Academy) and J. Macdonald (Pentland); Robbie Larnach (Lybster Portland), Hamish Horne (Academy), A. Macleod (Thistle), Ian Macdonald (Groats), D. Stewart (Academy), Bill Mackay (Thistle), Robbie Shearer (Groats) and Geordie Munro (Groats). There was only one Thurso representative in the winning team, but a second (W. Mackay) came in at inside-right at Kirkwall.

Dramatic Late Draw

Two goals down two minutes from time at home in 1955, Orkney fought back determinedly to snatch a dramatic last-second draw against more polished opponents. J. Donaldson had both goals, and his team went on to win the second encounter 3-2 at Thurso. Again it was two minutes from the final whistle when Russell Groundwater scored to regain Orkney the trophy. Ian Macdonald scored both Caithness goals.



Caithness goalkeeper, Donald Gunn (Lybster Portland), out-jumps' an Orkney forward to claim the ball in the 1955 Archer Shield contest at Sir George's Park, Thurso.

Never can any team have made a better and more dramatic recovery than Caithness did at Thurso in 1956. They were two goals in arrear when first they scored in the 28th minute and in a rousing game were leading 5-2 in the 56th minute. Three Lybster lads figured among the scorers-Bob Gordon (2), Robbie Larnach and Stanley Larnach; the other belonged to William Farmer (Thistle) who had also scored in the previous season. Their final 5-3 score was obliterated at Kirkwall when Orkney routed their opponents by 7-2. Our friend Jim "Dook" Donaldson scored four goals in a match against Caithness for a third time-two of them from penalties, one of which came into the category of "soft"-very soft. Lybster Portland supplied four of the team, as also did Groats; Thurso had only one representative. Robbie Larnach was responsible for the second-half two that gave the score a little more respectable look.

Both counties won away from home in 1957 but Orkney had by far the heavier score-6-1, to win 7-4 overall. At home the ultimate winners gave one of their dullest displays in the competition-and before a record attendance of 1780.

Peculiarly enough, 1958 gave similar away results with Orkney comfortable leaders on aggregate. After suffering a 1-5 defeat at Thurso, the critics gave Caithness no chance at Kirkwall, yet 2000 onlookers saw them play fast, open football and retire with a 3-1 score in their favour. Don Gunn (Lybster Portland) and A. Manson (Acks) were the only players to play in both matches. A well known 1st Division referee, Mr William Brittle of Glasgow, officiated at Kirkwall where Bill Mackay (Thistle) (2) and R. Williamson (Swifts) were the Caithness goal-getters. W. Murray (Acks) got the only goal recorded on his home ground, in the first match, where the twinkling feet of Findlay (Orkney) were very much in evidence.

A Worthy Record

To hold the trophy for four consecutive seasons-scoring 28 goals and conceding 19-was indeed a worthy record (it still stands) set up by Orkney prior to the 1959 engagements. The first that season (at Kirkwall) was a game of transformation. From being a goal up Orkney found themselves 2-7 down-and Caithness were finally struggling to save the game in which they had the advantage of two goals from twelve scored.

The return encounter at Wick was a tame affair, with the goalkeeping providing the only thrills. Orkney were disappointingly disjointed particularly in attack and a mere shadow of some combines of previous years. Caithness, too, played with seemingly uncertainty although they recaptured the shield by means of a 3-1 win. The team that day read :- James Mackay (Thistle), J. Reid (Academy), Alan Robinson (Acks), A. Manson (Acks), Alistair Stephen (Academy), Geordie Munro (Groats), D. Allan (Acks), Donnie Shearer (Groats), Bill Mackay (Thistle), W. Murray (Acks) and W. Walker (Acks). Robinson and Allan did not play in the successful team at Kirkwall; they came in for J. Macdonald (Pentland) and Ronnie Sutherland (Acks). Donnie Shearer notched three goals (2 and 1), Bill Mackay two (1and1), Ronnie Sutherland 2, Walker and Stephen (from a penalty) one each, and there was an own goal. Stephen, who was prominent throughout, captained the Caithness team and accepted custody of the shield from Mr G. Sinclair, Dounby.

But the very next season the shield was back again in Kirkwall. Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland) gave Caithness a first minute goal at Thurso and they were in the ascendancy by three when centre-half John Beales (Groats) was removed from the field with a knee injury. Midway through the second half the score was 4-0 but the home handicap grew as time went on. The Orcadians staged a four goal rally but something like justice was done three minutes from the end Donnie Shearer (Groats) restored the home lead. Much of the same thing happened in the return match. Three goals ahead, Caithness seemed certain to retain the trophy but they lost their earlier poise when Orkney began to retrieve a seemingly hopeless position, ultimately to win 5-3-sufficient for an aggregate goal win.

Caithness returned double wins in 1961 and 1962. In the former year by 4-2 away and 7-4 at Wick. Caithness had to hustle in getting to Kirkwall. The St. Ola was delayed on leaving Scrabster and the team had to be hurried through from Stromness, changing en route. They were fully an hour late. Yet they were the easier moving team, but Orkney were unlucky to be deprived of the services of centre-half Merriman (Stromness Athletic) through injury. Although the Orcadians were leading 2-1 at one stage, the

result of the game at Wick was never really in doubt.

The following season (1962) the games twice resulted in a goal win for Caithness. Orkney squandered several scoring chances at Thurso before the home team counted ten minutes from time-just when everything pointed to a goalless draw. The "overseas" game in 1962 was a hard fought bout-mainly end-to-end stuff. Kemp, the home goalie, played an inspired game and Kennedy was a second-half star in a persistent forward line. Teams:-

1961-Will Murray (Groats), George Fairweather (Dounreay Athletic), Allan Robinson (Acks), Donnie Shearer (Groats), J. Miller (Thistle), Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland), W. Walker (Pentland), Billy Farmer (Thistle) and Bill Mackay (Thistle), W. Murray (Acks) and Billy Mackay (Lybster Portland). For the second game S. Manson (Groats), appeared at left-half; W. Davidson (Acks) at outside-right; Dnbar moved to inside-right and Farmer to inside-left. Walker and Murray did not play.

1962 (at Thurso :-J. Davidson (Lybster Portland, J. Campbell (Groats), Allan Robinson (Acks), A. Manson (Acks), R. McEnney (Dounreay Athletic), J. Miller (Thistle), Douglas Reid (Pentland) Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland), Bill Mackay (Thistle), W. Murray (Acks), and D. Mackay (Pentland). At Kirkwall, Macrae guarded the goal, and Billy Farmer (Thistle), Kennedy and Brownlee (Acks) had places in the forward line. Davidson, Campbell, Bill Mackay and D. Mackay dropped out. Scorers for Caithness were Brownlee (2), Murray, Farmer and Reid.

Goal Aggregate Decision

Results were unfavourable to Caithness were returned in the years 1963 and 1964, though on each occasion only an aggregate goal separated the teams. In 1963 Caithness won 3-2 in Kirkwall and at Wick was 5-6 down. This result necessitated an extra period of time in which an Eric Hutchison goal dumped Caithness. That season W. Alexander (Acks outside-left) registered three goals (2 and 1) one of which came direct at the restart and was obtained without an opponent touching the ball. Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland) also had a goal in each game and Tommy Reid (Swifts) had two at Wick, where Brownlee (Acks) also counted.

In 1964 Caithness was beaten 8-4 at Thurso on a misty day. The homesters were awarded three penalties that afternoon but converted only one

through Ronald "Biz" Mackenzie (Swifts) who made the third attempt. The Orcadians would have been really unlucky had they been denied a victory. The return match at Kirkwall produced a 3-3 draw. Groundwater (Thorfinn) had a hat-trick and Andrew "Drew" Robertson (Wick Rovers) 2 and "Dokers" Mackay (Pentland) scored for Caithness.

Reversion to a single game per season was made in 1965. This took place at Wick in mid-July when the home team gave a superb display of football in brilliant sunshine and completely overwhelmed the Orcadians. Indeed, they recorded an unequalled score of nine goals-and might well have had more. The debacle started after two minutes' play when John Macdonald (Dounreay Athletic) accepted a chance; thereafter Tommy Reid had four, and Mackay and Macleod one each. Two were inadvertently given away by harassed and over-anxious defenders. The record-making team:-J. Davidson (Swifts); Falconer (Lybster Portland), Fleming (Dounreay Athletic), Campbell (Dounreay Athletic), A. Macleod (Rovers), Tommy Reid (Swifts), John Macdonald (Dounreay Athletic) and Donald "Dokers" Mackay (Pentland).

Orkneys Two Victories

After the Lord Mayor's show came the ash-cart. From the pinnacle of success-the most substantial victory-Caithness dropped to yearly defeats at Kirkwall and Thurso. The 1966 team, according to newspaper accounts, considered themselves victims of two highly controversial decisions on the field-both vital to the result; but this year's (1967 team had no cause to feel aggrieved-they deservedly went under even although Morgan Marcus, the Orcadian goalkeeper, is given as "the man of the match." Therefore friendly and worthy opponents hold the Archer Shield. It is for Caithness to be good enough at football to wrest it back.

Like the games against Sutherland, those against Orkney have provided *in toto* correspondingly close results. The Orcadians and Caithness have contested thirty seven games, of which Caithness have won 19, lost 16, and drawn two, amassing a tally of 127 goals and conceding only one less. This, solitary goal advantage suffice to give Caithness possession of the trophy on fifteen occasions, whereas Orkney have been holders ten times. The Caithness ascendancy really belongs to the earlier years: of four pre-war games three were won, as were two immediately after the

resumption of the competition in 1947. In three seasons there was but one game annually and in

the six Caithness accumulated 31 goals and conceded 20.



A large crowd in attendance for the 1955 encounter at Sir George's Park, Thurso.



Caithness XI

Season - 1947

Archer Shield winners

Caithness 8-5 Orkney

Back: Sinclair Mackay (Wick F.A. Secretary, Alec Boyd (Wick F.A.), Unknown, Unknown, D. W. Cowper (referee)

Seated: George Lyall (Groats), Adam Dundas (Swifts); Andy Farquhar (Academy); John Bain (Groats), Gordon Grant (Thistle), Jack Gunn (Thistle), John Munro (Thistle).

Front: Murray Harper (Academy), Johnny Bremner (Academy), J.Farmer (Thistle); Ian Bremner (Thistle).

Pictured is the Caithness XI that lined up after their 8-5 Archer Shield victory in 1947. This was the first post war match to be played in the competition and a period of extra-time was required to separate the two teams. Goal scorers for Caithness were Ian Bremner (4), Johnny Bremner, Jack Gunn, George Lyall and an Orkney own goal.

The Orkney line up that day was: T. Wall (Rovers); W. Barrack (Hotspur); W. Foubister (Hotspur); T. Keldie (Thorfinn); K. Macleod (Rovers); Dave Fox (Thorfinn); R. Miller (Rovers); Louis Cabrelli (Thorfinn), Russel Croy (Rovers), Arthur Dainty (Holm), J. Miller (Thorfinn).

Referee was D.W. Cowper, Wick.



Orkney
Season - 1949
Archer Shield & Milne Cup Winners
Caithness 0-6 Orkney

Back: Bill Sim (Thorfinn), Arnold Rendall (Tankerness), Jock Cursiter (Rovers)
Middle: Jim "Dook" Donaldson (Thorfinn), Davie Fox (Thorfinn), John Donaldson (Thorfinn), Jackie Hutchinson (Dounby), Magnus "Mugga" Tait (Stromness).
Front: Russel Croy (Rovers), Freddie Hutchinson (Dounby), Arthur Dainty (Holm).

Arguably one of the best, if not “**The Best**”, Orkney teams there has been. Caithness was no match for this tall physical team, as Jim “Dook” Donaldson, helped himself to 4 goals in the 1949 match played at Sir George’s Park, Thurso. Here was an excellent Orkney XI who would go on and beat their great rivals Shetland 6-1 to lift the coveted Milne Cup in the same season.

Orkney had a spell of domination with this team, winning three contests in a row.

Donaldson would go on for some years to come and put Caithness to the sword on several occasions, scoring a total of 32 goals in Archer Shield contests from 1948 up to 1966.

Davie Fox the little pocket battleship in midfield, a player full of tricks, was involved in many a scrape with his Caithness counterparts. Both these players helped out Wick Academy occasionally in their Scottish Qualifying and North of Scotland Cup ties.



Caithness XI
Season – 1948
Archer Shield

Back: W.D. Cowper (referee), Andy Malone (Swifts), William Egerton (Groats), J. “Celtic” Bain (Groats), Hamish Horne (Acks), J. Sinclair (Academy), Sinclair Mackay (Wick F.A.), Dan Thomson (Academy).

Front: George Ross (Acks), James Corner (Academy), Robbie Shearer (Groats), Murray Harper (Academy), A. Durrand (Academy), Thomas Cook (Swifts).

Pictured above in Thurso is the Caithness representative side that took on Orkney in the 1949 encounter. For reasons unknown the team are photographed with the Archer Shield as Orkney were the winners on the day with a 6-0 score-line. Perhaps it was to make up for the

previous season if no photograph was taken of the winning Caithness XI.

It would take Caithness until 1952 until they got their hands back on the coveted trophy as Orkney had a dominant spell, winning three on the trot 1949, 1950 & 1951.

Emerging in this side was Hamish Horne (Acks), an accomplished centre-half who would go on to represent the County on 18 occasions in Portland Bowl & Archer Shield contests. He would also breach the Thurso Wick divide in Inter-Town tussles, with 16 appearances for Thurso whilst a

Thurso Academicals player and 6 for Wick during a spell with Wick Academy.

Also in this team was Swifts player Andy Malone who tragically lost his life a couple of years later, being struck by a train at Georgemas and was a huge loss to everyone.



Caithness XI
Season – 1952

Archer Shield winners

**Back: Sinclair Mackay (Caithness & Wick F.A.), Mike More (Thistle), Markie Campbell (Pentland), D. Swanson (Pentland), Tommy Geddes (Pentland), Adam Dundas (Swifts), Robbie Larnach (Lybster Portland).
Front: J. Mackay (Caithness & Thurso F.A's), D. Mackay (Pentland), G. Mackay (Swifts), Hamish Horne (Acks), Robbie Shearer (Groats), Geordie Munro (Groats). Alec Boyd (Caithness & Wick F.A's)**

Three officials at extreme back are unknown

Although not a very clear photo, this is the Caithness team that lined up prior to the 1952 contest at the Bignold Park, Kirkwall.

1500 spectators paid £108 15 shillings and witnessed Caithness come from two goals down to win the match 4-2. Goal scorers were Robbie Larnach (2), G. Mackay & Geordie Munro for Caithness and Jim Donaldson was once again on the mark for Orkney with both goals.

Caithness captain Hamish Horne was presented with the Shield by Mr Jo Grimmond who was the Liberal Party leader at that time.

The Caithness line up that day read- Tommy Geddes, Mike More, Adam Dundas, D. Swanson, Hamish Horne, Markie Campbell, Robbie Larnach, D. Mackay, G. Mackay, Robbie Shearer and Geordie Munro.

Orkney:- D. Shearer (Dounby), G. Hunter (Rovers), C. Clouston (Stromness Ath), T. McGhee (Thorfinn), Freddie Hutchison (Dounby), "Mugga" Tait (Stromness Ath), Jim

Donaldson (Thorfinn), Dave Fox (Thorfinn), Russell Groundwater (Rovers), J. Crisp (Hotspurs), M. Allan (Rovers).



Caithness XI
Archer Shield – Sir George's Park, Thurso
14TH July 1960



Orkney XI

Archer Shield Winners

1935 – Caithness	1971 – Orkney	1999 – Orkney
1936 – Caithness	1972 – Orkney	2000 – Caithness
1937 – Orkney	1973 – Orkney	2001 – Orkney
1938 – Caithness	1974 – Caithness	2002 – Orkney
1947 – Caithness	1975 – Caithness	2003 – Orkney
1948 – Caithness	1976 – Caithness	2004 – Caithness
1949 – Orkney	1977 – Orkney	2005 – Orkney
1950 – Orkney	1978 – Orkney	2006 – Orkney
1951 – Orkney	1979 – Orkney	2007 – Caithness
1952 – Caithness	1980 – Orkney	2008 – Orkney
1953 – Orkney	1981 – Caithness	2009 – Caithness
1954 – Caithness	1982 – Caithness	2010 – Caithness
1955 – Orkney	1983 – Caithness	2011 – Orkney
1956 – Orkney	1984 – Caithness	2012 – Orkney
1957 – Orkney	1985 – Orkney	2013 – Orkney
1958 – Orkney	1986 – Caithness	2014 – Orkney
1959 – Caithness	1987 – Caithness	2015 – Caithness
1960 – Orkney	1988 – Orkney	2016 – Orkney
1961 – Caithness	1989 – Orkney	2017 – Orkney
1962 – Caithness	1990 – Caithness	2018 – Orkney
1963 – Orkney	1991 – Caithness	2019 – Orkney
1964 – Orkney	1992 – Caithness	2020 – Not played
1965 – Caithness	1993 – Caithness	2021 – Caithness
1966 – Orkney	1994 – Caithness	2022 – Orkney
1967 – Orkney	1995 – Caithness	2023 – Orkney
1968 – Orkney	1996 – Caithness	2024 – Orkney
1969 – Orkney	1997 – Orkney	
1970 – Caithness	1998 – Caithness	

INTER-TOWN FOOTBALL



The Harmsworth Bowl

John O'Groat Journal report 14th January 1900

**THE PRESENTATION OF A HANDSOME CUP BY R. L. HARMSWORTH, ESQ., M.P.
TO THE JOHN O'GROAT FOOTBALL CLUB IN HONOUR OF THEIR SEVEN CLUBMATES NOW
SERVING AT THE FRONT WITH THE SEAFORTH VOLUNTEERS.**

In common with the other forty odd football clubs, ploughing associations, etc., the secretary of the John O'Groats F. C. wrote to Mr Harmsworth soliciting his patronage, and drew his attention to the fact that seven of the "Gallant Twelve" Wick Volunteers were

members of the Groats. Mr Harmsworth immediately replied, and promised something substantial. Last week the following letter was received by Mr James Shearer, the Groats' secretary:-

John O'Groat F.C. Players Names Inscribed on the Harmsworth Bowl

Ben Anderson
Dan W. Baillie
Alexander Clyne
William Cowper
George Forbes
Donald Gunn

Alexander Macleod
Alexander 'Akie' Miller
Alexander Nicolson
Donald Ross
John H. Tait



Sir Leicester Harmsworth Esq, M.P.
REVELEY LODGE, BUSHEY HEATH, HERTS,
1st December, 1900.

“Dear Sir, - The delay in replying to your letter of the 23rd October last arose in the following manor:-

On receipt of the information that seven members of your club had joined the Highland Brigade in South Africa, it immediately occurred to me that I would like to endeavour to mark my personal appreciation of such a conspicuous example of patriotism-unequaled, I should say, by any other football club in the Kingdom- in some appreciable manner.

I have been searching the jewellers of London for a silver figure of a Highlander to present to your club, to be played for under some conditions which would appeal to all lovers of the game in Caithness. But I am afraid that however useful and indispensable the real Highlander may be in South Africa, there would not appear to be a large demand for him in silver replica. Accordingly I was compelled to fall back upon the more prosaic, but, I hope, equally satisfying bowl, which I am forwarding on to you.

I should like the bowl to be played for under the following conditions:-

Let a team of players from the Thurso football clubs play two matches every year with a team of players from the Wick football clubs.

The bowl is to be the property for the year of the winning team.

If no result be arrived at after playing two matches, then a third should be played, and a fourth or fifth in necessary.

One match should be played at Thurso, another at Wick, and the “decider”-if necessary-on a neutral ground-say at Castletown, Halkirk or Lybster.

The winning team might deposit the bowl for the year in the Free Library of its town as a token of the town’s success I Scotland’s national game.

The stand is purposely made large for room to add a silver plate, giving the name of the bowl and the circumstances under which it was presented-that is, giving the seven soldiers’ names-and to add from year to year the name of the winning club and the date. The expenses of adding such a plate will be gladly borne by me.

I trust that this will be met with the approbation of the John O’Groat Football Club and that they will do me the pleasure of accepting the bowl.

With the best wishes for the success of your club and with kind regards, believe me, truly and faithfully yours”,

R. LEICESTER HARMSWORTH

I have no doubt the Groats will fully appreciate Mr Harmsworth’s tribute to the gallantry to those comrades whom we all delight to honour. And they would wish to fall in with Mr Harmsworth’s conditions. That is, provided the Wick and Thurso clubs are agreeable. The financial affairs of the Wick clubs are not in such a sound condition as to admit further strain, and

especially so if it became necessary to play on neutral ground. Again it is doubtful if the best representative team of each town would be willing or able to pay their own expenses. However, I have no doubt Mr Harmsworth will be willing fall in with conditions better suited to local requirements. Space will not allow me to enlarge at present.

INTER-TOWN FOOTBALL
Wick v Thurso
THE HARMSWORTH BOWL

Unquestionably the outstanding games in the annals of Caithness football are the annual contests between Wick and Thurso for possession of the Harmsworth Bowl. Other trophies such as the (Miller Cup and the Wilson Cup) have served the purpose for which they were offered for inter-town competition, but followers of football in Caithness look upon "the Harmsworth" as "the classic event of the season". The games decide the county championship, and the matches-many of them memorable-are to our community what cup finals are to our southern brethren. Players have been proud to play for what the great majority of cases has been their native town, and spectators flock to see the rival towns in action.

Some 67 years ago the Harmsworth Bowl (which is a very handsome one) was presented by the then M.P. for the county of Caithness-later Sir R. Leicester Harmsworth-to the Wick John O Groat F.C. as a mark of esteem for the eleven men belonging to the club who volunteered for active service in the South African War. The volunteers, whose names are inscribed on the bowl were :- Dan W. Baillie, Alex Clyne, William Cowper, George Forbes, Donald Gunn, Alex Macleod, Alex Miller, Alex Nicolson, Donald Ross, and John H. Tait. The bowl was handed over in accordance with the wishes (expressed or unexpressed) of the donor for inter-town competition in the county and was undoubtedly beneficial to the furtherance of football locally.

Bone of Contention

The Bowl has been played for but one season when it became "a bone of contention." The club which was made the medium through which the gift was bestowed claimed to have the whole and sole management of the fixtures-fix the date of the match, select the Wick team, and last, but not least, appropriate all the gate drawings. This apparently because the M.P. had given no yearly subscription that season to the John O Groat F.C. and the contention was that this must necessarily show that the bowl was to be in lieu thereof-"It was their special property." The Academy F.C. made a proposal for an amicable settlement, the chief point of which was that the Groats should receive a guinea (how money value has changed!) out of the surplus drawings at the home match each year before dividing the balance, so that the three clubs would then be on the same financial equality. This proposal was accepted but then the Groats stipulated that the Wick match-there was one in either town each year-would have to be played at Gallowhill (their ground at the time) and that their club

members are admitted free. To the latter part of this ultimatum the other club representatives would not agree; the Groats representatives withdrew from a Harmsworth Committee meeting-and a deadlock ensued. It is on record, too, that the recipients of the bowl" unanimously resolved to manage the competition themselves"; and the other clubs retorted with a suggestion -or it could be termed a threat-to raise funds to provide another suitable trophy, the profits from which would be divided equally between the clubs entering the competition. Happily, this "muddle and a mess"-as it was described by a writer of that now distant date-was satisfactorily adjusted, and the competition arranged on an acceptable and equitable basis. Two of the regulations, (13 in all), governing the Harmsworth Bowl contests at the outset stipulated that the matches be played on the Groats' ground and that their secretary should be secretary for the Wick Committee.

Sporting Spirit

The sporting spirit of the John O Groat F.C. finally triumphed over pecuniary gain and the trophy became the property of Wick Football Association. In the early days the Thurso clubs acquiesced to the arrangements, later the rival Associations became a joint controlling body (as should be) and doubtless regard their position as joint owners. Anyhow, each has won it often enough!

The annual jousts between the towns have not been altogether trouble-free-disagreements there have been, but only in rare intervals. In this review we hope to re-live some of the days that are but memories and get again a glimpse of some of the more expert exponents of the game who blossomed here and there.

Policy Park, near Thurso Castle, was the venue of the first encounter of representatives Wick and Thurso Association football teams in the Harmsworth Bowl contest. The match was played on the afternoon of Saturday, March 16th, 1901, and attracted "more than ordinary interest." Quite a gala-day appearance was given the flagstone town by the large concourse of people wending their way first from the railway station, where they had gone to welcome the Wick team, and then to the scene of the action led by a fine Artillery Band discoursing popular airs. The gate receipts (£7 5/-), though considered meagre nowadays, constituted a record for Thurso at the time-and included among the spectators was quite a number of the then fairer gentler sex.

Don Ryrie

Wick appeared in the John O Groat jerseys (red) and Thurso in the Swifts' black and white. The Wick captain (George Banks) won the toss, and the game and competition were set a-going by Donald Ryrie, to whom, as later years proved, it was appropriate that this distinction should belong. Ryrie made his football acquaintance with senior football when 15 years of age, as a player with the then flourishing Thurso Thistle F.C. Quickly he demonstrated his worth on the field and came to be regarded as one of the best backs in the North. One who could give and take hard knocks-permissible in the early days-Ryrie delighted in a hard and fast game? Following a short sojourn in the South, he returned and joined Academicals, and in his first game essayed the role of centre-forward. Later he played in every position on the field (even in goal) with success. A reliable informant described him as undoubtedly the best all-round football player the county had produced, and wondered if ever again Thurso would rear his like again.



Don Ryrie (Thurso)

The opening goal in the H.B. competition was registered by A. Sinclair (Thurso) and only a few minutes later A. Bain retaliated for Wick. Finally, that first afternoon, the score stood 5-2 in favour of Wick, notwithstanding the fact that fully two-thirds of the play had been in the visitors' territory. "Jimit" Doull, the Wick custodian, "did more than any other man to win the match," though it is on record that he was severely criticised by a section of the crowd behind his goal." The teams in opposition in the initial game were:-

Thurso-T. Sutherland, J.D. Millikin, A. Gunn, W. Mackenzie, A. Sinclair, D. Manson, S. Manson, J. Makaskill, Don Ryrie, W. Miller, William Stratton.
Wick-Jimit Doull, F. Miller, D. Clyne, Alex Macleod, John Swanson, Hugh Henderson, D. J. Henry, G. Harper, George Banks, A. Bain, Donald Stewart.
Referee-Mr P. Campbell, Thurso.

Return Game at Wick

The return game at Wick in 1901 was also won by Wick and by the same handsome margin. Harper was unable to appear for the winners and John Davidson (Academy) filled the inside-right berth.

The west-end players extracted their crumb of comfort from the competition in 1902-a respectable draw, but Wick made no mistake in Harrow Park. J. Sinclair (the Acks' centre) scored in both games, as did two Pulteney Thistle players-Archie Miller and Donald Stewart.



Wick's Winning Team – 1902

Standing: Mr A. Nicolson, Mr A. Miller, D. Clyne, James "Jimit" Doull, Alex Tait, Mr W. Cowper.
 Middle: Alex "Sach" Macleod, D. J. Henry, Mr J. Brims, Mr J. Christie, Hugh Henderson,
 H. Sinclair.
 Front: Archibald Miller, J. Anderson, John M. Swanson, Alex Sutherland, Donald Stewart.

It was on a breezy day in April, 1903, that Thurso recorded their initial triumph over their rival neighbours in the Policy Grounds. A goalless period passed quietly, but when the home team took the lead after the cross-over the enthusiasm of the Thurso support was given full vent. The combined play of the home forward quintet completely nonplussed the opposing defence and two further goals were added. It was a glorious victory.

Consulting an east-end supporter's notes to ascertain who were chiefly instrumental in the attainment of Thurso's initial win, it was found that he considered the game well played and well won and asserted that the superiority of the winners lay in a knowledge of each others play and in the ability with which they used that knowledge. Thurso's First winning team:-Macleod, Ryrie, Gunn, Williamson, Begg, Irvine, Mackay, Morrison, Millikin, Gunn, and Mackay.

Thurso showed but one change in the personnel of the team for the fixture on their opponents' ground, but four members of the defeated combination did not find places in the Wick eleven for the second encounter. On this occasion D. Mackay and Millikin registered goals for Thurso, but two were not sufficient to earn possession of the trophy as Macleod had to

acknowledge defeat four times, Willie Bruce and G. Campbell sharing equally these goals. Weather conditions that day had been unsuitable for football, but the "tanner" gate then in vogue brought in slightly over £12, the spectators including 200 enthusiastic Thursonians who had travelled to urge on their team.

First Final

Each team with a home win to its credit, the first final game (a third match to separate the teams on equal goals) of the competition became necessary. How the venue of play was decided upon the writer does not know but has a notion that the spin of a coin settled this important point, on which the rules might as well silent as to bind the contestants in such circumstances to neutral ground. Anyhow, the final was played at Thurso on April 25th, 1903, and accompanying the Wick team (which was the same as did duty in the previous match) were upwards of 300 supporters who had travelled by "special train". The Thurso Association made several changes causing a reshuffle of positions; they risked-and lost. A clear-goal victory was won by Wick. The all-important goals were scored obtained by W. Bruce (2) and A. Sutherland, and for the third consecutive season the bowl was housed in Wick. The winning team read: Jimit Doull, D. Clyne, H. Sinclair, J. Waters, J. Bremner, H.

Henderson, W. Bruce, A. Ogilvy, J. Sutherland, A. Sutherland and G. Campbell.

This brief review shows that Wick owed much of its 1903 success to the shooting propensities to an outside-right named William Bruce, who obtained four of the seven goals registered by the men from the fishing town. This William Bruce, who took part in the first inter-town engagement the following year, but did not again figure in a "Harmsworth" team until five years later when he occupied the right-half position,. But Willie was a whole-hearted footballer who right loyally served John O Groat F.C. throughout many a trying campaign. He was just the type of man who did football a service by his very presence. Though fairly tall in build, he had not the appearance of an athlete; he was an unusually quiet, modest and honest sportsman-esteemed by friend and foe. On the field he was fleet of foot and in later years in partnership with Jimmy Groat he performed the duties of a defender with as much skill and pluck as he showed in his youth on the wing

Another Goal-getter

The other goal-getter, Alex Sutherland, was a diminutive fellow whose guile and cleverness earned him several Wick "caps" between 1902 and 1910. Though small in stature, he had grit and a never-say-die spirit that, allied to natural ability, carried him through many a hectic game. He was best known by the peculiar nick-name of "Deathaig". On some occasions he was partnered by a grand player named Alex Manson, known locally as "Kill"-and a really deadly wing they made!

Superstitious folk dislike the colour green, being considered an omen of ill-luck: but those responsible for the management of football affairs in Thurso in the year 1904 had no qualms about sending forth the town's representatives eleven garbed in the colour that rashes grow. Wick wore yellow and black-but it was they who succumbed (score 4-1). This substantial victory was in no small measure due to the brilliant leadership and opportunism of J. Baillie. As a centre-forward such a player was a real treasure. Fortunate, indeed, it was for the eastern town that their intermediate division of that day-Waters, Bremner and

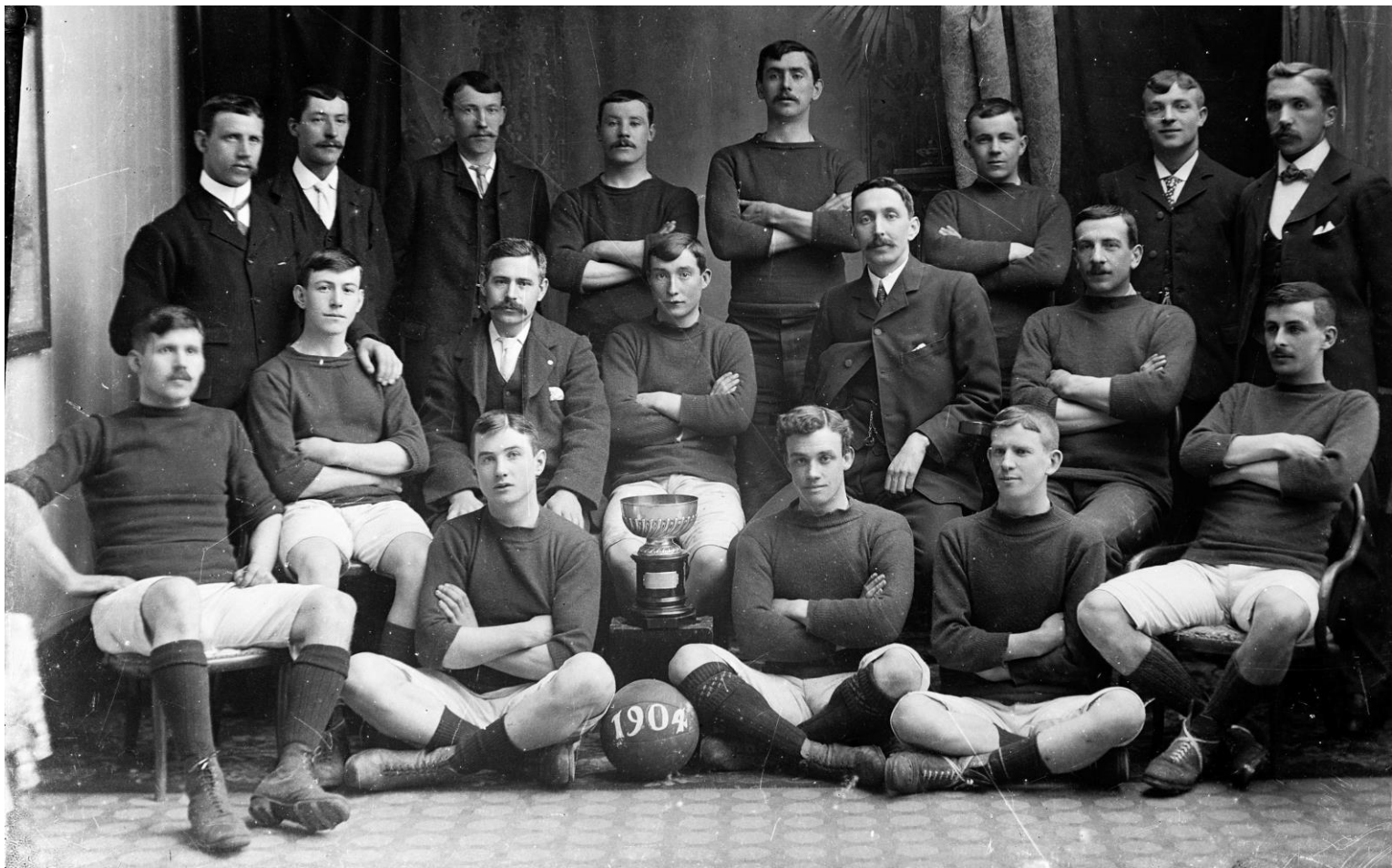
Henderson-was one of the cleverest and most formidable the town had fielded.

Wick discarded the jerseys and five of the players who had made such an ignominious exit from the Thurso enclosure, and donned blue for the return encounter in Harrow Park. The visitors defence that day had to withstand a severe bombardment; Manson and Gunn came often to the rescue and when they failed an almost impassable barrier was presented to the local sharpshooters by the heroics of Leith, the Thurso custodian. Three times did wick get the ball into the haven he guarded, but only one goal did the referee (Mr Davidson) allow, and to the relief of the 300 followers who came to cheer them the Thurso forward fliers equalised during one of their spasmodic attacks?

Trophy Presented

In the Station Hotel in the evening the victors and the vanquished met, and Mr W. Thomson, secretary of Wick F.A. handed over the bowl to Mr G. D. Millikin, president of the Thurso League and later a schoolmaster in Wick, who, in accepting the trophy remarked that it was a really proud moment for Thurso players. Thereafter songs and recitations were rendered and an enjoyable evening passed.

The winning team remained unaltered in both engagements. It read:-D. Leith, A. Gunn, D. Manson, W. Angus, R. Macdonald, Don Ryrie, H. Morrison, G. Morrison, J. Baillie, W. Mackay and K. Mackay. There were memorable scenes in Thurso that Saturday evening and on arrival of the train from Wick the team got a mighty reception. The station was crowded by old and young, and the din and scenes that followed were beyond description. Headed by two pipers (whose stirring music could not be heard beyond a couple of yards because of the yells and cheers that burst forth remittingly), and with the trophy held high, the crowd surged its way down Princes Street to the end of High Street, giving vent to their joyous feelings en route with vigorous cheers. The outburst had been simmering for four years-at last Wick had been humbled-and nothing approaching this massive and spontaneous demonstration has been repeated.



Thurso

Harmsworth Bowl winners – 1904

Standing: Messrs George Tait, Sinclair Manson, - Mackay, A. Gunn, D. Leith, D. Manson, Messrs Murray and W.J. Macpherson.

Middle: H. Morrison, W. Angus, Mr J. Shanlin, R. Macdonald, Mr G. D. W. Milikin, Don Rylie, William Mackay.

Front: George Morrison, James Baillie and Ken Mackay.

1905

The bowl's sojourn in Thurso was of short duration. The opening game played there in 1905 ended in a 3-3 draw, the home team scoring its third goal in the closing minutes, but the return match at Wick settled the

trophy's seasonal destination-Wick winning by five goals to Thurso's two. The latter encounter is notable in that the home team's first and last two goals were scored by the outside-right, Angus Budge (Thistle).

The captain of the team also belonged to the Pulteney club. He was Donald Stewart. Scrupulously fair on the football field, he was yet a player possessed of sufficient weight and dash to cause uneasiness in any defence. He did not lack confidence or initiative-and very frequently succeeded in his mission. A grand sociable fellow with a pleasant appearance, he was extremely popular. Playing career over, he performed with ability and impartiality the onerous duties of a referee.

An incident concerning Stewart was described as the "funniest thing ever in football"-and would have got wider publicity today. Yet it was an incident with a simple and sensible explanation. Playing in Harrow Park, one stormy day, the Thistle outside-left preferred

wearing full-length pink woollen underwear beneath his football shorts rather than risk aggravating a common cold. Odd looking it certainly was, but also maybe effective.

Wick Dominated

Competitive football between the Caithness towns was a rather one-sided affair-so far as results were concerned-from its commencement up to and including the year 1907. Wick with larger resources to draw upon dominated the H.B. competition, and of the first fifteen matches won nine, drew four, and lost only two, scoring in all 46 goals and conceding 28. The difference of 18 goals between the rivals enabled the leaders to have possession of the trophy in six separate seasons, while the name of Thurso had been engraved upon it on only one occasion.

Instead in 1907 the western selection was entirely eclipsed succumbing by two goals at home and by no fewer than six on "foreign soil" without notching a single success against the Wick defence. Fortune proved a veritable friend to Wick in the Policy Ground engagement, but the return encounter at Gallowhill was as one-sided as the score indicated. The gate receipts amounted to £16, which at the time constituted a record for Wick.

For those who like to reminisce the Wick players who kept the seasons score-sheet clean were:-John Bain (Thistle), John Bremner (Academy), James Anderson (Thistle), Angus Budge (Thistle), John Waters (Academy), Alex Tait (Groats), Alex Manson (Groats), William Houston (Groats), George Skinner (Academy)-all forgoing were in both games; the following had places in one of the matches-H. Clyne (Groats), J. Tait and Dan W. Bain (Artillery) and James Bain (Thistle).

Altogether (between 1901 and 1907) there have been only three seasons in which two teams have retired goalless over the two games-and Thurso were in the unhappy position on all three occasions. Wick; have never failed to get one goal at least. A deceptive drive by a half-back was all that saved their bacon (as the saying goes) in 1925. Scorer (for the curious) was Bob Tait (Academy). Thurso's first unproductive season was 1907, the second 1911, and the third 1954. In both pre-war years mentioned the aggregate was 8-nil, and in 1954, 10-nil.

The lads with the unyielding defence in 1911 were:- John Begg (Academy), Don Brims (Artillery), George Skinner (Academy), James P. Bain (Artillery), John Waters and William Leys (both Academy), H. Clyne and A. Macgregor (both Groats), James H. Miller (Academy), George "Rover" Tait (Academy), G. A. "Brora wizard" Sutherland (Groats) and Dan W. Bain (Academy) each played in one game.

Houston and Skinner

Comment on some of the above may pardonably be made. First Don Brims-a player of fine physique and a sound, staunch defender. He was unfortunate to be contemporary with Academy's notorious pair-William Houston and George Skinner-and these two games is all he had for Wick. Many less qualified have had more "caps".

"Bogie" Houston and Skinner never seemed to loose form. They were both smallish in build, but what they lacked in inches was fully compensated for in other qualities. Houston was uncommonly neat, tricky and was effortlessly got power behind returns. Skinner, moved from outside-left (and an exceptionally good one) made in ideal partner, providing speed, dash and determination. They must surely be remembered as about the best club pair ever. George Sutherland had no peer in the North as an inside-forward. Not for nothing was Geordie known as the "Brora Wizard". He was an architect in Wick and probably the best capture the Groats ever made. His zeal, enthusiasm and optimism, could vitalise the whole team and when with London Caledonian was at least three times honoured by the London F.A., playing alongside such a glittering star as Vivian Woodward, an amateur who led England's international team on occasions.

Moving ahead for a moment to 1954-the season showing the highest ever H.B aggregate-Wick (at home) is given as the more constructive and cohesive

side in a two-goal win. It was only after a goalless first-half at Thurso that the record was established. And, despite the 8-nil score, it was no one-sided affair even then-"the goals were simply popped in at one end within quick time after play had been at the other end." And the Wick goalkeeper was given a word of praise.



Bill Mackay (Wick)

For Bill Mackay (Thistle), the smart moving, intelligent centre-forward referred to in the county review, it was a personal triumph with a record seven goals in a game to his credit. This outstanding leader collected 30 goals for Caithness and 39 in inter-town tussles. Hamish Horne, for Thurso centre-half and captain, led the Wick team that evening (he was then resident in Wick) and with his as victors were:-Bobby Munro (Academy), Ted Reid (Academy), Geordie Munro (Groats), Peter Grant (Thistle), Hamish Horne (Academy), Alistair Macleod (Thistle), Ian Macdonald (Groats), Don Stewart (Academy), Bill Mackay (Thistle), Robbie Shearer (Groats) and A. Durrand (Academy), Murray Harper (Academy)-he scored two goals-and Ian Swanson (Thistle) played in the opening game, and apart from wingmen Macdonald and Durrand all the others had double "caps".

Tide Turns for Thurso

Thurso's disappointments in the early years might well have disheartened a less courageous body than the plucky Thursonians who repeatedly accepted defeat in a sporting spirit and as an incentive to sterner efforts. Several consecutive seasons with only a solitary success was their unobvious position, but with the advent of the eighth year of the competition the tide of fortune began to flow more in their favour.

The general procedure at the beginning appears to have been that the opening match each season took place in Thurso and in 1908 the eleven that travelled

from Wick was “not regarded as a particularly strong one” but proved good enough to return with the score 5-3 in their favour. Two were inadvertently turned by defenders; the other three came from James Bain, the sure-shot Thistle inside-left. He could place a ball with uncanny accuracy. A quarter of a century later his son-George, of the Groats-also had a place in Wick’s ranks as a half-back. For the return bout (played at Gallowhill) both elevens underwent several changes, and in fast and exciting exchanges one of the home full-backs “headed” through Wick’s own goal and gave victory to the visitors.

Extraordinary interest was manifest in the third struggle for supremacy, and a great gathering of spectators listened to the town band discourse musical selections at the Gallowhill ground as the teams took to the field. (The final was due to be played at Thurso but the Policy Ground was unavailable). The local eleven appeared in Academy colours, and the Thursonians in white shirts and blue shorts. A disputed goal equalised Wick’s first count, and the visitors redoubled their efforts. The local lads began to lag in their movements and in a scrimmage in front of the home goal Campbell “hooked the ball into the net” giving Thurso possession of the coveted piece of silver for the second time in eight years. It was noted that “by a curious coincidence it was only in leap years that the trophy moved from Wick.” Campbell, the goal scorer, was D.G. of the Academicals, and this was his only game for the town. He earned much distinction as an athlete, particularly the running high jump.

The players who performed so well in 1908 were from Academicals and Britannia and here they are with (in parenthesis) number of appearances that season:-Acks: R. Macleod (3), J. D. Millikin (2), D. G. Campbell (1), Logan Mackidd (2), W. Paul (2), Don Ryrie (3), ; Britannia: R. Geddes (2), D. Macdonald (1), D. Manson (2), J. Farquhar (1), Rod Macdonald (3), James Sutherland (3), William Sutherland (3), William Sutherland (3), David Williamson (3), Sinclair Manson (3) and A. Rosie (1).

1909 Unfinished Contest

Nineteen-hundred-and-nine was the only year in three decades that the H.B. competition remained unfinished. Happily harmony has suffered a setback only at infrequent intervals down the long lane of years and the disputes could be described as more or less family differences in which grievances have been aired. These differences generally oozed mainly from uninspired management and the proper course was never far to seek. But in 1909 there was a real flare-up between the rival teams. That was the year of the fiasco final-a final tie that never played. The ordinary games resulted in each town winning its home match-Thurso by two clear goals, and Wick by 6-2. It is not the historian’s privilege to award the trophy-only to comment that a little less dignity and a little more commonsense would have been valuable ingredients

towards a settlement. The facts seem to be that following the second game there was the customary spin of a coin to decide the venue of the final match. This toss, Thurso believed, gave them the right to name the ground, and naturally decided on their own.

Wick officials apparently objected that the toss took place unofficially as far as they were concerned –they had no knowledge of it or no part in it; they alleged that “the gentleman who represented Wick at the spinning of the coin had no official authority”. It was a player (not the captain) who in an unguarded moment had erred at the railway station. To Thurso, Wick’s argument sounded absurd as “the toss took place when a large number of footballers were present.”

Thurso officials and players were sorely disappointed at such a turn of affairs. They hoped to the last that Wick would come up to scratch; Thurso had the ground prepared and the posters announcing the match in print. As a final way out of the difficulty Thurso suggested that the game should be played on the Wick annual holiday in June; and Wick were called upon to “stifle peevishness and play the man.” Anyway, East was east and West was west, and Wick failed to respond. (It is interesting to note that the final game required in the following season was staged in Thurso!)

Thurso’s Winning Goal

Each town had an away win in 1910-each by a goal-and the toss of a coin decreed that Wick should travel. The game was keenly contested and only a lucky goal separated the teams in the end. Directing a dropping ball with little pith behind it towards the Wick citadel the veteran Ryrie must have been delighted to see the dependable “Jimit” make an irretrievable miscalculation when he allowed the ball to tip over his fingers into the net. Yet this is often how important matches are lost and won-just the something so often alluded to as the glorious uncertainty of the soccer field. The football jinx is ever active.

Thurso’s longest run (one that was never bettered) of H.B. successes was during the years 1924 to 1929 inclusive when they held the trophy six times, scoring in 13 games a total of 60 goals and conceding exactly half that number. Jack Shearer (a lion-hearted player if ever there was one) had an ever-present record during this period appearing in all 13 games; James Rosie and Angie Munro each were once absent; George Rosie played 11 times, John Rosie (10); James R. Miller (9), Don. Mackay (8), and James Cutt (7).

The 60 goals collected during 1924-29 were obtained by: - G. Rosie (14), Robbie Smith (12), James R. Miller (11), James Rosie (6), and Angie Munro (5), Don. Mackay (3), J. D. Auld, J. Hitchinson and Jack Shearer each (2), and singles were contributed by D. Henderson, J. Bremner and James Baillie, Swifts.

Wick's Success

Peculiarly enough, starting when Thurso's ascendancy ended (1930) Wick went on to emulate their rival's feat by becoming winners each season until 1935, when a goal aggregate of 45-27 over 14 games. Wick also won the first match in 1936 (score 8-2) but the record went flop when they succumbed in the next two games at Thurso. Six goalkeepers appeared for Wick in this victorious period, namely-A. Riach (Thistle) and W. Nicol (Thistle) (4 games each). Pat Gunn (Academy 3), Alex Miller (2) and Eric Swanson (Academy 1). Other player with four games or more were:- Bill Mulraine (Groats) and David Oag (Thistle) (each 11), Marcus Miller (Thistle) and William Thomson (Groats) (each 10), Dan Thomson (Academy 8), David Banks (Academy 7), Alex Miller (Thistle), Don G. Macleod (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle) and Peter Chisholm (Academy) (each 6), Alec Clark (Academy) and Jimmy Hull (Groats) (each 5), D. B. Cowper (Thistle) and Donald Shearer (Groats) (each 4).

Nineteen players shared the winning goals (1930-1935) viz:-Bill Mulraine (9), David Oag (7), Marcus Miller (5), David Henderson and Donald Miller (each 3), Alex Ferguson, Rev. Sid J. Toman (Academy), Don G. Macleod and Donald Shearer (each 2), and single scores were made by-David Banks, John Banks, Peter Chisholm John Cowie, R. Steven (all Academy), D. B. Cowper, Jimmy Hull, William Macleod (Thistle), Dan Miller and William Thomson (both Groats).

The second-best sequence of wins (five successive years) also belongs to Wick and attained between 1954 and 1958. In performing this achievement the teams notched 46 goals in only 11 games and forfeited 12. Wick called on the services of 41 players in these five seasons. Those making three or more appearances were:-Ted Reid (Academy) (9), Donald Gunn (Lybster

Portland), Geordie Munro, Robbie Shearer (both Groats, each 7), Jimmy Dunbar (Lybster Portland), Bill Mackay (Thistle), A. Macleod (Thistle) and Sinclair Manson (Groats) (each 5), Robbie Larnach, Harry Coghill (both Lybster Portland), Hamish Horne (Academy), Billy Farmer, G. Gunn (both Thistle), Herbie Lyall, Ian Macdonald (both Groats and A. Stephen (Academy) (each 3).

Heavy Scoring

Scoring was unusually heavy, particularly in the three years 1954 to 1956 when Wick collected eight on two occasions and a seven in an aggregate of 36. The victories in 1957 and 1958 were much less pronounced and include one draw. Bill Mackay (Thistle) had a "hat-trick" and a record breaking-seven in his 11 goals in five games; Robbie Larnach, the Lybster Portland leader, had a four and a three sandwiching singles in his total of nine; others who made the victories possible by scoring were:- Jimmy Dunbar (4), G. Ross (Lybster Portland), Billy Farmer (Thistle) and D. Warnock (Academy) (each 3), Murray Harper (Academy) Ian Munro and Robbie Shearer (both Groats) (each 2); and singles were scored by:-W. Bruce (Thistle), Ian Macdonald, Sinclair Manson, A. Macleod and Donald Stewart (Academy). There were two "own goals" to complete the 46.

The bowl was housed in Thurso in two pre-war and two post-war seasons, giving the town four "consecutive" successes from 1913 to 1921. A third (final) game was required in each pre-war year indicated and again in 1920. The players who did so well for Thurso in the six 1913-14 games were:-Hugh Doull, Dan Manson, James Laurie, George Ross (each 6 games), W. Macpherson, A. Rosie, D. Swanson AND j. Swanson (4 each. A. Morrison, Sinclair Mowat, Andrew Oag, George Forbes and G. Macadie (each 3). Brothers David Ross and



The triumphant Thurso team of 1914

Alex Ross and a player named Maclean (each 2); W. Elder and one with the surname of Mackay each made one appearance. Maclean and D. Swanson (each 2) were the only players with more than one goal.

Going into Thurso on a March afternoon when the competition was revived in 1920, some superstitious soul was overheard to remark: That's bad luck! The players coach had met a funeral cortege on the outskirts of the town. The words were prophetic-that afternoon Wick football sustained what was probably its severest drubbing. It was good luck-and much of it-that Wick needed. With seven experienced players available after a compulsory lapse of six years. Thurso lost (by 1 goal) only one of five games in the first two years. (Wick's pre-war players had vanished like golden sovereigns-six fell in action and a seventh was severely wounded). Thurso found it "Easy" on resumption and trounced their opponents' 8-1-a record defeat at the time. And Robbie Smith, the quick-moving Pentland centre, established an individual record with six goals in a game. It remained for 34 years. George Forbes, R. Smith, David Ross and James

Rosie were ever-presents in these five engagements. Hugh Doull, J. D. Millikin, A. Morrison and James Bremner appeared in four; W. Angus in three; A. Edwards, T. Melville, Angus Munro and G. Williamson in two, and Alex Inrig, Colin Morrison, George Ross, Ken Fraser, Pat Robertson and John Smith each had one game.

25 Years Later!

Jim Millikin scored four goals including a "hat-trick". Not a remarkable accomplishment until it is added that Jim began his outstanding football career 25 years earlier-before many of his colleagues were born. He led the victors in 1921, and he captained the Thurso eleven which first defeated Wick in 1903. A tall, powerful fellow, he was an all-round athlete of distinction, being particularly successful in the 100 yards sprint. On one occasion (at Wick games) he gave away eight yards-and won. As a footballer, he was with Acks at the beginning and end of his distinguished career; in between he had wide experience with several known clubs in Scotland and England where unbiased critics referred to



Thurso are Harmsworth Bowl winners again in 1920

him as the “brawny Scot-sturdily built, unusually fast, and keenly observant” Didn’t we know! Millikin, was a true Thursonian with several interests and delighted in the town’s advancement, although his forebears hailed from Wick.

Total of 124 Games

Examining the Harmsworth Bowl results over 66 years, it is found that Thurso and Wick have been in opposition in 124 games. Sixty-three of these have taken place on Thurso grounds, of which the home team Won 30 and lost 25 (eight were drawn), scoring 173 goals against 166 conceded. Wick fared somewhat on their-own grounds. Sixty-one games have been staged in the county town, of which Wick teams have won 36, lost 19, drawn 6, scoring 185 goals against opponents’ 134. Thus of the 124 games Wick has retired victors in 61 and was defeated on 49 occasions; 14 games have been drawn. Wick’s goal column shows 351 and Thurso’s 307. Not a tremendous difference over such a lengthy period. Sufficient though to allow Wick to

qualify as bowl-holders 29 times; Thurso had the distinction 23 times-24 if 1937 be included, a year when they retained the trophy as holders because the towns were equal in goals after three games.

Sixteen deciding games have been contested, nine of these played in Thurso. The west-end team owe almost half of their successes to a flair for final ties as they have ousted Wick this way in eleven separate years. Seven of these eleven finals were settled by one goal before 1936, since when Thurso have recorded final by two goals (twice) by five goals, and at last by an assertive six. Wick have won five final games, our by a margin of three goals and one by two. But goals did not always decide the destiny of the trophy. For instance, Thurso acquired possession with an aggregate score of 4-6 in favour of Wick in 1914 and again 9-12 in 1936, and when they won in 1908 the aggregate score was 6-6. These triumphs were, of course, in accordance with prevailing rules and the scores quoted only as something of interest.

INTER-TOWN
The HARMSWORTH BOWL
Winners

1901 – Wick	1926 – Thurso	1953 – Thurso
1902 – Wick	1927 – Thurso	1954 – Wick
1903 – Wick	1928 – Thurso	1955 – Wick
1904 – Thurso	1929 – Thurso	1956 – Wick
1905 – Wick	1930 – Wick	1957 – Wick
1906 – Wick	1931 – Wick	1958 – Wick
1907 – Wick	1932 – Wick	1959 – Thurso
1908 – Thurso	1933 – Wick	1960
1909	1934 – Wick	1961 – Wick
1910 – Thurso	1935 – Wick	1962 – Thurso
1911	1936 – Thurso	1963 – Thurso
1912	1937 – Thurso	1964
1913 – Thurso	1938	1965 – Thurso
1914 – Thurso	1939	1966 – Thurso
1920 – Thurso	1947 – Wick	1967 – Wick
1921 – Thurso	1948 – Thurso	1968 – Thurso?
1922 – Wick	1949 – Wick	1969
1923	1950	1970
1924 – Thurso	1951	1971 – Thurso
1925 – Thurso	1952	

THE WILSON CUP and MILLER CUP



The Wilson Cup

Two considerations influenced the introduction of a second inter-town tourney: the favourable atmosphere created by the "Harmsworth" and for the need for the rival towns in action prior to the selection of a county eleven. The pre-war games with Sutherland took place on the first day of the year and county team selectors were in a quandary. Friendly trial games were of little value and it was thought unwise to disturb the spring dates of the existing competition.

The Thurso Association provided the way out when they offered for competition the handsome trophy given them by Mr John Miller of Scrabster (himself a one-time player). The first Miller Cup match took place at Harrow Park on 15th November, 1913, when George Skinner officiated as referee. The teams were: **Wick**- B. Sutherland (Academy), P. Grant (Thistle), G. Sutherland (Groats), D. Miller (Thistle), Charnley (Groats), J. Duchart (Academy), James H. Miller (Academy), John Bremner (Groats), William Macniven (Groats), David Skinner (Academy), P. Duchart (Thistle).

Thurso- Hugh Doull (Acks), S. Mowat, (Acks), T. Melville (Swifts), Fraser (Britannia), J. Laurie (Acks), G. Ross (Britannia), G. Forbes (Acks), H. Macdonald (Swifts), A. Rosie, D. Swanson and W. Macpherson (all Britannia).

Thurso won the toss but Wick won the game by three clear goals. Willie Macniven had the honour of scoring first, and David Skinner missed a rare opportunity of performing the "hat-trick" when he failed to convert a penalty award in addition to two nicely-taken goals. The return game at Thurso also ended in favour of Wick and the trophy moved to the herring port where it remained during the six war years.

Resumed in 1919

When the contest was resumed in 1919 the Thursonians were extremely anxious to regain possession of the cup. The donor of the trophy had not intended it to go out-with the bounds of Thurso and

was apparently unhappy about what had happened. But in 1919 the Thursonians were unsuccessful in their quest. Indeed they were weakly represented at Wick and suffered a five goal defeat.

The return game at Thurso is notable as probably the only occasion on which Wick F.A. decided to conduct two games on the same afternoon. This was strongly objected to by at the meeting by the Thistle F.C. delegates, who were anxious that the best possible team should travel to Thurso, and who maintained there should be no local game on the day of the Miller Cup was being contested.. But numbers prevailed, and the five players in the Wick eleven withdrew in order to assist their own club. Consequently it was a Groats it was practically a Groats' combination that opposed Thurso, and the Wick team was not finally decided on until Bower was reached on the journey west. The score against the team was 5-1 despite a stubborn resistance.

The third and final game at Wick produced an exhibition which for keenness and pace is seldom seen in Caithness. It was a regular cup-tie struggle and hard knocks and hasty tempers were prevalent-too much so. At one stage spectators crowded on to the pitch-as spectators will do and have no right to do-but happily the referee quickly had the game set in motion again. Such rowdy scenes are uncommon in the county.

Three games were again necessary in 1920 but this time the final belonged to Thurso who recaptured the Miller Cup by means of a 3-nil victory. Thereupon the trophy was withdrawn from inter-town competition.

Mr James Wilson, of Thurso Station Hotel, presented a handsome silver cup to take its place and it became known as the Wilson Cup. At the outset it was arranged that the games be played on the 2nd and 3rd January (1922), but at Thurso's request the dates were altered to the 14th and 21st of the month. Wick had a double win, and thereafter the fixtures were moved forward to October.



Wick XI - 1922

Harmsworth Bowl & Wilson Cup

Back: John Mathieson (Academy), James Mulraine (Academy), Unknown.

Middle: James Cormack (Academy), Charles Ball (Wick F.A.), Bolta Nicolson (Groats).

Front: Robert Tait (Academy), Unknown, Donald Shearer (Groats), George "Rover" Tait (Academy), John Gunn (Thistle).

The Wilson Cup

Altogether (including the Miller Cup) 99 Wilson Cup games have been played-51 of them in Harrow Park. The longest run of seasonal successes (eight) was recorded by Wick between the years 1933-1949. Thurso were cup holders in four successive seasons 1962-1965, and this continuous run was broken only through the opportunism of Andrew "Drewie" Farquhar (Groats) who accepted three half-chances to depose of Thurso's claims in a final game they might well have won.

The most humbling defeat in the competition was also inflicted by Wick when playing at home in 1956. The score was 9-1, and the winning combine comprised:-Don Gunn (Lybster Portland), - Leith (Thistle), Eric Larnach (Lybster Portland), Herbie Lyall (Groats), Hamish Horne (Academy), Sinclair Manson (Groats), Donnie Shearer & Robbie Shearer (Both Groats), Robbie Larnach (Lybster Portland), Bob Gordon & Stanley Larnach (both Lybster Portland). There were five Lybster Portland players in that team three of them brothers. Goal-getters were-

Robbie Larnach (3), Donnie Shearer (2), Stanley Larnach (2), Robbie Shearer and Herbie Lyall. The eleven was captained by Hamish Horne, a Thurso lad then resident in Wick-one of several players honoured by both towns over the years. He was a neat and stylish pivot who appeared in 18 games for Caithness, 16 for Thurso, and on six occasions against that town with Wick. A nice record by a nice lad. Among the players who appeared in both Wick and Thurso teams were G. Munro, Markie Campbell, J. Maclean and Robin Green.

Victories and Defeats

Wick won games by 8-3 in 1937 at home and 8-4 in 1925 away; they have failed to score in five games-one of them at home. Thurso's highest count was eight goals in a five-goal away win in 1925; they shot seven goals in a game in 1963 and again in 1964-each time at Wick. Peculiarly enough, the result was 7-3 on each occasion. Thurso have retired goalless on six occasions-four of them in away games. Only once has this happened in post-war years and that in an away

game in 1959. In late years (since 1962) Thurso have performed consistently well, scoring 60 goals against 41, and this

Colud indicate a change in fortune. Last season, for instance, Wick won the Wilson Cup with an 8-8 aggregate score; in 1931 the east-enders became cup holders when the aggregate score was 13-13. Has Wick then had a slice of good luck?

Ninety-nine have taken place in this second inter-town tournament over a period of 41 years. At Thurso 48 games have been played of which the home team won 20, lost 18, and drew 10, and scored 147 goals against 143 conceded. Thurso, however, did not fare nearly so well in the 51 games played in Wick, where the locals won 25, lost 16, drew 10, and scored 178 goals against 142 conceded. The combined results covering all 99 Wilson Cup matches show that Wick won 43, lost 36, drew 20, and scored 321 goals against 289 conceded. They became cup holders on 23 occasions (including one season "retained"); Thurso having triumphed in 18 seasons. Seventeen final (3rd match) games have been necessary. These produced eight wins for Wick and six for Thurso. The other three were drawn-two of them in 1933.

INTER-TOWN CONTESTS

Adding the Wilson Cup results to those of the Harmsworth Bowl the combined figures give some astonishing totals. For instance, 223 games have been played, 111 of them on Thurso grounds. Goals scored number 1268: Wick 672 (363 at home), Thurso 596 (320 at home). Wick won 104 games (61 at home), and it's a pity that the towns century win was allowed to pass unnoticed. Thurso have recorded 85 wins and 34 games have ended with the teams on level terms. On home grounds Thurso have retired victors 50 times and suffered defeat on 43 occasions. Wick's advantage has been established mainly in Harrow Park where 61 games have gone their way, and 35 to worthy opponents. Wick's "away" record is also slightly better.

"Monkeying with the rules" caused a rumpus and later a deadlock in the Wilson Cup competition in the thirties. New and maybe inexperienced Association representatives had made ill-considered changes-and squabbles assuredly followed.

Lets have a look at the inter-town arrangements throughout the years to get a true review of the positions that arose. For brevity's sake, it may be stated that up till 1920 arrangements as to playing dates were pretty haphazard. Were one town favourably placed as regards available players it seemed the custom to suggest to the other that the time had come to get on with the games. Receipt of such a communication was always suspect in the opposing camp-and sometimes there was strategical delay.

A Major Change

When the competitions were resumed in 1920, however, the then secretary persuaded the rival

Associations to make minor alterations in the rules and one major change. The latter was the fixing of standing dates for the inter-town games-the first and third Saturdays in the months of November and of March. Once decided by the spin of a coin, final games would take place alternately in the rival towns.

This arrangement worked quite satisfactory for about a dozen years. It was in 1931 that the foundation of pending trouble was innocently laid. The chairman at a County Association meeting in October of that year perceived that the two competitions (to quote from minutes) "were at present run independent of one another, and he moved that in future any final games in either competition be dependent one on the other, thus ensuring that that the final would be played alternately in Wick and Thurso". The chairman (be it noted) was a Thurso representative. At the time this motion was passed unanimously neither town had cause to grumble concerning equality as to the number of games played therein.

This new rule had a magical effect. It sent three successive Wilson Cup finals to Wick-1933, 1934 and 1938. In 1933 came a deadlock-Thurso refused to fulfil the fixture.

Thurso expected to house this tie and contested that "to run separate competitions as one as regards finals was ridiculous, as each cup should stand on its own merits." A complete somersault from the 1931 attitude. Thurso also alleged that "the rules had been altered far too frequently of late-to the disadvantage of Thurso." And, it could have been added, as the result of a brainwave of a Thurso representative. An important point overlooked was that Thurso had two consecutive H.B. finals. Indeed, Thurso was the venue for three successive Wilson Cup finals (1948, 1954 and 1958), before Wick had its first post-war show in 1962. Taking the inter-town contests as a whole Wick has seen 17 final games and Thurso only one fewer. The 1933 deadlock ended after three weeks argument when the rival Associations agreed to toss for a venue, Wick guessed correctly.

Five Matches in 1933

Frequent changes indeed. In 1933 five matches were played ere the destination of the Wilson Cup was settled. Following upon that unprecedented happening it was hastily decided that goal average over two games should determine the winner. This was swinging the pendulum with a vengeance-doing away altogether with extra games. Under this rule Thurso (as holders) once retained the H.B. when the teams were level in goals and corners after extra time. The arrangement, however, was soon declared wholly unsatisfactory and flung on the scrapheap of legislation.

There was obviously uncertainty in the 1934 final. First, a new rule decreed the game be at Wick instead of Thurso, and another stipulated that extra time would be played if the teams finished equal on goals. Thurso

came to Wick, established an apparently unbeatable lead in goals but their defence ultimately let them down and Wick drew level.

The referee (D. B. Cowper) acted on instructions and, as he whistled "time up" signalled the teams to the centre of the field to renew hostilities for an extra half-hour. But the Thurso team would have none of it, and refused to play because they maintained the Wick team had been late in turning out. Spectators waited hopefully in the rain and there was a bit of a demonstration as the Thurso team left the ground.

The Association ruling was that play should commence at 2:45pm on that occasion and the late arrival of certain Wick players caused the start to be delayed. On this point Thurso based their refusal to continue play longer than the customary 90 minutes. The Association, however, had also ordered extra time in the event of equality and this rule Thurso unwisely spurned. As it happened, the stipulated minutes of

extended time could not have been played owing to gathering darkness hastened by rain-laden clouds. No provision had been made to cover this eventuality and what the upshot would have been had abandonment been necessary might have presented another problem.

Thurso claimed the trophy on account of Thurso's failure to fulfil the conditions. This unhappy ending was unfavourably commented on by a contemporary writer who declared that the Wick Association "had not been overburdened with commonsense in this competition" and described their action as an appropriate follow-up to their remarkable work, as team selectors.' Seldom, if ever, he added, had the Association come in for so much criticism and all of it thoroughly deserved.

So that was that! Now, may harmony prevail? Below is a Thurso F.A. select team for a possible Harmsworth Bowl or Wilson Cup tie.



Thurso Select 1950's

Back: Alistair Rosie (Pentland), George "Rosser" Ross (Acks), Donald Farquhar (Swifts), Hamish Horne (Acks), Andy Malone (Swifts), George Campbell (Acks).

Front: James Macdonald (Pentland), Unknown, Adam Dundas (Swifts), Thomas Cook (Swifts), William Simpson (Pentland).



Wick Academy in the Scottish Qualifying Cup

Between the years 1907-12 Wick Academy were much too good for local rivals. Indeed, defeats averaged less than one per season over six years. Such encouraging success spurred them on to seek sterner opposition and where better than among the Highland League clubs? Hence application was made to the S.F.A. to become contestants in the Scottish Qualifying Cup (A competition to progress to the Scottish Cup proper). Acceptance was approved and ever since Academy have had an active autumn interest.

The club did something in far-away 1911 it hasn't dared to repeat in the following 56 years: it included nine of its own Wick League team in the initial "Qualifying" tie. The club experts on whom they depended were John Begg, a reliable and sometimes brilliant goalkeeper; adequately guarded by William Houston and George Skinner, two speedy and sure-footed wee fellows. Wing half-backs Alex Fraser and

William Leys were experienced players before they came to work in Wick. At centre half was their own John Waters who later became president of the club and shared and shaped its enterprise and ambitions. The inseparable left-wing pair-George "Rover" Tait and D. W. Bain-had graduated with the Artillery F.C., and Jimmy Miller (James H.), an Academy product, was on the right touchline. Into the forward line came the two "strangers"; G. A. Sutherland, the Brora Wizard, who had commenced business as an architect in Wick and assisted the Groats, and David Ross, an ever alert Thursonian whose mother was a native of Wick. Behind this eleven was (as trainer) Sergeant-Instructor George Sutherland of the Scots Guards.

First opponents were Inverness Thistle who (at Wick) was defeated 4-nil, but Academy went out in the second round to Inverness Caledonian.



From the left: William Houston, John Begg and George Skinner, who formed the formidable back line for the Academy.

Jimmy "James H." Miller's Influence

For Jimmy Miller, 1911 was near the beginning of a personal association that was to extend for another 50 years. Academy (or indeed the town) never had a truer friend, more versatile player, or conscientious official. Jimmy captained the first Caithness team (1921) to win the Portland Bowl; appeared for Wick in 21 representative matches. He became secretary and later president of

Academy and was mainly responsible for bringing north all the professional teams that visited the town. He sat on Wick Association and was chairman of the Juvenile F.A. He was also chairman of the Park Improvements Committee in post-war years. No individual gave more freely of his time, his talents, and his treasure to the betterment of football and sport generally in his native Wick.



Wick Academy

Season 1911-12

Wick Senior League & Macpherson Charity Cup

Back: Alan Ross, A. Stewart, John Bremner, J. M. Swanson.

Second Row: D. Steven, William Houston, John Begg, George Skinner,
William Leys, James Bremner.

Third Row: William Dunnett, W. Fraser, G. Campbell, John Davidson,
T. Meechan, John Waters.

Front: John Tait, P. Calder, James H. Miller, George "Rover" Tait, D. W. Bain.

Pictured above is the Wick Academy side that dominated the local football scene and were Wick Senior League winners on four consecutive seasons and Macpherson Charity Cup winners on three successive seasons. This dominance encouraged Academy to seek a

further test of their football ability and applied to the Scottish Football Association for membership, which would allow them to enter into the Scottish Qualifying Cup contests against Highland League opposition.

From Thurso to Girvan

For 45 competitive years Academy has opposed teams from Thurso to Girvan (Coldstream, if you like) with fluctuating fortune. Talented individuals from Caithness and Sutherland comprised the clubs early teams and right loyally they responded. This preserve was tapped undisturbed for 20 years or more but with the entry of Brora Rangers and Thurso Pentland, Academy no longer had an unchallenged claim on the services of far-northern experts and were forced to search farther a field. Former players have travelled from Scarborough, Forfar, Elgin, Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere to be with them on "the day" and now and again the assistance of Orcadians and lesser known Southerners were acquired. On one occasion they fielded a former Scottish Internationalist-Alex Thomson of Celtic.

Altogether Academy has taken part in 77 Q.C. matches-36 at home and 41 away. In Harrow Park 12 were won and nine drawn; on opponents' ground they enjoyed eight victories and three draws. In seven seasons when Academy was k.o'd only a solitary goal separated the teams. It may be hard to believe but Academy have scored 156 goals in this Scottish competition (81 in Harrow Park) and maybe harder still to believe they forfeited 105 more than they scored-261 to be exact. Twice they have qualified to compete in the Scottish Cup proper.

Unbeaten Home Record

The most astonishing fact that emerged was that between the years 1928-1938 Academy enjoyed an unbeaten home record-five wins, three draws-in Qualifying Cup-ties, and with two draws and a win continued the record in the three immediate post-war years. The Wick team actually went unbeaten at Harrow Park in 14 successive seasons, scoring 34 goals and conceding 18.

In fulfilling fixtures Academy's mileage by rail and road would have taken them five times across the Atlantic.

Although playing achievements may have been indifferent one prized record they certainly hold-sportsmanship. No player has ever come under the ban of the referee-always a complete stranger.

The Wick club's failures were generally attributable to lack of confidence-confidence that can be acquired only through regular practice and proper training. Always they have been a team of clever individualists-seldom a collective striking force. Uncertainty accounted for repeated failures. The players have

always done their utmost to avoid defeats on the field but as amateurs they failed to take the game seriously enough, suffered from an inferiority complex, and lacked the "killer" instinct. Always Academy began at a disadvantage and should Dame Fortune be against them-once at Telford Street, Inverness, they rattled the woodwork nine times yet lost by the only goal of the game-they earned no more than the customary tribute of giving "a plucky display". When defeat came one regular who resided in the South used to say: "Cheerio, boys, I'll see you next year."

Three Matches in Extra Time!

Probably the most memorable Q.C. games Academy played were against Clachnacuddin in 1928. The Inverness team were more than an hour late in taking the field at Wick because of a motor failure. The game went on without protest and ended in a 3-3 draw, and a similar score was returned on the Grant Street pitch. Academy agreed to return to Inverness for the second replay and here eight goals were equally shared. Extra time settled the score in Clach's favour. The winning goal was scored by left-half Willie Sutherland who belonged to Caithness. Clach actually were lucky in this thrill-a-minute game, as Father Toman had dived to head as pretty a goal as was ever scored only to have it disallowed on account of a colleague being in an offside position and Joey Rosie shook the crossbar with the very last kick. Although Academy went out gallantly that was the eighth consecutive season in which they succumbed in the opening round.

George Rover Tait, the Academy secretary at the time, later wrote: "I think that the team which represented the Academy on these occasions was the best we ever fielded. In goal we had Pat Gunn, a wonderful keeper, who was actually carried shoulder high from the field at the close of play in the second game at Inverness; at back were Peter Grant, a sure kicker, and George Steven, whose early death robbed Caithness of a fearless tackler; the ever energetic Jack Shearer, unsurpassable Jimmy Rosie, and the keen Jim Cutt formed our half-line; and at forward we played John Banks, Father Toman, Hamish Miller, Joey Rosie and Angie Munro.

"The Inverness fans, who gave us plenty of support, described the matches as the best ever. Our goalie of course, gave them plenty to enthuse over, and in Father Toman we had an inside man who played First Division football in the ties.



Back: John Duchart (Treasurer); Peter Nicolson, G. Sutherland, John Begg, Cecil Ross, John Tait.

Middle: William Miller; George A. Sutherland ('Brora-Wizard'), John Stewart, William Houston, George Mackenzie (Secretary).

Front: Jimmy H. Miller; John T. Matheson, James Fulton, David Skinner, William Macpherson.

Pictured above is Wick Academy's Qualifying Cup side after their 4-0 second round win over Aberdeen University. Academy beat Buckie Thistle 3-2 at Harrow Park in round one. The Jags had travelled to Wick across the Moray Firth on the Friday night in a fishing boat. In the next round after a 1-1 draw at Kings College, the students of Aberdeen University were taught a lesson at the Harrow Park replay. Academy bowed out of the Scottish Q.C. in round three, losing 5-2 to Caledonian at Telford Street Park, Inverness. Three of this team made the supreme sacrifice during WW1.

George A. Sutherland was an architect in Wick and opted to play for Groats in local Wick League matches. He was rated, at the time, as without peer in the north as an inside-forward and known as the "Brora Wizard". He played, of course, for Sutherland against Caithness when the inter-county series started in 1913. He also had a spell working in London where he was outstanding for the famous London Caledonian amateur team in the Isthmian League that he was chosen for the London F.A. representative side. George was one of many of his generation to perish in the Great War. Among his team-mates lost, goalkeeper Begg was killed in action on the 9th of May 1915.

Five Skinner brothers-George; Willie, Jimmy, David and Frank-all played in Academy's dark blue striped jersey. David, who also left played inside-left for

Caithness against Sutherland in the early Portland Bowl games, worked at the North of Scotland Bank in Bridge Street, Edinburgh. Both David and Willie were killed in action in 1917. David Duchart (Gordon Highlanders) was also lost in the war.

SCOTTISH CUP MATCHES

Twice Academy qualified to compete in the Scottish Cup proper-in 1933 and again in 1935. Peculiarly enough, they had only one home game in the combined seasons and drew (3-3) with Brora Rangers. The other games were played at Nairn, Inverness (Caley), and Keith: Brora, Forres, and Buckie. The Scottish Cup ballot sent Academy to Edinburgh and Stirling.

In 1933 Academy travelled to Nairn by train leaving at 7:40 a.m. and were accompanied by about 60 supporters. At Brora the train was joined by the village Rangers and many Sutherland fans en route for Forres where they were heavily defeated in making their Q.C. debut.

Against Nairn County Academy played open football at (for them and the opposition) an astonishing pace and finished 2-1 winners. Academy: -Will Murray (Pentland); James R. Miller (Acks), Dan Thomson (Academy), T. Kane (Groats), George Rutherford (Helmsdale), William Thomson (Groats), David Oag and Alex Ferguson (both Thistle), William Mulraine (Groats), George Rosie (Pentland) and Peter Chisholm

(Academy). Ferguson and Mulraine got the all important goals.

For the second round tie at Inverness, Academy brought in John Cowie (their player coach) at left-half, moved Willie Thomson to inside-left, and introduced Angie Munro (Acks) who dazzled on the left wing in place of an unavailable Chisholm. Academy won 4-2, Willie Thomson (2), Munro and Oag scoring. Again the Wick team travelled by special train that morning, carrying about 100 supporters; many others undertook the journey by bus and cars.

An unchanged team played Keith on a rain-sodden pitch and lost 4-nil. This score was an injustice and report says the number of times Academy's efforts shook the woodwork was beyond belief. And they had a "goal" disallowed near the beginning. An unlucky day!

First Scottish Match

Academy's first venture into the Scottish Cup proper in 1933 attracted attention everywhere. With three "away" games before qualifying hope was uppermost for a home draw in the big competition. But Academy had to add a trip to Edinburgh to the thousand miles already travelled that season in search of glory. The player who at Keith jocularly remarked that "Academy would go further in the Scottish Cup than in the Qualifying" was a true prophet.

Academy faced St Bernards (a Second Division side) at the Royal Gymnasium ground and among the 3000 crowd who went to welcome them (or to laugh) was Lord Provost W. J. Thomson who had Caithness connections. Another notable spectator was ex-Provost Ross of Dalkeith, one of the original founders of the Academy club. The Wick team that afternoon were: - Will Murray (Pentland); James R. Miller (Acks), Dan Thomson (Academy), George Rutherford (Helmsdale), John Cowie (player coach), William Macdonald (Edinburgh University), David Oag (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), W. Miller (Brora), Willie Thomson (Groats), Angie Munro (Acks).

Hope of surviving this test was existent but after going three goals down (at the beginning nervousness and indecision were apparent among the visitors)

Academy rallied to make the second half exciting and received a well-deserved ovation at the end of a sporting struggle. The evening newspapers paid the Wick team high tribute, especially their cleverness as individuals. Experience, it was stated, swung the balance in favour of St Bernards.

At Stirling

Two years later in 1935 the name Academy appeared among the Scottish Cup contestants. Only one of the qualifying games took place at Wick and the ballot for the national competition sent them to Stirling to engage with King's Park. The game was postponed for a week because the ground was unplayable and when it did take place it was under atrocious conditions. But it wasn't a water-logged pitch that accounted for Academy's early exit; as at Edinburgh, they went under to a better and more experienced team. The Wick boys started brightly and took an early lead through J. Smith, Inverness (an ex Clyde player) but finally were ousted 6-1. Team at Stirling: - J. Robertson (Groats), D. Mackenzie (Golspie, Dan Thomson (Academy), David Banks (Academy), George Rutherford, R. Garrow (Dingwall), David Oag, (Thistle), Murdo Mackay (Pentland), J. Smith (Inverness), Anthony Haggerty (coach), Peter Chisholm (Academy).

Elgin City can fittingly be termed Wick Academy's *bete noir*. Under Q.C. auspices the clubs have clashed ten times, with Academy's best result a 2-2 draw in their first meeting at Wick (1919). Elgin have registered 41 goals against reversed figures-14. (in 1968 Elgin administered a further 6-1 slogging at Wick). Results show a somersault only in 1946 at Borough Briggs when Elgin were shocked and Wick surprised by a five-goal Academy victory-and they had two goals disallowed. Representing Wick on that occasion were mainly local lads: Peter Millar, G. Grant, D. Moonie, John Gunn, Jimmy Hull, D. Farquhar, W. Miller, George Lyall, E. Maxwell, Murray Harper and Johnnie Bremner. This was the youngest team ever fielded by Academy and in this game were credited as the fastest and cleverest as well. Scorers-Bremner (2), Miller, Lyall and Maxwell.



Wick Academy line up to face Aberdeen in a friendly match at the Harmsworth Park.

Eight of this team were to play in the Scottish Cup match against St Bernards in Edinburgh.

Back: A. McCutcheon (Academy official), H. Stewart (Official), James H. Miller (President) G. Hendry (official),
David Banks (Academy), Will Murray (Pentland),
James R. Miller (Acks).

Front: John Cowie (Coach), Don Miller (Groats), George "Joey" Rosie (Pentland), Willie Thomson (Groats), David
Oag (Thistle), Alex Ferguson (Thistle), Angie Munro (Acks),
Dan Thomson (Academy).

Two Replays with Rothes

The second round found Academy at home to Rothes and give a disappointing display. A ball that Miller caught, dropped, re-grasped and threw out was adjudged to have gone over the goal-line-ever an unsatisfactory decision-and Academy were behind for half the game until Harper sent in a fierce drive that rebounded from a packed goal and the inside-left again getting possession scored a dramatic equaliser with only minutes to go. The replay at Mackesack Park was also a 1-1 draw, this time Rothes equalising a Miller goal in the closing minutes. G. More had come into the team for Moonie (an excellent substitute for Dan Thomson) and Albert Keble, Leith, for Maxwell. The second replay was at Dingwall. Dan Thomson returned at left-back and George More led the attack. Academy won 3-2. William Miller shot two goals and had a third

that rocketed home as the whistle sounded time. Lyall scored the second. Wick's half-back line was "superb" with Jimmy Hull predominant.

It was Clach at Inverness in the fourth round tie-and what a climax. Academy suffered the severest defeat of a long career and for the first and only time do the records show a doubled-figure score in the "against" column! Lyall counted for Wick on this day of the ebb tide. The Wick team showed one change from the eleven at Dingwall-Angus Mackenzie (Orkney) leading the attack.

Ordinarily, Academy's 1946 performance would have been good enough to earn a place in the Scottish national competition but with resumption of post-war football came a change in the rules.



Wick Academy 1 -1 Rothes

Season – 1946

Mackesack Park, Rothes

Back: Jimmy Hull, Andy Farquhar, Gordon Grant, Peter Millar, George More, Jack Gunn.

Front: Willie Miller, George Lyall, Albert Keble, Murray Harper, Johnnie Bremner.

Seven against Forres

Now, on a 'cheerier' note. Academy's most meritorious performance (as regards goals) came in Harrow Park on a September day in 1930. Forres Mechanics provided the opposition and at the close retired with the humbling score of 7-nil against them. But Forres were a much better team than the score suggested. Dan Thomson, then a young lad, was at inside-left and had a hat-trick for Academy with cracking shots that bulleted into the netting; the other

scorers that happy day were James R. Miller (Acks), 2, Angie Munro (Pentland) and A. J. Sutherland. The home team read: - Pat Gunn (Academy); D. Mackenzie (Golspie), Willie Thomson (Groats), Jack Shearer (Acks), George Rutherford (Helmsdale), A. Sutherland (Brora), A. J. Sutherland (Brora), William Macdonald, James R. Miller (Acks), Dan Thomson (Academy), Angie Munro (Acks).



Scottish Qualifying Cup
 September 1930
 Wick Academy 7 – 0 Forres Mechanics

**Back: George ‘Rover’ Tait, A. J. Sutherland (Brora), William Macdonald (Thistle), Gordon Rutherford (Helmsdale), Jack Shearer (Acks), James R. Miller (Acks), Angie Munro (Acks). Unknown.
 Front: Dan Thomson (Academy), D. Mackenzie (Golspie) Pat Gunn (Academy), Willie Thomson (Groats), Alex Sutherland (Brora).**

Before bidding farewell to Academy’s adventures brief reference may justifiably be made to the loyal and enthusiastic assistance of a lad from over the Ord-Gordon Rutherford, Helmsdale. He succeeded a locally great centre-half in Jimmy Rosie (Pentland), but became the mainstay of the Wick eleven for eight years, playing 20 competitive games. Rutherford was with Academy in the clubs best seasons and was one of only three players twice to take part in Scottish Cup games. (The other two were David Oag and Dan Thomson). The Helmsdale lad was big and strong and although he despised shinguards he never shirked a tackle and had a heroic part in many stern tussles. How he escaped injury

was his own secret, for within minutes of kick-off stockings were around his ankles. (Two pre-1914 Wick centre-halves had the same peculiarity-the classy John Bremner (Beatons) and true-blue Johnny Malcolm, who is still moving around the east end of the town. Two decades later there was another Thistle centre-half with the same habit-Alex Miller.

Gordon Rutherford was the bulwark on which Academy built in the thirties, and was a favourite with Wick crowds. He was much honoured by his native Sutherland, too. He played 15 times against Caithness and on occasions captained the county team. He had a spell with Forfar Athletic.



A young Wick Academy side went down 1-0 to Rothes at home in 1952

Hat-Trick Twice

The highest individual score in a game (four) was obtained by D. "Dokers" Mackay (Pentland), playing outside-left against Aberdeen University in 1965. Apart from Dan Thomson, the only other player to perform the hat-trick in Q.C. matches was Bill Mulrairie, and he accomplished the feat in successive seasons (1936 & 1937) against Ross County at Dingwall, and Thurso Pentland at Wick. Mulrairie was Academy's most consistent goal-getter with 10 to his credit, and playing for Brora Rangers in 1934 and 1935 twice scored two goals against the Academy.

Players with three or more goals are: -James R. Miller, Acks (8), D. "Dokers" Mackay, Pentland (7), W. Murray, Acks and David Oag, Thistle (each 6); George Lyall and William Thomson, both Groats, (5 each); William Miller, Thistle, Angie Munro, Acks; George "Joey" Rosie, Pentland; J. Smith, Inverness; G.A. "Brora Wizard" Sutherland (each four).

Those who counted on three occasions were: -John Banks (Academy), Peter Chisholm (Academy), Jim "Dook" Donaldson (Orkney), A. Findlay (Orkney), J. A. Fulton (Golspie), Bill Mackay (Thistle), W. Miller (Brora), David Ross

(Acks), David Skinner and George "Rover" Tait (both Academy).

The highest individual score in a game by an Academy player was six by William "Bill" Mackay (Thistle) playing against Brora Rangers at Dudgeon Park, Brora in February, 1959, in a North of Scotland Cup competition.

In fulfilling their 77 fixtures Academy fielded approximately 240 players, including 20 from Sutherland, 51 from Thurso, 13 from Lybster, 12 from Orkney, and 56 belonged to Wick clubs. Sixty were Academy's own players, and 16 were southerners signed for the occasion

Wick F.A. Venture

Academy (though they have stayed longest) was not the first Wick team to register with the S.F.A. That distinction belongs to Wick F.A.' who entered the "Qualifying" contest in seasons 1904 and 1905. The venture failed financially and on the field notwithstanding two home games. Gate drawings were trivial averaging less than £12, leaving the Association approximately twice the amount in debt-and that was a hefty sum 60 years ago. Consequently the Association withdrew from the competition.

The "Wick" team was selected from local players apart from J. Baillie (Thurso) and it is astonishing to find the wholesale changes made in successive

seasons. For the record, here are the teams fielded by Wick:

1904-James "Jimit" Doull; D. Clyne, Frank More, Alex "Sach" Macleod, William Miller, Hugh "Bogie" Henderson, William Bruce, Angus Budge, Robert Tait, Donald Stewart and Alex Sutherland. Result-Wick 1 (Tait) Inverness Caledonian 5.

1905-John Bain; Robert Tait, Alex Tait, George Sinclair, John Bremner, John Bruce, Angus Budge, Hugh "Bogie" Henderson, J. Baillie, D. Georgeson, Alex Sutherland. Result-Wick 2 (Budge & Baillie), Black Watch 3.



Though beaten 3-1, Wick Academy made a plucky display against their more experienced rivals, Inverness Caledonian, in the 1956 North of Scotland Cup tie in Inverness.

Back: Bill Budge (Secretary); Herbie Lyall, Reid, Don Gunn, Hamish Horne, J. Macdonald, Sinclair Manson, Hugh Sutherland (President).

Front: Harry Coghill, Jimmy Dunbar, Robbie Larnach, Bob Gordon, Durrand.



Thurso Pentland in the Qualifying Cup

When Thurso Pentland was admitted to the national competition in 1934 a writer expressed the opinion that the club's application had been made at the wrong time. For 14 post-war years (he wrote) Thurso was rich in football talent, but the position of the town in this respect had become much less happy. Results proved him correct.

Altogether (in five seasons) Pentland contested seven games-only two at home-of which five were lost. The club's best effort as regards results) was in 1938 when they played two drawn games with Brora Rangers before making their exit at Brora in the second replay. Pentland accumulated a dozen goals in the seven games and conceded 22. The Thurso team's goals were notched by: -Roy Manson (3); George "Joey" Rosie and Eddie Shearsmith (each 2); D. Arbuthnot, William Hair, Ronald Mackay, R. Macleod (Helmsdale) and Angie Munro (1 each)

Pentland's first two attempts necessitated going to Dingwall for the opening round and each time the final whistle found them two goals in arrear to Ross County. At the beginning the Thurso entrants included players from Sutherland and Wick (four altogether), but in 1935 they fielded an all-Thurso eleven, and (we read) one with experience, weight, speed and skill but yet not strong enough to challenge seriously the progress of Ross County.

The third year (1936) the newcomers were luckier with the advantage of home ground. Spectators numbering 1250 gathered in Sir George's Park and witnessed a keen, even and clean game-Brora Rangers were the visitors-in which a solitary late goal settled the issue in favour of Rangers.

Both Academy and Pentland combed the area for players when the clubs were drawn at Wick in 1937. Peculiarly enough, both goal keepers that afternoon came from Helmsdale as did other four of the contestants. There were three Wick players in the Thurso team which lost an unlucky opening goal that gave Academy a grip they seldom relaxed. Final score was 4-2 against Pentland who converted a last minute penalty through R. Macleod.

Farewell Bid

With an eleven from local sources Pentland tackled Brora Rangers in the club's farewell bid. For years the Sutherland representatives had pursued policy of engaging ex-pros, for such matches but in 1938-for the first time in their Q.C. history-Rangers' team was composed entirely of natives of the county-a fact that won much favour locally. A late goal at Brora earned that team a replay and in a rousing tussle in a downpour of rain it was Pentland's turn to equalise to save the day at Thurso. W. Miller, Brora's centre, was responsible for all four of his side's goals (two penalties).

The spin of a coin gave Rangers ground advantage in the second re-play that had lively exchanges. Brora winning 3-nil and getting two in the last 10 minutes, the third from Dan Miller (Groats) described as "the goal of the game." This sturdy and speedy wingman had assisted all three northern clubs-Academy, Brora and Pentland-in their efforts to succeed. Similarly, D. G. Macleod was four seasons with his Academy colleagues and other seasons helped Brora and Pentland. How he could rise to a ball and how he could challenge for possession on the ground! The old Scots saying that "guid gangs in sma' bulk" was applicable in several instances to county footballers.

No player took part in all Pentland's Q.C. games but Roy Manson, Angie Munro and George "Joey" Rosie each appeared in six. On the five mark were Alex Macleod, W. Robertson, and G. Ross; Murdo M. Mackay and Ronald Mackay, each four, and William Hair and William Phimster each had three games.

Turned Down

Pulteney Thistle also forwarded an application to compete and this came before a meeting of the S.F.A. in Glasgow. It was explained that the ground the Pulteney club sought to have registered was the same as registered by Wick Academy. The Association contended that the ground really belonged to the Harmsworth Park Committee but the Scottish body took the view that so far as they were concerned it was the home ground of the Academy. For that reason the application was dismissed.

With Bigger Clubs

Caithness footballers seldom gave a thought to professionalism—they were too far removed from the centres in the South. The first to taste and test the advantages of this adventuresome career was Willie Hunter, Thurso Thistle goalkeeper, who on occasions assisted Castletown Rangers, went to the Capital to play with St Bernards F.C.

Next to go (also to Edinburgh) was Hughie Henderson, Groats-known familiarly as “Bogie” Henderson—who signed for Leith Athletic, then in the Second Division. This tricky little fellow with an imperturbable temperament earned much praise and quickly got into the headlines of sporting newspapers. Like Hunter, though he was a tradesman, too, and settled in the Capital.



Robert “Curly” Tait
In Sheffield Wednesday colours

The first to cross the Border in search of fame (or at least money—£3 a week was a near-fortune at the time) was Robert Tait (“Curly”), whom nature endowed with all the qualities required to make an outstandingly clever and dependable defender. He bid goodbye to Wick Academy (and temporarily to printing) in 1908 and was a couple of seasons with Sheffield Wednesday.

Years later a brilliant Thurso wingman, Willie Macpherson of Britannia, was persuaded to leave his paint-brushes behind and join the ranks of Sheffield United. He was a speedy, well-built lad whose prospects of a worthwhile football career were interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914.

Round about 1947 Pat Travers, the Clyde manager, signed Johnnie Bremner, the Academy outside-left, who finished his playing career in the ranks of Ross County, along with James Farmer of Thistle. Several of our stars assisted Highland League clubs over the years, and since Brora Rangers entered that competition the demand for their services increased considerably.

With Queen’s Park

Queen’s Park, probably the oldest and best known of Scotland’s teams, has included a number of Caithness players during its long history.

Willie Macdonald held a prominent place in the Hampden XI for several seasons in the ‘thirties. Indeed, he had a wider experience than any from the county. Another Wick Academy lad who served Queen’s well was George More. The Glasgow club found a star, too, in David Christie, a human whirlwind from outlandish Altnaharra of all places. All three were University students, and all three were frequently honoured by appearances for Scotland in amateur internationals. Macdonald and More had additional honour as captains of the country’s selections.

D. G. Banks, one of three brothers who were founder members of Academy, was with Queen’s Park before he immigrated to South Africa early in the century. He signed for Cape Town Caledonians and took part in several representative matches in the Union.

The Caithness connection with Queen’s Park is likely now to be continued by the signing of Russell Swanson, a boy full of running power and with an accurate left-foot shot. An apprentice engineer in the South, he is the son of one-time Thurso Swifts inside-forward William Swanson. May he earn success and enjoy a bright career.

Two county players who had wide experience in Southern football were Jim Millikin, Thurso, and George Tait, Wick—both shrewd fellows who clung to amateur status. Tait appeared in Second Division football in the ranks of Abercorn. He was probably at his peak when on war service and his talents as a player were fittingly recognised in military teams. He returned to gain local honours in six post-war seasons. Millikin turned down several offers from well-known Scottish and English clubs after assisting them on occasions. Across the Border this “Brawny Scot” was happy with Eastbourne and London Caledonian. He enjoyed an unusually long and brilliant career in the realm of sport.

Healthy Enthusiasm

There was a healthy enthusiasm in the early days that caused young men to brush aside inconveniences, large or small, in order to help up-hold the honour of a club. The custom in those now distant days was for a member of a team to meet their-own travelling expenses and generally sacrifice a half-a-days pay. Apprentices were then receiving anything from 2/6 to 4/- per week and although the railway fare between Thurso and Wick was but 1/1—three trains made the return journey each week-day—they had also to contribute towards food and refreshments. Clearly they did not expect a club to “mother” them.

The advance of time brought changes—even at club level, and monetary and other inducements (small) as

these may have been began to be offered in the 'twenties. There were committee members who resolutely disapproved.

Player Coaches

Wick Academy openly set a fashion in 1933 when they engaged John Cowie (formerly of Falkirk and Stenhousemuir) as a player coach for their team with a view to getting together an eleven of required strength and skill for the Qualifying Cup (Q.C.) competition. Academy, however, gave an open invitation to all players in town to train under, and benefit by, the tutorship of their professional. Several accepted and Cowie had a helpful influence. He took part in local league and other club matches and Academy had a successful season-in a playing sense anyway. Indeed, it may be doubted if the venture was a failure financially.

What was good for Academy would not be bad for Groats and Thistle (so they thought) and these two clubs the following season each appointed one of their leading members in the capacity of player-coach. Groats selected James Hull, Motherwell, and Thistle appointed Alex. Ferguson, Aberfoyle, both of whom

had come to Caithness in 1931 in connection with one of the county road schemes. It was actually a reversion to the days of "leaders".

The appointments created much interest locally and resulted in increased gate receipts but not sufficiently high to warrant continuation of the arrangement. Academy, however, carried on with Anthony Haggerty, Cowdenbeath, as coach.

The appearances and generalship of those players had a marked influence on play generally and the local games in the thirties provided a better and brighter standard of football than at any other point. Whether it was proper for professionals to play in inter-town matches was questioned (though not officially) by Thursonians. Anyhow, results of inter-town tussles show how Wick profited, winning the Harmsworth Bowl in the six successive seasons 1930-35 and the Wilson Cup in seasons 1933-38 inclusive. All three coaches also played for Caithness in 1934 when our county lads twice defeated Sutherland; indeed in the years 1932-33-34 Caithness returned five wins and a draw.



Academy's first season with a player coach proved to be successful as Academy won all three of the Wick Associations trophies.

Wick Academy
Season – 1933-34

Back: H. Stewart, A. Harper, R. Miller, Robert Tait, Alec Clark, D. Wares, Eric Swanson, Dan Thomson, J. Maclean, G. Bain, G. Mackenzie, H. Sutherland, A. Miller.

Front: A. Macleod; Harald Banks, Andy Farquhar, John Banks, James H. Miller, John Cowie (player coach), David Banks, Bill Budge, Don Macleod.

Men of The Cloth

Leaders of the people openly opposed football in the early days and church-goers generally were sternly against the game. To play on the Fast-day Thursday was regarded as a sin, and ministers and elders ignored the game at all times. The church and football did not mix. Indeed, young ministers who were keen and talented exponents of the game in student days dared not attend matches when inducted to Caithness charges lest they offend members of their congregation. Among the game's protagonists were many who viewed participation in football as accepting an invitation of the devil. But prejudices eased gradually with the passage of time.

Some 60 years ago there were three distinguished sons of the manse in Inverness noted for scholarly attainments and in their youth first-rate sportsmen as well. They were the brothers Mc'Echern, widely known in Caithness-Dugald (latterly of Bower), John (of Tain), and Victor (who held a regular place in Abardeen F.C.). All three blossomed in the ranks of Inverness Thistle and became widely known and respected in northern ministerial circles. Their parents allowed them much latitude-their father was the noted Rev. Charles Mc'Echern of Inverness, whose name was long revered-and they certainly proved worthy of the trust reposed in them.

Father Toman



From time to time ministers have taken welcome part in Caithness football and even by example had a helpful influence. Their presence was an inspiration to youth. Probably the most noteworthy was Sydney J. Toman, a Roman Catholic Priest, who for five years assisted Academy. He was as clever a footballer as he was a true Sportsman. He captained the team on the field in Q.C. ties and his play-ever distinguished by well-conceived movements and judicious passing-captivated Press critics everywhere he went. Usually he was alluded to as the most polished and unselfish player on the field. While in Wick, Father Toman figured in every representative team of town and county. He played against Thurso on 22 occasions and each season he was among the scorers. In March 1930, he was chiefly

instrumental in bringing the Harmsworth Bowl to Wick for the first time in seven years, and his two winning goals in the final between the towns were characteristic of the player. Both were attained with crisp, stinging well-placed shots which whizzed into the netting.

Within three months of leaving Wick for Peterhead, Father Toman passed away during an operation and the youth of Wick and all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance mourned the passing of a quiet but jovial and loyal friend. He would be about 30 years of age, and was known and respected, too, on the golf course and the bowling green.

Pictured below is the Wick Academy team line-up, featuring Father Toman, after their success in the Gold Medal competition of 1926-27.



Wick Academy
Season – 1926-27
Gold Medal winners

Back: T. W. Wylie; Unknown, George Steven.

Middle: Jimmy Cormack; George Rover Tait, Robert Tait, James H. Miller, Unknown, John Matheson.

Front: - Miller, **Father Syd Toman**, Don Miller, B. Walton.



Rev. Murdoch M. Mackay

During the war years Caithness ministers fielded a complete eleven-seven of them officiated in Wick-against a team composed of R.A.F. Officers stationed locally. And they won comfortably 4-1. Though Wick had it that evening numerically, Thurso provided two of the stars-Walter Johnstone, Dunnet, who had a hat-trick, and Murdo. M. Mackay, the confident and

sprightly Thurso town and Aberdeen Varsity player, who led the opposition a merry dance. He was the bomb that actually wrecked the R.A.F. that evening. This lad when available played consistently cleverly for Thurso Pentland and appeared in 20 inter-town tussles. When he made his debut in the Thurso select (in 1929) he had a hat-trick to his name in a Wilson

Cup game. In later years he had half-a-dozen single goals for Thurso in H.B. contests. He played in the Caithness County team against Sutherland and Orkney as well as representing Castletown F.C. in the Rural League. He became the Rev. Murdoch M. Mackay, and after holding an educational post in India under

the Church of Scotland was inducted to a church in Abardeen. He is a son of Mr. J. Abrach Mackay, the nonagenarian member of Caithness County Council, and the second eldest of four brothers who all found places with Pentland in 1935.



Rev. Murdo M. Mackay lines up (seated second from the right) with his Thurso Pentland team-mates circa 1935. His father Councillor J. Abrach Mackay is seated next to him and Brother George is seated extreme left.



Rev Walter Johnstone

It was in the immediate pre-war years that Rev Walter Johnstone, Dunnet, assisted Pentland. He guarded Thurso's citadel in two Wilson Cup games in 1938 and both H.B. matches in 1939. Like the other clergymen mentioned above, he earned wide respect. Caithness

football indeed, is indebted to them all for associating so freely and helpfully with the youth of their day. They were shining examples of sportsmanship at its very best. Who can reckon what good they inspired by showing the better way in any circumstances?

Rev. David Sutherland

Another minister who played regularly for Academy in local and Q.C. matches was Rev. David Sutherland, of the Congregational Church. He was a native of Avoch and came to Wick first as a student preacher and later returned as pastor. Academy appreciated his help as a player and the value of his influence on the field. In 1936 he was in the town Harmsworth Bowl team at inside-left.

While in Wick he (twice probably)

Conducted what was termed as sportsman's service on Sunday evenings—an innovation that attracted large congregations of young men who occupied reserved pews in the body of the church. What an inspiring sight and tribute to a worthy gentleman. Yet even in 1934 the dissenting voice was still with us: "the means of grace were being polluted", an objector alleged, and he regarded such services as "a new device of Satan." What utter rubbish!

TRAVELLING

Travelling facilities presented a problem in the early days for although only twenty miles separated Wick and Thurso the towns were actually far apart. Seventy years ago when teams from either town visited each other (or Castletown) transport was by wagonette drawn by humble horse. This journey needed approximately seven hours getting there and back—a big slice from any day. Besides, the trip could be very unpleasant in cold or rainy weather. But the open wagonette was something of a luxury before the 20th century.

An instance in April, 1995, may be quoted as an illustration. The John O'Groat Club (Wick) arranged a game with Thurso St Clair on the Wick Sacramental Fast-day (always a Thursday), and the Wick team started for the west-end around 9:30 in the morning, arriving in Thurso at 12:45 pm—three and a quarter hours. Their conveyance must have resembled somewhat an old-time travelling circus for it is recorded that the party filled three of Mr Sinclair's carriages and the first one was three-in-hand.

Tragedy struck on one such Fast-day outing on the return journey when one of the drivers was lost his life in an accident. There was stern opposition at the time to the Fast-day Thursday being regarded as a holiday and used for pleasure. Jaunts on such a day were heavily frowned upon by the church and its communicants.

When the Wick-Thurso contests commenced at the beginning of the century travelling between the two towns was transferred from the road to the rail and the passengers were numbered in hundreds. Special trains were made available at a return fare of one shilling. These excursions were convenient and comfortable but discontinued with the introduction of motor cars and buses on a substantial scale.

Slower By Rail

There's always an exception. Away back in 1919 a Wick town team set out for Thurso by the then ordinary 12:30 pm train on a cold November day. For a reason known only to the railway company the train was delayed dreadfully in starting and at almost every

station (especially at Georgemas) and ultimately reached Thurso at 2:35pm, five minutes after the match should have started. Two hours and five minutes to cover 20 miles! That "longest ever" journey will remain an unhappy memory with some of the victims.

The advent of the motor car in quantity and the motor coach sent traffic back to the roadways and rail excursions ceased for a lack of support. Little provision was made for the humble, if at times, noisy supporters and numbers travelling for inter-town games were conveyed principally by friends in private vehicles. And that's how it has continued.

When Academy had to visit Buckie in the Q.C. competition very many supporters made the trip across the Firth in fishing boats. Such a mode of travel, however, was not approved by the authorities and it was never repeated.

With an airfield on the outskirts of the town the inhabitants became air-minded. And it was in early May, 1934, that a Wick select flew to Orkney to fulfil a privately-arranged friendly. Today football teams are conveyed regularly by air to all parts of the world, but the Wick lads who went by 'plane to Orkney were said to be the first football team in Scotland to fly and the promoters of the trip were given much credit for their enterprise. A party of 15 travelled (three called off) and the plane had to make two flights. The time taken to reach Kirkwall averaged 20 minutes for the four runs. Most of the players had not been in the air before but everyone was pleased with the comfort and ease of flying. The Orcadians royally welcomed the party and about 2000 attended the game. Result was 3-3. The flying team:- Eric Swanson (Academy); Alec Clark (Academy), David Rosie (Groats), David Banks (Academy), Don Macleod (Academy), Jimmy Hull (Groats), David Oag (Thistle), Alex. Ferguson (Thistle), Marcus Miller (Groats), Thomas Farmer (Thistle), William Budge (Academy). The scorers were Ferguson, Miller and Oag. Since the Archer Shield matches have commenced the Orkney County

eleven have come to the mainland by air on several occasions.

Writing of travelling experiences one recalls what was described as a humorous episode. Academy had gone to Inverness by a one-day special train accompanied by 200 enthusiastic followers. There they played and lost to Citadel (4-1). Inverness railway station was crowded around 7:25 (leaving time) but there was much confusion as to the correct platform-one of which was around a bend and out of sight to the unwary. Some sat innocently in carriages on the wrong side of the platform; some left the north train in search of missing friends, leaving cases and parcels behind. While confusion reigned the north train puffed out of the station. Five players and many supporters were left on the platform. Efforts to stop the train went unheeded.

Nine of the stranded party hired two taxis and raced with speed to Dingwall only to be three minutes late. A request to have the train delayed at Invergordon was turned aside. That was one of the rare occasions when minutes were seemingly important on the north line. The nine unfortunates returned to Inverness where

they had difficulty in finding accommodation; some found themselves in a financial dilemma. The majority were lucky enough to start the return journey by road on Sunday; but a few had to wait till Monday morning to get a train home.

Looked back upon, it may be a humorous episode though doubtless remembered.

Senior county clubs had little on teams in the Rural League when it came to "transferring" players. Short of a centre-forward to play in a cup tie at Staxigoe in mid-summer, 1947, John O'Groats Pentland, the most northerly team on the British mainland, sent a message urgently to the neighbouring island of Stroma for an attack leader. In response a motor-boat ferried across a lad named William Robertson to fill the breach. But this did not solve all Pentlands problems as Staxigoe won the tie 6-4. Bad weather and short days make Rural League play impossible in winter, but with the long summer evenings the season gets into swing and players and supporters think nothing of travelling 30 to 40 miles for a game.