

ABERDEENSHIRE HARRIERS

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September 2018

Introduction

Soon after becoming secretary of Aberdeen AAC in 1975 I began to make enquiries about the history of athletics in Aberdeen. As a consequence I was put in touch with a number of people able to supply me with information. A few, who seemed appreciative of my interest in the subject, were good enough to give me some of the items in their possession which related to athletics in Aberdeen. These items, and others which I acquired during my twenty years as secretary of the club, I later donated to the Special Collections held in the Aberdeen University library.

Among those who kindly gave me their athletics memorabilia was Ralph Dutch, the last secretary of Aberdeen's first athletics club, the Aberdeenshire Harriers (the Shire Harriers). The material which he gave included the minutes book of that club, one which covers the period from June 1923 to April 1950. This paper is almost entirely based upon the contents of that book.

The Shire Harriers survived for 62 years from 1888 until 1950 when Ralph was due to be called up to do National Service after graduating from Aberdeen University and when no one else was prepared to fill the post of club secretary which he, of necessity, had to vacate. Ralph, a former colleague of mine at Aberdeen College of Education, gave me a number of items that had been in his possession as secretary: a few items of correspondence, the secretary's cash float, a number of Shire Harriers lapel badges, a Shire Harriers medal and, of greatest historical interest, the above mentioned Shire Harriers minutes book.

When the minutes book was started the address of the club was given as King's Crescent: following the end of the First World War the club succeeded in having a clubroom erected there. Some use might have been made of that clubroom by members who took up boxing(!) though boxing competitions seem to have been held in the Music Hall. According to Jim Ronaldson, an Aberdeen athlete who was narrowly beaten by Dunky Wright in a marathon from Fyvie to Aberdeen in 1923, "The boxing section destroyed the club; young men joined the boxing section instead of the athletics section." Colin

Youngson's history of the Shire Harriers' marathon speculates that the reason that there were no marathons or other long road races in the period 1926 to 1928 was that the "athletes had been overshadowed by the boxing fraternity". It appears from the Shire Harriers' minutes book that there might be considerable truth in the views expressed by Jim Ronaldson and Colin Youngson. The minutes reveal that there was an AGM on 17 September 1926 and at that AGM the secretary stated that to make up a report for this meeting used to be a serious matter for him but that this year there had really been nothing done by the club in the way of races, etc. to report on! Office bearers were appointed but seem to have achieved very little because there was no further entry in the minutes book until 2 February, 1928 when another General Meeting was held. According to the minutes of that meeting, the chairman stated that "this was the first meeting held of the club since it had again been instituted (sic)". At that meeting not only were office bearers appointed but dates of various distance races were agreed to. At a later General Meeting on 12 June 1928, dates were agreed for 100 yard, 220 yard, ¼ mile, ½ mile and 1 mile races. These were to be held on Riverside Road! (No doubt that was the road now known as Riverside Drive.) There was also reference to participation in a 1 mile relay race and also in a 1 mile team race organised by the North Eastern Harriers Association of which the Shire Harriers was a member. The Shire Harriers was again providing competition for its members and the "boxing section" of the club seemed no longer to exist.

At AGMs there was regularly expressed concern about club funds and ideas were put forward about fund raising. These concerns were to disappear following the AGM held on 6 September 1928 when members were introduced to Mr F. J. Glegg (Fred Glegg). According to the Minutes, Fred Glegg stated that he would wipe out the £2 – 2 – 0 ½ deficit which the club had incurred during its first season (after being reconstituted). Further, since he considered that the club still had an uphill fight he would be very pleased to make up any deficiency that might occur as a result of unforeseen circumstances in the future. (It seems that this was never necessary apart, perhaps, during the Second World War when Fred Glegg seemed to keep the club in existence unaided by a committee.)

In 1929 a photograph was taken of the Shire Harriers with the athletes in their strips, the officials in their suits and the trainer (who was paid for his

services) with a towel over his shoulder. I have no doubt that Fred Glegg is the man second from the left in the second row. Both he and the man second from the right in that row are wearing lapel badges which seem to be identical to the lapel badges which Ralph Dutch gave me. In the foreground of that club photograph are seven impressive looking club trophies. These included the silver cup which was awarded annually to the winner of the Aberdeen marathon which had been organised by the Shire Harriers since 1909.

According to John Keddie's Centenary History of the Scottish Amateur Athletics Association, F. J. Glegg was President of the Association during the War (1939 – 1946) and in his will he bequeathed £50 for a Challenge Trophy. Unfortunately Fred Glegg died in October 1946. It is the opinion of Ralph Dutch that had he not died so early then it is likely that the Shire Harriers would have survived.

Returning to the minutes book of the Shire Harriers, it is noteworthy that at the monthly meeting on 4 February 1930 there was a proposal that the club be wound up and this was seconded! An amendment that the proposal be left over to the AGM was also seconded and carried on the casting vote of the chairman. Thereafter things not only seemed to run fairly smoothly until the outbreak of the Second World War but also to be developing in a promising way. For example, at the Annual General Meeting held on 13 May 1933 it was agreed that the summer athletics competitions be held at Hazlehead and in the Duthie Park. It was further agreed that, in addition to the running events that had been held on Riverside Drive in the past, there be added a long jump, a high jump and a shot putt to the summer competition programme. (These field events could hardly have been held on Riverside Drive.) The following year, on 14 May 1934, it was further agreed that a discus and a javelin be purchased. On 23 January 1936 there was another interesting development: it was agreed that the club should have a junior section open to youths between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age. Also in 1936, at a meeting held on 9 May, it was agreed that "the Ladies Athletic Club" could use the Shire Harriers clubrooms two nights per week for their winter training at a charge of 3/6 per month "including coal and gas". The Shire Harriers had not become a mixed club, but had taken a first tentative step in that direction. In general, the Shire Harriers showed signs of developing in the ways that the Edinburgh clubs had done in

the post war period. (I was involved in athletics in the Edinburgh area from 1953 to 1965.)

At the General Meeting of the Shire Harriers held on 7 September 1937 Fred Glegg observed that the club “was now in its fiftieth year”. That confirmed the information that had been given to me by a man called Alex King who had been a member of the Shire Harriers as early as 1912, the year in which he won the “marathon” from Inverurie to Aberdeen: he had told me that the Shire Harriers had been founded in 1888.

A marathon craze had swept the UK after the drama of the marathon in the 1908 London Olympics and the Shire Harriers was one of the clubs that began to stage local marathons. At that time the distance for the marathon had not been standardised and a marathon was simply a long race staged on a road. The first of the Aberdeen marathons was held in 1909 on the North Deeside Road from Banchory to Aberdeen.

According to Alex King, a publican called William Jamieson donated a silver Marathon Cup to the Shire Harriers to be awarded to the winner of each of the “marathons” which it organised. Alex King clearly knew what he was talking about since he had won the Aberdeen marathon on three occasions, namely in 1912, 1913 and 1925. William Jamieson’s generosity towards the Shire Harriers manifested itself in other directions also. In particular, again according to Alex King, he met £100 of the £120 cost of the hut which the Shire Harriers purchased after the end of the First World War and to which reference was made above.

It is not known when William Jamieson first became involved with the Shire Harriers. However, a photograph was taken of club members in 1902 and this might have been taken shortly after that time, just as a club photograph was taken in 1929, shortly after Fred Glegg (another publican according to Alex King) became involved. In the 1902 photograph it is likely that William Jamieson is the man in the middle of the second row behind the trophies. There is a remarkable similarity between the two photographs, including the presence in each of a trainer with a towel over his shoulder.

The minutes book of the Shire Harriers reveal that meetings were held initially at King’s Crescent, presumably in the hut which the club had purchased with the assistance of William Jamieson, one that may have been situated on the edge of the recreation ground to the north of Nelson Street. The same

minutes book reveals that in the years preceding the Second World War meetings were being held in the club house at the Wellington Bridge (the Chain Briggie). This club house was a building at the north end of the bridge which had once been an octagonal shaped toll house. No doubt the Shire Harriers paid rent for the privilege of using it. During the war years Fred Glegg seems to have paid this rent out of his pocket and also the club's subscription to the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association.

A General Meeting of the Shire Harriers was held in the Wellington Bridge club house after the war on 6 April 1946. Fred Glegg was there in his capacity as president. A further General Meeting was held in that clubhouse on 9 May 1946. On the latter occasion it was (ominously) noted that Fred Glegg was unable to be present, that the Vice-President had been killed in hostilities and hence a chairman would have to be appointed for the meeting. One was duly appointed and a businesslike meeting ensued. It was decided to hold events during the summer season provided the rugby field at Hazlehead could be made available for the months of June to August on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. (A tramcar terminus was situated within 100 yards of that rugby field so getting to it would not have presented a problem.) It was also agreed that the committee should look into the possibility of getting fresh quarters.

At a meeting on 14 May 1946 it was decided to combine the 1914-18 and 1939-45 Rolls of Honour into one scroll "including the one already hanging in the clubhouse". The following names were to be added:

Alex Donald	Lieut. London Scottish
Harry Donald	Sub Lieut. Fleet Air Arm
John Gerrie	Gunner R O
Lindsay Nunar(?)	Private Scots Guards
R. Stove	Staff Sgt Royal Army Pay Corps

At a meeting held on 25 November 1946 it was intimated that the club had lost a faithful friend, the late Mr Glegg. He had been a faithful friend from 1928 and had been keenly interested in the club "to the last". According to Ralph Dutch, Fred Glegg was about 48 years old when he died.

At a meeting on 13 May 1947 it was agreed that nothing should be done regarding a combined Roll of Honour until the club again acquired a clubhouse in which the scroll could be displayed. The former toll house on Wellington Bridge had ceased to be used by the club in 1946. From 27 August 1946 the

club used the rugby pavilion at Hazlehead (demolished some years after I came to Aberdeen in 1965) for its general and committee meetings as well as for changing. However, that pavilion, which belonged to Aberdeen Corporation, was also obviously used by rugby players as well as by members of the Shire Harriers. Since the Shire Harriers failed in its attempt to again acquire a clubroom for its exclusive use, the scroll commemorating club members who had been killed in action during the First and Second World Wars was never produced.

The above noted five men were not the only former members of the Shire Harriers who had been killed during the Second World War. Another was William Chapman. According to his grandson, this former member “was killed in a German bomber attack on his home on the Beach Boulevard in August 1941 at age 33”. (Aberdeen was frequently bombed during the Second World War.)

At the final General Meeting of the Shire Harriers on 25 April 1950 there were some interesting items of business including a reference to a possible ladies section. However, since no one was willing to become club secretary the Shire Harriers ceased to function and never became a mixed club as did its successor, Aberdeen AAC, which was founded almost exactly two years later, i.e. in April 1952.

Footnote

It is my clear memory that I once read somewhere, possibly in his obituary, that the Shire Harriers had been founded by William Russell, a tinsmith from Edinburgh, and that he had also been responsible for founding other sporting clubs in Aberdeen. However, I was unable to locate that press cutting, if it exists, when conducting the research for this paper.