

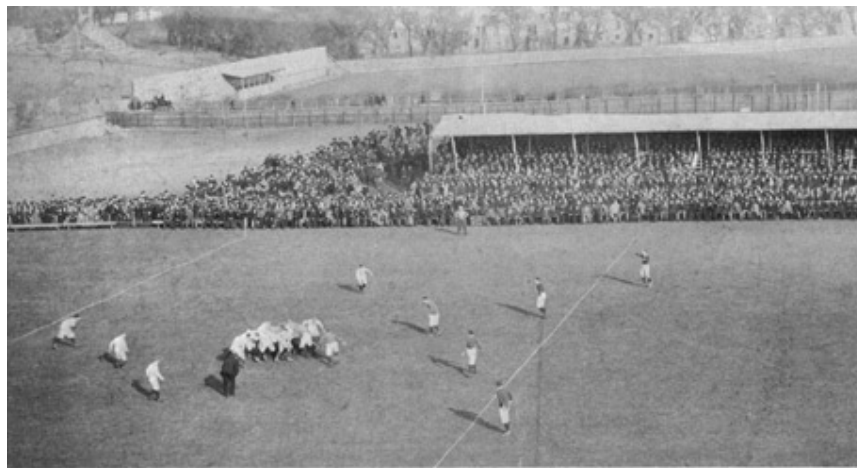
FROM RAEBURN PLACE TO MURRAYFIELD: a Past with a Future



Commemorative Stone, donated by Mr William Mackay of Aberdeen and placed in the Raeburn Place grounds as a Centenary Memorial.

The dawn of international rugby football

The very first rugby international match was played at Raeburn Place, Edinburgh, on Monday, 27 March 1871, on the cricket field of The Edinburgh Academy. In fact, the first nine international matches in Scotland were all played on established cricket fields - the second having been played at Hamilton Crescent, Glasgow, the home of West of Scotland CC. Both these venues were used for International and Trial matches up until 1895. The then Scottish Football Union rented these fields on a match-to-match basis, £25 being paid in 1875 - a sum which rose gradually to £30 in 1881 by which year the gate money had more than doubled. A temporary stand was erected at Raeburn place at a cost of £45.



Raeburn Place, Scotland v England, 1894
This shows the temporary stand erected for this match. Note that there is still no stone wall along the lane to the park. The Wanderers pitch in the Grange ground has been moved to the north end of the cricket field and some form of stand has been erected along the line under which the covered ditch ran. The Scottish left half-back is looking for the ball and the right half is clearly 'standing off'. The referee's apparel is worthy of note.

The Edinburgh Academy became increasingly unhappy with the arrangement. The field was in constant use by pupils of the school, including Saturdays, and there was little time left to prepare the ground for the rugby internationals which were played on Monday afternoons, the field having been in use during the afternoon by the school!

The search for a ground

By 1890, the SFU had begun a search for an area of ground with the intention to purchase it for the Union. The search was fraught with difficulties, disappointments and frustrations. People simply did not want an international rugby ground in their locality.

Meanwhile the cricket clubs concerned were repeatedly raising objections to the SFU applying for the use of their grounds. They complained about the crowds swarming over their field, the erection of temporary stands and the SFU's insistence that cricket club members should pay for entry to watch the rugby internationals. For their part, the SFU were unhappy about the ground being used on the morning of a rugby international and the subsequent loss of control created by members and others gaining entrance without payment.



Old Hampden Park, Scotland v. England, 1896.

In October 1895, The Edinburgh Academical Club decided that they were no longer prepared to lease Raeburn Place to the Union. In an attempt to overcome this blow, the Union entered into an arrangement for the use of Old Hampden Park, Glasgow, for the 1896 match v. England. District and Trial matches were played at Merchiston Castle School and at The Royal High School FPs' ground at Newington in Edinburgh. In 1897, the match v. Ireland was played at Powderhall Stadium, Edinburgh.

Inverleith: the first purpose-built international rugby ground

Eventually, in 1897, the Union purchased ground at Inverleith, Edinburgh, for the sum of £3,800, the money being raised by a debenture issue. Thus the SFU became the first of the Home Unions to own its own rugby ground, complete with stand.

During building and preparatory operations, the Powderhall sports ground in Edinburgh was used to house two international matches: v. Ireland in 1897 and v. England the following year. It had been planned to open the new Inverleith ground with the Welsh match in January 1899 but inclement weather forced a postponement. Instead, the ground was opened with the game v. Ireland. A reporter's box and telephone office was added and opened in 1901 and an additional piece of adjoining land was purchased in 1905.



Inverleith, Scotland v. England, 1914.

During the First World War (1914-18), the Inverleith ground was used for some military rugby matches but, during that period, little by way of maintenance was carried out with the result that, by 1919, the general condition of the ground, its buildings and fittings, was giving cause for concern.

In addition to the difficulties with the fabric at Inverleith, the SFU had to address other matters which were causing problems. The increasing popularity of rugby international matches made it clear that the ground was not going to be able to cope with the larger crowds. The demand for stand seats could not be met.

The Union's dilemma increased when clubs in the west of Scotland argued for some international matches to be played in Glasgow. The only suitable venue there would have been Hampden Park, the home of Queen's Park soccer club - albeit that the SFU had entertained the South Africa touring team at that venue in 1906.

Looking to expand: Murrayfield is purchased - and a change of name for the Union

In Edinburgh, the opportunity for the grounds at Corstorphine, previously occupied by The Royal High School FP Club before it moved to new ground at Jock's Lodge in 1920, was lost when the land was taken over by the City in 1921. The Union made an enquiry about leasing ground to the east of Inverleith, belonging to the Fettes Trust, and estimates were obtained for the building of a second stand if the application was successful.



Murrayfield, aerial view, 1925

Whilst all this exploratory activity was taking place, the then Secretary and Treasurer of the SFU announced that an opportunity had presented itself to possibly acquire 19 acres of land at Murrayfield, belonging to the Edinburgh Polo Club. Negotiations were entered into and, by the end of 1922, the deal for the purchase of the ground had been completed.

Funds for the preparation of the land and the building of a rugby stadium were raised by way of an issue of debentures. With preparations in full swing the SFU, in 1924, changed its name to become the Scottish Rugby Union. The cash inflow from the debentures allowed the construction work to go ahead and Scotland played their last international match at Inverleith on 25 January 1925, signing off with a 25-4 victory over France (a fitting celebration for Burns' Day!).

Murrayfield was officially opened on a sunny day on 21 March 1925. England were the visitors and a more fitting climax to the international season could not have been scripted: it was pure Boy's Own stuff!

Scotland had already recorded victories over France at Inverleith (25-4), Wales in Swansea (24-14) and Ireland in Dublin (14-8). England, the Five Nations champions of the two previous seasons, already had a win over Wales (12-6) and a drawn game (6-6) with Ireland - both matches played at Twickenham; they were to go on to defeat France in Paris by 13-11, in April. The 70,000 spectators at Murrayfield were treated to a stupendously exciting match in which the lead changed hands several times before Scotland secured the 14-11 victory which was to give them their first-ever 'Grand Slam.' At the time, the phrase 'Grand Slam' had not been created and the players of the day, although aware that they had won all of their matches in the Five Nations series and that they were champions, had never heard of 'Grand Slam' in rugby parlance. The phrase was to become popular in time to come being, it is thought, the invention of journalists.

Expansion

In 1927, land to the west was purchased. This enabled the SRU to prepare extra pitches for use by junior clubs. Two access bridges over the Water of Leith were built and a car park was prepared.

The move to the more spacious Murrayfield was fully justified. Stand tickets were increasingly in demand and, to try to alleviate this difficulty, two wing extensions were added in 1936, thus increasing the seating capacity to 15,228.



Murrayfield, post-1936. The photograph shows the North and East terracings, complete with score box, and the original West Stand with the North Wing stand which was added in 1936.

The War Memorial Arch, which had been erected at Inverleith in 1921, was transferred to Murrayfield, also in 1936.

Improvements were made to the dressing rooms and to the Committee Room. A Committee Box, within the stand, was also erected.

In 1929, the Clock Tower was gifted by Sir David McGowan, a Past President of the Union. Still a landmark today although having been removed from its previous location at the top of the terracing at the 'Railway End' when the stadium underwent major renovation and rebuilding during the period 1991 - 94, the Clock Tower is now located at the rear of the East Stand. In 1930, J. Aikman Smith, a Past President and former Secretary and Treasurer of the Union, presented the first Score Box and, in 1931, Sheriff Watt, KC, presented the original Flagstaff and Flag.

World War II

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 brought rugby in Scotland to a halt. The SRU cancelled all arranged Trial and International matches and encouraged the member clubs to carry on as best they could. Some clubs closed down, others amalgamated and carried on playing other local clubs and, sometimes, teams from the armed forces stationed in their various areas.

The ground at Murrayfield was offered to the Nation and was taken over by the Royal Army Service Corps and used as a supply depot. During the war years the armed forces sports authorities managed to arrange two England v. Scotland Services Internationals each year, on a home-and-away basis. Scotland's home matches were played at Inverleith for the first two years with a return to Murrayfield in 1944 after that ground's derequisition.

The Post War Years

The end of hostilities in 1945 saw the Union and its member clubs getting together to reorganize the game and Murrayfield was the venue for a number of 'Victory' International matches in 1946 against Scotland XV's with no caps being awarded to participating players. Full international matches at Murrayfield were resumed on 1 February 1947, Scotland losing to Wales by 8-22.

However, 5 years of wartime neglect had taken its toll of ground, stand and terraces. Major repairs and reconstruction work was undertaken: the stand's metalwork, roofing and seating were overhauled; terracings, which were overgrown with grass and weeds, to a height of 2-3 feet in places, were cleared and repaired.

Extra rows of seating were added to the stand. Within the stand building, improvements and extensions were made to dressing rooms and showers. Extra tearooms for players and for lady guests were added.

A decision was made to transfer the Union's office, then in Coates Crescent, Edinburgh, to Murrayfield. Plans were drawn up and the transfer was carried out in 1964. Following that initial move, additional office facilities were added, within the stand area, to accommodate increases in staff.

The first undersoil heating facility

In the early 1950s, investigation was made into the possibility of installing an under soil heating system for the playing pitch. Wintry conditions posed a constant threat to matches and an alternative to the not-altogether-satisfactory contingency arrangements, for protecting the playing surface, was being sought. Up to that time, attempts to protect the playing surface consisted of tent-like canopies with tall paraffin heaters within, being pitched over the playing area - supplemented by tons of straw! The remarkable thing about these rather Heath Robinson-like arrangements were that they did work - but they were costly of time, manpower and materials. However, initial investigations into undersoil heating proved the cost to be prohibitive.



Murrayfield, Summer 1959. Laying the electric blanket during the summer of 1959. Second from the right is D.S. Kerr, Convenor of the Field Committee and, on his right, T. S. Sellars, Head Groundsman.

In 1959, Dr C. A. Hepburn (Hillhead High School FP) offered to meet the cost of the installation of an electric 'blanket.' The Union gratefully accepted the offer and a plaque was placed at the rear of the West stand to acknowledge the gift. The cost of installation was £10,000.

A new under soil heating system

The original 'electric blanket' served the Union and Scottish rugby well for over thirty years but, by the end of the 1980's, it was beset by recurring maintenance problems and a decision was taken to have it replaced. Following the final Five Nations match, v. Ireland in March 1991, the old system was removed from the playing pitch and replaced by a new gas-heated system of hot water pipes.

This change entailed the 'furrowing' of the playing surface but hard work by the Union's ground staff and completion on time by the contractors, ensured that the pitch was ready and in good shape for the playing of the preparatory matches prior to the 1991 World Cup. By contrast to Dr Hepburn's gift in 1959, the new system was financed as part of a £250,000 scheme which included drainage, sand slitting and irrigation of the playing pitch.

Current running costs of the old and new systems make interesting reading. The original electric blanket, in use between November 1990 and January 1991, resulted in a bill of £30,500 for the SRU. The new system (it has different settings to deal with all kinds of weather) costs between £400 and £900 per match to operate. The new system has an estimated 24 miles of plastic piping running about 10 inches below the surface, from west to east.

Concurrently with the installation of the under soil heating in the 1950s, consideration was being given to the possibility of the provision of a floodlighting system. However, the Union decided that flood lighting at Murrayfield would have only limited use and noted that Kelso RFC, in the Borders, had installed such a system at their ground at Poynder Park. This gave rise to the idea that the union should aid the playing of Inter District matches by assisting clubs with grounds suitable for staging such matches, by giving financial support to floodlighting installations.

Dr Hepburn again offered financial assistance: this time to help with the installation of floodlighting at Murrayfield. However, design problems, the positioning of the lights and other considerations led to over-long discussion and negotiation and the whole project ground to a halt when Dr Hepburn found it necessary to withdraw his offer.

Further ground improvements were given serious consideration. Plans for covered enclosures for the terracings, and the building of an East Stand were examined. Estimates were obtained but the high costs involved resulted in such projected plans being shelved - at least temporarily.

The match against Wales in March 1975 (Scotland 12 Wales 10) saw 104,000 spectators inside Murrayfield - a world record, at that time, for such a match. Hundreds could not gain entry to the ground, even although many of them held tickets. Following that match, a decision was taken that all future international matches would be all-ticket and attendance restricted to 70,000.

A new stand

In July 1981 the Union took a decision to build a new stand in place of the East Terracing. A Special General Meeting, held in December 1981, finalised the financial arrangements, the expected cost being estimated at £3.15 million. Part of the cost was to be met by the issue of 5000 interest-free loans of £400 each, the cash to be repayable in twenty years. Each lender would have the right to purchase one ticket for international matches played at Murrayfield. In addition, the Scottish Sports Council offered a grant of £250,000 toward the cost.



Murrayfield, 1984. An aerial view showing the original Centre West Stand and its two later wing stands faced by the new East Stand.

The SRU President, Mr Fraser MacAllister, cut a symbolic turf in March 1982 to launch the construction work on the East Stand. The building of the new Stand was completed in December 1982 and it was ready for use for the matches v. Ireland and Wales early in 1983. The official opening ceremony was performed by the then HRH The Princess Anne, immediately prior to the match v. The Barbarians on 26 March 1983.

Marketing and Sponsorship

During season 1982-83 the Union appointed marketing agents and The Royal Bank of Scotland agreed to sponsor international matches played at Murrayfield for three seasons starting with 1982-83. The success of this venture can be gauged from the fact that the sponsorship was extended until the end of season 1997-98.

The building of the East stand saw the old score box demolished. Two electric scoreboards, one on each stand, were installed and Mrs G. P. S. Macpherson, widow of one of Scotland's most prominent international rugby players,

offered to contribute to the cost of the installation of a clock at the rear of the East Stand, in memory of her late husband. The offer was accepted and a plaque acknowledging the gift is affixed to the back of the Stand.

The many uses of Murrayfield

The pitch and corporate entertainment facilities at Murrayfield are let for a variety of activities and special occasions. Among these have been the Edinburgh and District Charity Sevens, the Edinburgh Highland Games, the Scottish Women's Hockey Association, the Scottish Ladies Lacrosse International Match, the Clan Gathering and World Pipe Band Competition, the Annual Watch Tower Convention, Pop Concerts featuring various world famous entertainers including Tina Turner, David Bowie, The Rolling Stones and Oasis, a Youth Rally to welcome to Edinburgh His Holiness The Pope, and an entertainment by the Harlem Globetrotters. The function suites can be hired by corporate bodies and companies for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and the like. Catering can be arranged as required.



Murrayfield, May 1982. His Holiness The Pope attends a Youth Rally during his visit to Scotland.

In 1947, the Heart of Midlothian FC made enquiry about the possibility of their staging a match v. Hibernian at Murrayfield. The Union agreed to the proposal but the tie did not materialise. Some thought was given, too, to the housing of part of the 1970 Commonwealth Games but this was abandoned because it would have necessitated major adjustments being made to the east embankment.

The secondary pitches behind the West Stand are in constant use by Murrayfield Wanderers RFC and by a host of junior rugby clubs. The Wanderers have their own clubhouse within the stadium precincts.

New offices and other facilities

By the beginning of the 1980s the office and entertainment accommodation was found to be inadequate and, in 1985, the refurbishment of Murrayfield was continued with an office and Committee development at the rear of the West Stand. Elevated above ground level, the extension comprised offices, tearooms and suites suitable for conferences, etc. These developments made available some space within the West Stand area and, in the former large Committee Room, the Union established its National Library and Museum. This was opened in December 1986 by the then President, Dr D. W. C. Smith.

The present and looking to the future

The SRU Committee, looking and planning ahead and following the publication of the Taylor Report, and in order to comply with the demands and guidelines of that Report, decided to plan for an all-covered, all-seated Murrayfield stadium. The Union launched a debenture scheme aimed at raising most of the expected cost of £50 million. The goal was to establish Murrayfield as one of the finest sports grounds in Europe, capable of seating 67,500 spectators.

Subject to the consent of member clubs and planning approval from Edinburgh District Council, it was planned that construction work would commence after the 1992 Five Nations Championship matches, with a completion date three years later. Phase One, the building of the stands at the north and south ends of the ground, with a combined capacity of 24,000 was completed in January 1993. In March the same year, following the Five Nations Championship matches, Phase Two began. This phase saw the demolition of the existing wings of the West Stand and their replacement with covered seated areas which linked in with the new North and South Stands. Phase Three (the final one) began in the spring of 1993. The original West Stand was demolished entirely and a brand new stand replaced it. The Stand was partially in use for the match v. England on 5 February 1994, with completion due by November that year when South Africa were the visitors. A new and well-furbished Library was established within the West Stand and was opened in December 1995.

Improvements were carried out to the press area and a floodlighting system was installed. New electronic scoreboards were established at the north and south ends. Ambitious? - yes, but the Scottish Rugby Union are nothing if not adventurous in a positive way. A new, larger Museum is being planned to link up with the Library and a new Visitor Centre. The new, improved stadium has made Murrayfield one of the very best sports stadiums in Europe

- and that was the planned aim of the Union.

Scotland's 'Grand Slams'

France joined the four Home countries (they first played Scotland in an official international match in 1910) and the Five Nations series of matches was founded. Two World Wars and various disputes apart, the series of matches has been continuous each season. When a country defeats the other four in any one season, it is said that it has achieved a 'Grand Slam' - an unofficial title believed to have been the invention of journalists. Scotland has had the accolade bestowed upon it on only three occasions - all at Murrayfield: in 1925, 1984 and 1990. In the year 2000, Italy joined the five nations to make it a Six Nations series of matches and one can but wonder what the journalists will dream up for this new series!



Murrayfield, 1994. This aerial view shows the almost-completed new stadium which was opened with the match v. South Africa in November of that year.