

WESTERN WILDCATS HOCKEY CLUB

Founded 1898

FRIENDS OF WESTERN NEWSLETTER January 2015

Firstly we wish you all a happy and prosperous 2015. As you all know, the club mourned the loss of Dr Bill Matheson in November last year. Our main feature is FOW's tribute to the Great White Doctor, whose contribution to the club and its activities cannot be overestimated. In addition we are pleased also to include the musings of Martin Kemp, Emeritus Professor of the History of Art at Oxford University on his time at the club.

The season so far

Pride of place goes to our women's 1st team who are currently fifth in Division 1. After 12 games they have suffered only two defeats, and under coach Kareena Marshall they have shown little sign of inferiority against the traditional big guns. The men sit third, but their form has been mercurial, with eight wins and four defeats - not unexpected, perhaps, given the number of youngsters in the squad. More consistency will be required if they are to stay in the top four, for a place in the end of season play-offs for the title.

The experiment of putting a batch of very promising juniors in the men's 4th XI has been very successful so far. After 10 league games they have won 7, scoring 42 goals in the process and attract decent crowds. With the boys winning the Scottish Under 18 Indoor Cup, the junior section is very healthy and reflects much credit on their coaches.

The club president, not entirely impartially, draws our attention to the league record of the men's 3rds in the West District Division 1 - played 11, won 11. Not bad for a bunch of egocentric has-beens supported by a band of callow youths. More seriously he tells us that there is lots of enthusiasm about the place, with excellent attendance at coaching and training sessions.

Indoor the women have improved one place on last year and finished third in the league. In the play-offs to reach the final they were 2-3 down with five minutes remaining, so took off their 'keeper. Unfortunately this back-fired as they conceded two more goals, but they are to be commended for their enterprise.

The men were flirting with relegation, but came good in the play-off's for places 5 to 8, defeating Grange on running penalties to come fifth.

Folk News

Geoff Laws lives near Worcester and plays golf regularly at the Worcester Golf and Country Club, where Sylvia was recently Lady Captain. He keeps busy in his role as church treasurer, and treasurer of the local sports club - "really just a croquet section and a few bowlers". Geoff enjoys hearing about Western's progress and passes on his regards to all.

We have two new members of FOW:

Andrew Starling, son of Dennis and brother of Michael, has been out in Australia for over 20 years. A handy cricketer at Auchenhowie as well as hockey player, he now plays Masters Hockey for Melville City H.C. in the Perth area and at state level. The club is very family-oriented and has about 1000 members with a thriving junior section. Andrew is an airline pilot with Virgin Australia, and lives in Palmyra, near Perth with his wife Tricia and his two daughters.

Ian Thomas left Western in 1981 after 14 years, and moved to Reading, not far from the local hockey club "which was bigger than Western but the same view of life". His involvement there went from player to high office bearer at a time when the club was rising to the highest spheres of English club hockey and participating regularly in European competitions. Ian played up to 2010, when his knees finally rebelled.

In the mid-90's he moved from Balfour Beatty to the board of Amec, with responsibility for their international business development. In that role he provided advice on business matters in Asia to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, resulting in the award of an OBE in 2006.

During a three-year stint in Sri Lanka and Singapore in the 80's Ian discovered golf and has been hooked ever since. A member at Henley Golf Club, he served as club captain in 2007, their centenary year. All seven grandchildren play hockey, two in Australia and five at Reading which has a vibrant junior section.

A TRIBUTE TO DR BILL

Our Honorary club president, William Murchison Matheson, passed away on November 10th following a severe stroke, aged 86. He was a member for almost half of the club's entire existence, so probably knew at least half of those who were ever members. In his time he played to a very high standard, held many positions of responsibility from groundsman to President and was an exemplary ambassador for the club.

Those of us who attended his funeral were impressed by the huge attendance and will never forget the moving tributes from the family. The love, respect and affection expressed for "Dr Bill" extended to past and present members of Western Hockey Club who were well represented at the service. Many who sent in tributes wished to record how welcoming Bill was to everyone who joined the club.

This appreciation focusses on Bill's hockey career, only one of this remarkable man's interests and passions, with only occasional reference to his wider activities where appropriate.



Dr Bill in 1958 in the club's 60th Jubilee Match

It all started at school in Lairg with an annual hockey game, boys against the girls, from which he apparently emerged unscathed. University entrance to study medicine had to be put on hold while he did the required National Service in the Royal Tank Regiment in Yorkshire. There he was persuaded to take up hockey and played as a right half, which he enjoyed greatly. When he was invalided out after 20 months he was at last able to go to Glasgow University in 1951. In addition to his academic duties he became a leading light in the hockey club, again at right half. However too much competition for this position led him to volunteer as goalkeeper for the 3rd XI. Within two months he had been

promoted to the 1st XI, and was selected for Scottish Universities the following year. In those days this was considered a high honour in hockey circles. A highlight was his participation in the first ever televised hockey match in Scotland, playing for Scottish Universities against their English counterparts at Westerlands. Despite his defence being on the back foot all game, he managed to achieve a shutout. Clearly a rising star, the following season he played for the 'Possibles' against the 'Probables' which was the final stage of selection for the international team. Unfortunately due to prior injury he had a poor game and the starting jersey went to George Black of Stepps, who went on to represent Scotland and GB with great distinction over many years. Bill was honoured with the Presidency of the Glasgow University Athletic Club in 1956-57, an early indication of his willingness and suitability for positions of responsibility.

On leaving university in 1957 Bill joined Western, along with Gavin Walker and Norman Macleod, who both went on to gain Scottish caps. In the team at that time were Alastair Carnegie, Irish international David Hopkins and one of Western's better known hyphens, Robert Cunninghame-Graham. He went straight into the 1st XI and occasionally was selected for the Picts, Scottish hockey's equivalent of the Barbarians, in the company of some of the country's top players. His abilities and character made him an ideal tourist and he received many invitations to join other clubs at festivals and tournaments.

Bill's early Western career was affected by the demands of being a junior doctor: his frequent unavailability to travel forced him to play for whichever team was playing at home. Loss of his first XI place was the rest of the club's gain though. He graced several teams in the succeeding decades: vice captain of the 3rds for many years, and in the late 70s, doyen of the lowest team, the 5ths, along with his friend Alastair Carnegie. His knowledge of the game was useful in identifying and recommending young talent which might otherwise have languished in the lower XI's. Old goalkeepers don't retire, they just fade away - and Bill continued to play into the 21st century. Known affectionately as "the great white doctor" for his unconventional kit of white tracksuit and cricket pads, he eschewed face guards and other pansy safety equipment. His genial and

gregarious nature belied a fiercely competitive streak, and his blood-curdling shrieks at his recalcitrant defence were legendary. Sample shout: "Western, you're all higgelty-piggelty!" His goalkeeping style was adventurous, with an occasional propensity to charge from his goal line in search of ball or man, or both. On one classic occasion, his team stood aghast as he chased a young opponent to the corner flag with a view to GBH.

But perhaps the best anecdote about Bill, which attests both to his longevity as a player and to his ability to laugh at himself, was when in his 70s he recounted his visit to a Glasgow sports shop to replace his ancient kit. After dithering for a while over the merits of various items of modern gear, the shop assistant helpfully suggested "Why don't you send your boy in to get fitted himself?"

Impressive though his hockey contribution to Western was, his service to the club was much wider than his goalkeeping. Right from his arrival in 1957 Bill Matheson started to undertake positions of responsibility and he was involved in committee work until his death 57 (!) years later. The pages of the Club Centenary History reveal his involvement in nearly every activity of the club from the most exalted to the most menial. An ability to get things done without fuss was his touchstone. As secretary between 1966 and 1969 Bill was closely involved in the negotiations to bring the club to Auchenhowie, as a section of Milngavie and Bearsden Sports Club. This was one of the most important and influential changes in the club's history. In the inaugural hockey match for the new pitch in 1971 he was 'keeper in the President's XI against a Club XI, score 2-1.

He was President of Western from 1978 to 1986, succeeding Alastair Carnegie. Another seminal event in Western's history started during his Presidency - the international indoor hockey tournament known as "The Glenfiddich". Bill was in the planning group which met in 1978. Subsequently the tournament was held annually from 1979 to 1994. It put Western firmly at the centre of indoor hockey in Scotland and well beyond. Bill was throughout an enthusiastic backer and official tournament doctor, many players benefitting from his skilful interventions. Some members may recall an excellent post-tournament celebration at Auchenhowie when some Dutch players decided that Bill's shirt would make an excellent notice board, and before long many others had added their messages. He accepted this with his customary

good grace, but his wife Eileen may not have appreciated the jape as she tried to wash it. Bill was always a keen and vocal supporter of the 1st XI - at home and abroad, at cup finals and relegation battles. His enthusiastic response to victories was counterbalanced by quiet words of consolation in defeat. For him the highlights of his association with the club were the successes of the 1st XI, various foreign tours, the long association with Huddersfield HC, and the Glenfiddich Tournament.

As the demands on the President and Club Captain became more onerous, in 1986 the club embarked on a fundamental reorganisation, which included restricting the club president's tenure to a period of three years. The intention was to encourage the incumbent to develop the club to meet the demands of the modern game before handing on to a fresh pair of hands. As a corollary, the post of Honorary President was instituted. There was no question about who would be the first holder - Bill was elected *nem. con.* He served wonderfully in this role from 1987 until his recent death - 27 years later. In addition to Hon. Pres. duties he has chaired almost every imaginable committee, from "centenary" to "disciplinary". He was deservedly awarded the Western Trophy (for outstanding service to the Club) in 1995, 1996, 2005 and 2007. Since Friends of Western was set up in 2003 Bill was a most enthusiastic member of the managing group, helping the club to keep in touch with its past members.

As well as his contribution to the hockey section, Bill always had a strong commitment to the M & B Sports Club, and after spells as the hockey representative on the Sports Club Committee, and grounds convenor, he served as their president for four years. In conjunction with this he represented the sports club on the Bearsden & Milngavie Sports Council. After the opening of the artificial pitch at Auchenhowie he acted as pitch convenor and organised the lets for many years. He also ran the '100 Club', a fund-raising project whereby members paid in regularly and occasionally got a welcome small cheque.

In a club which has benefitted greatly from a host of (voluntary) administrators, organisers and planners over many years, Bill Matheson's dedicated commitment stands above all others. He was ever willing to take on positions of responsibility, yet he never requested nor expected anything in return. His sagacity and geniality have been important factors in the club's development and achievements. We surely won't see his likes again. **HFA/AMS**

When I was asked to write something on my time in the club, I imagine the thinking was of something compact and witty. Instead here is something longer and more earnest.

Some background for those too young to remember or happy to forget: first team 1966-81, captain 1974-75 (with Bobby Hunter as my vice-), sometimes West District and West District captain, captain of Thistles, Scottish District Cup winner final season, skinny mid-fielder with stamina and eye for a pass. I think I had a good reading of space on the pitch and of the shape of the game. My standard shout to adjacent teammates who were in possession was "if you like", which, I am reliably told, mutated during one notably fraught game at Grange into "if you are desperate". I was of course renowned for a placid temperament (for those who never saw me in action). Don't ask the umpires, who frequently made monstrous decisions.

Why do we play hockey?

Not easy to answer. There is a general sense of enjoyment, but does this extend to playing on a snowy waste in Dundee against a second-rate outfit who seem to have no ambition to cross into our half (result 0-0)? There is the undoubted pleasure of being fit and that warm glow of fatigue after giving all in a game. And there is the sheer competition, playing to win. But why is it that winning seems just the natural order of things, while losing hurts like hell?



Mario Kempes circa 1974

With that badge he looks like he might have wandered into the Welsh national team by mistake

For me the greatest benefit, looking back, was the team and companionship. As an academic it's easy to live a sealed life within a set of contrived values – I suppose this applies to all professions in

one way or another. Once we stepped on to the pitch it did not matter if one person was a professor and another from a very different walk of life. Background counted for nothing; we were all equal as members of the team. I also learnt that being in a team means playing to each person's strength so that the sum is greater than the parts. This rule I took into my leadership roles in academia and public bodies. You help people improve their weakness, but you don't exploit the weaknesses to prove something about yourself – unless they are in the other team.

The best moments?

Winning the West District league after many years of being frustrated by Stepps, who were driven by the midfield dynamo and part-time fireman, Peter Monaghan, who later switched to us. Although we skinned teams on the lightning-fast blaes at Blairdardie, the lumpy grass, wooden shack and tin bath at Stepps seemed not to be compatible with our style. There were also those home teams that put us on their worst and heaviest pitches to slow us down. Bring on the Astro turf!

There were various wins at tournaments, 6-a-sides, and festivals... I won't detail the story about IT and myself, who tried to pick up two professional "dancers" at a festival in Yorkshire, only, after an encouraging start, to encounter their Neanderthal minders. A tactical withdrawal seemed prudent.

The biggest win, I recall, was 18-0 against Glasgow Indians. The highlight was the contest between Mike Dickson and his marker, an Asian maestro apparently called "Spider" (it was easy to see why). Mike's style on the right flank, notwithstanding odd moments of finesse, was robust and direct. His first foray down the wing left Spider flattened like the victim of a steam roller in a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon. Thereafter Spider patrolled other areas of the pitch in spite of repeated entreaties from his team-mates.

Being nicknamed "Mario" by Malcolm Callaghan in honour of Mario Kempes, Argentinian football star.

Any win.

Beating Civil Service on the blaes.

The worst moments?

Any loss to Stepps – even the draws.

The loss in the Cup Final in Edinburgh to Civil Service, who also dominated us for the most part in the National League. Driven by the lofty pace and neurotic skills of Chris Sutherland, the all-round athleticism of Alan Stobbie, and the massive aerial passes of Gordon Grassick, they were just that bit better than us, not least in their professionalism – which unnecessarily brought with it an unpleasant streak of tactical fouling and destructive gamesmanship, with which the umpires were ill-equipped to deal.

My realisation that Billy Bruce had not been born when I started playing first-team hockey (at Slough). I recall his first goal, on his debut against Grange in Edinburgh. After the game Tony Duncan said to me, “that’s Western’s next international”. Billy was one of the group of players from the Vale of Leven Academy, where their talents were nurtured by David Simpson, who was surely the best umpire in Scotland in his era.

Any conversation with Jimmy Maxwell of Eastbank, former goal-keeper and belligerent umpire. On one occasion in the post-game bar we were discussing how to cope with the ball being switched laterally at a short corner. (Note: this was the time of hand-stopping of push-outs, or injections as they are known today). "Och", said the ginger warrior, "That's easy. I just run out and kick the hand-stopper". He was a disciplinarian as an umpire. Another umpire, Craig Madden, is a close runner-up. Though I forget Joe Dillon, the hockey reporter of the *Glasgow Herald* wins this category hands down. Joe's *pièce de résistance* was describing "Gus Scott revelling in the conditions" in one report. Gus was unavailable for that match (revelling at his sister's wedding in Perth, as it happens).

Telling any player that he was to be a sub, or subbing someone during the course of a game. My worst mistake was substituting Tony Duncan on one occasion.

Any loss.

Conclusion

All I can say is thank you to everyone in Western. The club has been a great source of richness in my life.

The news you've all been waiting for

Alistair Trainor has finally decided to give up playing, on the advice of various parts of his body. Last year Alistair celebrated 40 years as a player at Western in the company of a battalion of players with whom he had played over the years and a great occasion it was. However he will remain involved by umpiring the men's 4th team, where he keeps a benevolent eye on the club's future stars.

Alistair has also felt compelled to stand down from the Friends of Western organising group because of a number of other commitments. We must thank him for his measured and thoughtful contributions at meetings and assistance in various practical ways which have been much valued.

Bill Matheson Memorial

The hockey club is at present considering honouring Bill with a memorial trophy in his name to be presented annually.

We at Friends of Western felt that we too would like to mark his outstanding contribution over many years. After much discussion, it was concluded that a pitchside bench, suitably inscribed, would be an appropriate way of doing this.

We have available funds, but in view of the esteem in which Bill was held it may be that some members would like to make a contribution towards this, which would be most welcome. Cheques (made out to 'Friends of Western') should be sent to our treasurer Graeme Kenny at:

17 Kilmahew Avenue,
Cardross G82 5NG.

Anyone wishing to make a direct payment should contact me at angus.scott43@yahoo.co.uk if they require the account details.