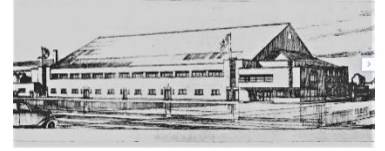


'The Kirkcaldy Ice Rink is to be opened next Saturday'



For generations of ice sports' fans, such a simple statement can arouse the fondest sense of anticipation. Skaters, curlers, hockey fans alike will count down the days to a new season, the latest of which, 2023/24, is promising a 'new era'.

How much more exciting was that headline when it appeared for the very first time, in 1938. Ten words containing multitudes.

The Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette of Tuesday 27th September acknowledged as much:

"Behind this rather bald announcement is the realisation of the dreams of Kirkcaldy and district skating enthusiasts whose numbers are legion in spite of the vagaries of the Scottish climate which make the pursuit of their recreation a rather hazardous affair. No longer will they have to wait wearily for suitable periods of frost or live in terror

of premature thaws – in the handsome new building erected at Rosslyn Street they have a veritable skaters' paradise . . . Curlers, those fellow victims of weather uncertainty will also be greatly interested, while ice hockey,



the fastest of games, is to make its debut in Kirkcaldy and its thrills will make a universal appeal. Already the Fife Flyers are practising hard for the opening of the season and the people of the town and district are eager to see them in action."

85 years have passed since Kirkcaldy Ice Rink first opened its doors, but the origins of the sports that sustain the arena to this day go much further back in time.

Skating is recorded as early as the 12th century and a form of hockey, chamiare, really just shinty on ice, is said to have been played on the River Forth in the early 1600s.

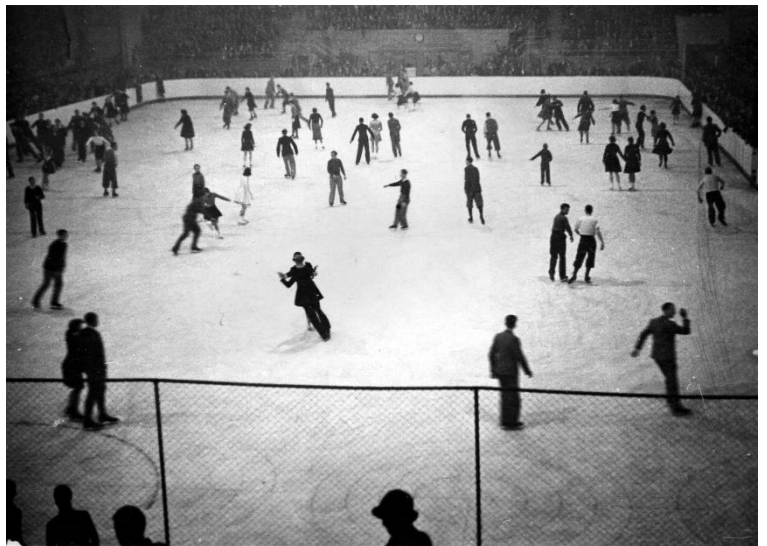
According to the British Ice Skating website, the world's first skating club was formed in Edinburgh in 1742, utilising the often frozen Duddingston Loch. To become a member of the Edinburgh Skating Club, like Raeburn's iconic 'skating minister' Rev Robert Walker, applicants had to pass a test: skate a complete circle on each foot, and then jump over first one hat, then two hats, then three hats each on top of the other to 'demonstrate athletic daring'.



Most recreational skating did not require such examination, but it did need reliable ice, As John C.

Anderson of Leslie, one of Kirkcaldy Ice Rink's first Board of Directors pointed out in 1938:

"Until quite recently skating as a recreation for most people has been dependent on weather conditions, and ice sufficiently good and sufficiently safe has only been available for very short periods. The result of this has been to limit the opportunities for practice and thus prevent the sport becoming really popular. Now, however, indoor skating rinks are springing up in most of our cities and these provide skating facilities under the most ideal conditions. The ice rink skater finds perfect conditions always at his disposal, he is not concerned with weather conditions, and Orchestra or radiogram play the latest tunes, while he glides around, unconsciously swinging with exhilarating speed to the lilt of the music."



This idyllic vision may not be wholly familiar to those who learned their skating at Kirkcaldy over the years but at least Anderson had the good sense to warn: ". . . you should not skate at high speed until you have learned how to stop. This is very important especially on a crowded rink."

The Andersons were locally known as simply "the skating family". On Loch Leven in January 1933, the Courier reported, "Mrs Anderson won the ladies' event and she and her husband gave a delightful exhibition of figure skating. In addition two five year-old kiddies were gliding about in a manner which drew envious glances from grown-up exponents of the art. Mrs Anderson told me the rest of the family are being brought up in the faith."

I am also indebted to a friend of the 50 Objects Project Bill Feit, for this anecdote:

"The Andersons were very good skaters at competition level. They would often bring a sledge with a hamper and a wind-up record player to the flooded cricket pitch at Leslie for a day's skating. I also remember seeing them do the judging on TV a few times."

Unfortunately, the frosty season was neither long enough nor common enough for people to fully embrace skating. The same is true of ice hockey. In its formative years it was undoubtedly a loose amalgam of field hockey, bandy and shinty but what is certain is that a form of hockey on ice was well-established 100 years before you could play, or watch, it in an arena in the Gallatown.

Scottish newspapers as early as the 1840s were referencing hockey played on ice, for example a fatality during a hockey game involving about 20

participants skating on a canal: “[T]he ice suddenly broke in, and several were immersed, but rescued, except [an] unfortunate lad.”

A form of ice hockey was played on the lake at Buckingham Palace during the hard winter of 1895.



Among the participants were the future Kings Edward the Seventh and George the Fifth and Sir Frederick Arthur Stanley, the 16th Earl of Derby, no less, whose squad for the regal scrimmage included four of his brothers. Sir Frederick is of course a hockey

notable, who donated, at accost of 10 guineas, the Stanley Cup, professional hockey’s holy grail, upon completing a five-year shift as Lord Governor General of Canada in 1893.

In a letter to the Fife Free Press in November 1902, ‘Old Hand’ writes about the ‘the carrick or shinty’ played on the beach at Kirkcaldy – “It is scarcely possible to conceive of a better or more enjoyable game for the development of the physical stamina of youth.’ The writer claims that this game was played by Linktown weavers after a shift – often in near-darkness with a ‘moonlight doe’ (ball). Not quite hockey, but getting there, we could say evolving.

By 1908, the Fifeshire Advertiser is openly calling the game hockey: "On Sunday skating was general on the loch [at Kinghorn] a fine covering of ice covering the west side. A hockey match also took place on the ice."

The curlers at Leslie were not so lucky that same weekend – Rothes Curling Pond had a fine sheet of ice on the Saturday but by the day designated for the match, a thaw had set in. "Alas", quoth the Advertiser, "John Frost is a fickle fellow for on Monday the pond was swimming with water and the curlers were left lamenting meantime."

Hockey has been possible on the Beveridge Park pond a handful of times in the last few decades and when hard winters coincided with successful Flyers' teams, as in the mid-1980s, the pond could often become quite busy, to the consternation of health & safety monitors!



It is curling that dominates the early records of ice sports in Scotland. The website of 'Scottish Curling' in its 'History of the Game' states that the written history of curling began when "the notary John McQuhin recorded a challenge about throwing stones across the ice between a monk at Paisley Abbey and a relative of the abbot in February 1541."

An Ayrshire church minister is quoted in Sir John Sinclair's Statistical Account of Scotland (1781 – 1799) that curling occupied a major role in the life of his parishioners. Borderline patronising it may be, but it captures the atmosphere of early outdoor social curling, involving all classes:

'Their chief amusement in winter is curling or playing stones on smooth ice. They eagerly vie with one another who shall come nearest the mark, and one part of the parish against another, one description of men against another, one trade or occupation against another, and often one whole parish against another, – earnestly contend for the palm, which is generally all the prize, except that perhaps the victors claim from the vanquished the dinner and bowl of toddy, which, to do them justice, both commonly take together with great cordiality, and generally without any grudge at the fortune of the day; wisely reflecting, no doubt, that defeat as well as victory is the fate of war. Those accustomed to this amusement, or that have acquired dexterity in the game, are extremely fond of it. The amusement itself is healthful; it is innocent; it does nobody harm; let them enjoy it.'

An exact century before Kirkcaldy Ice Rink opened, the Grand (soon to become Royal) Caledonian Curling Club was instituted and by the last decades of the 19th century every county had at least one

club affiliated with the RCCC, and almost every parish had its custom-made curling pond.



Contemporary newspapers are replete with references to curling al fresco as harsh winters enabled enthusiasts to play on a wide range of surfaces around the county, ranging from large public

ponds to private garden 'rinks'.

The Fife Herald of February 25th, 1858, reported on a 'A Week On The Ice', with curling matches on Raith Lake, Dunnikier, Cameron Bridge and Balfarg Pond near Markinch. The lyrical description of one match is typical of the time: "This evening, on Raith, was one of the most gorgeously lovely sights conceivable; the sun fell, all purple and gold, over the ice and trees, whilst over the lake were seen hurrying groups of players, and on the banks, gaily-dressed groups of ladies and other spectators."

Natural ponds were popular but unreliable – artificial curling ponds had become widespread through the 19th century as communities and private individuals with land to spare sought to improve recreational amenities for leisure, exercise, social contact and competition. Constructed with masonry walls and an asphalt base, they eliminated much of the danger and uncertainty of old ponds and could be converted

for bowling or tennis during the summer months, or vice-versa, as with the cricket pitch at Leslie.

The very comprehensive listing at the [Historicalcurlingplaces](#) site shows almost 3000 places in Scotland where curling has been played, including no fewer than 98 in Fife – among them Beveridge Park, Raith Lake, Abbotshall Pond, Leslie, Lochore Meadows, Kennoway Spats, Wemyss Castle, Lochgelly Loch, Dunnikier Pond, Balfarg, Auchterderran, the Burntisland Binn, Archibald's Park Markinch, Saline, Craigtoun Park, Dunino . . . the list rolls on. It would make a fascinating walking trail!

Outdoor curling was therefore very well-established by the time Scotland got its first indoor rink – Crossmyloof in Glasgow in 1907. There was massive interest both in playing and watching – some curling ponds had their own railway station stops (no doubt at the behest of the wealthy landowners who often played the game) and there are records of special trains running from Elie to Loch Leven for a Fife & Kinross v Perth match-up. The convivial atmosphere already mentioned seems to have run through curling history like a constant thread - "Nowhere so much as on the ice is the spirit of camaraderie seen" said the Perthshire Advertiser of the 1930 Loch Leven bonspiel. But aficionados still had three decades to wait for the explosion in arenas commensurate with the game's popularity.

The rinks arrived just in time, as early 20th century climate change was literally washing away the sport outdoors. Sir Robert C. Lockhart, first Chairman of Kirkcaldy Ice Rink, said in 1938:

“We of the older generation can look back to 8 to 10 WEEKS of continuous frost when the merry rumble of curling stones could be heard all over Scotland, wherever there was a sheet of ice. In recent years we could count ourselves lucky if we were able to enjoy 8 to 10 DAYS’ curling. The result of this change in the seasons is that there is a melancholy but natural falling off in the number of young players in our clubs.

“The good folk of Fife,” he went on, “have always been keen curlers and by the erection of an Ice Rink in Kirkcaldy have manifested their determination to keep abreast of the times and maintain the sporting traditions of the County. It is generally agreed that indoor curling provides a splendid substitute for the ‘Real Mackay’ . . . indoor curling has greatly improved the quality and science of the game and nothing could be more remarkable than the wonderful manner in which our

PROSPECTS FOR THE GRAND MATCH

SUN MELTING ICE ON CARSEBRECK

Loch Leven Bonspiel Likely To-Morrow

Word was received by the secretary of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club in Edinburgh last night that the ice on Carsebreck Loch was only 3½ inches thick compared with 3½ inches in the morning. The sun is melting the ice during the day.

The officer in charge does not think that the necessary thickness of five inches will be available for the Grand Match between North and South curlers for at least one week.

The Carsebreck bonspiel affects curlers from all over Scotland. Nearly 3000 will foregather at the Loch if a thaw does not bring about the same disappointment as last year. On that occasion the bonspiel had just commenced when a thaw set in, and the curlers had to retire.

Lady members have proved themselves no mean rivals to their men folk.”

Barely two months before Kirkcaldy Ice Rink was to open, curling was adopting a change to its well-established rule that stones should not count if they were clearly outside the seven-foot circle. The ‘house’ had a diameter of fourteen feet.

All was to change on July 27, 1938, when the RCCC Centenary AGM voted to reduce the minimum size of the ‘house’ from 14 feet to 12 feet in diameter.

As explained in David B. Smith and Bob Cowan’s superb The Curling History Blog:

“By 1938 much curling in Scotland had moved indoors. The main arenas in which the sport was played in the 1937-38 season were the Edinburgh Ice Rink in Haymarket, the Central Scotland Ice Rink in Perth, and the Scottish Ice Rink at Crossmyloof, each of which offered six sheets of ice for curling. The Dundee, Kirkcaldy, and Falkirk rinks were to open in late 1938, and Ayr, Aberdeen and Dunfermline the following year. Although used for curling, it was the demand for watching ice hockey, as well as for skating, that was the stimulus for these arenas to be constructed.

“At the 1938 AGM, William B. Henderson of the Kinnochtry Lawton Club had argued, “One main

reason for the lesser ring than the one we are accustomed to, the fourteen-foot ring, is the fact that you get more rinks in the building. In Canada and the States, as you know, all the curling takes place under a roof, and it is coming to be that way in Scotland too. One can see the number of rinks that are going up all over the country, and I think it would lead to cheaper games. . . . If you get seven rinks into very slightly more than is at present required for six rinks, there would be a very considerable increase in the earning capacity of the area. You then get in 56 curlers instead of 48; and you must not forget when curlers go to these rinks it generally is not what they pay for the rink but what they do for the general good of the house. I am sure that the ice rink owners would have welcomed a change of rules that allowed more curlers to play on the same sheet of ice than before, although this did not happen immediately. A World War intervened."

Curling, like hockey, did survive the war, just, and the first post-war British Open Curling Championships at Falkirk in February 1945 seemed to act as a timely morale-boost.

The Falkirk Herald reported:

"The British Open Curling Championship . . . was undoubtedly one of the best organised and most successful competitive events of the kind ever held

in Scotland. At the final tie on Saturday afternoon, there were fully 1500 spectators, probably the largest crowd ever to have witnessed a single rink curling game in this country. It was evident at least, that the indoor curling game on artificial ice is increasing in popularity in Scotland."

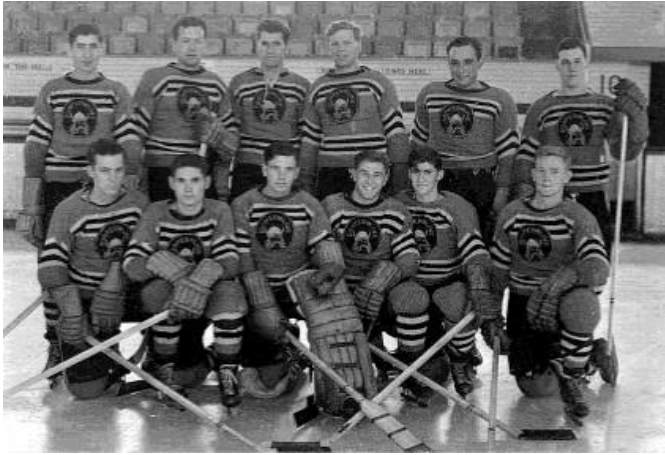
Presenting the prizes, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Thomas Johnston, struck a patriotic note, as the Herald recalled:

"He did not take a gloomy view of the future. He was one of those who believed that a nation which could face up to the perils of Dunkirk, a nation that could face up to Hitler's Wehrmacht with a Home Guard armed with sporting rifles and walking-sticks, was a nation that was not going to go down in discordance. If we maintained among ourselves a modicum of goodwill resembling the ice rink team spirit, we need have no fear of the future of our country."

The rinks at Crossmyloof in Glasgow and Perth were already established in 1938. Dundee/Angus Ice Rink was set to share an opening weekend with Kirkcaldy, Falkirk would follow two months later and the new rink at Murrayfield was under construction (Haymarket Ice Rink had already been in place for some 25 years, though not staging hockey).

Murrayfield was completed in early 1939 at a cost of £60,000 but the opening was postponed due to the war when it was requisitioned as a Royal Army

Service Corp Depot. It served as a Stationery Office store until 1951 before eventually opening in 1952.



Dunfermline Ice Rink opened in Halbeath Road in the summer of 1939 at a cost of £40,000 and would host the popular but relatively-short-lived Vikings who enjoyed some success – and some torrid derby tussles with the

Flyers particularly in the late 1940s - until the rink's closure in 1954.

New rinks also arose in 1939 at Ayr (for skating, hockey and curling) and Aberdeen (originally only for skating), while down south several new rinks – Bayswater, Grimsby, Oxford and Westover (Bournemouth) had opened in 1930 and in the years up to 1940 a string of rinks came along, including Streatham, Southampton, Birmingham, Wembley, Brighton, Liverpool, Blackpool, Nottingham and Durham.

Ice hockey was absolutely central to the vision of ice rink expansion. The sport was taking off. Phil Drackett, in his superb history of the early years of British ice hockey 'Flashing Blades' (Crowood Press, 1987) recalls growing up in the era in London, where he frequented the rink at Haringay:

“The hockey in the English National League was probably the best in the world outside the NHL . . .there was Britain’s triumph in the Olympics, the World Championships in London, the foundation of the world’s first ice hockey publication ‘Ice Hockey World’ and so much more besides . . .It is not just a case of memory hold the door, they truly were golden years.”



It was in this environment that the game was taking hold in Scotland. Sid Montford, a Glasgow-based journalist who also played hockey with Kelvingrove, gave ‘Sunday Mail’ readers a heads-up for the new season on 11th September, exhibiting something of the enthusiasm we associate with his son and future sports broadcasting legend Arthur:

“Ice hockey will get you, grip you, make you shout for more. This fast and furious sport has something the others haven’t got, an ‘outdoor’ sport played indoors, Spectators get a close-up of action, the kind of action that only red-blooded youth can turn on. Flashing blades, crunching ice, crashing bodies and blinding speed combine to make ice hockey symbolic of this exciting age.”

Sensational stuff – all of which optimism somewhat masked the poet W.H. Auden’s verdict on the 1930s

as “a low, dishonest decade”. In the Guardian in 2017, Jonathan Freedland was equally dismissive: “No case needs to be argued, just to name the decade is enough, it is a byword for mass poverty, violent extremism and the gathering storm of war.”

In retrospect, of course, this is all true. Yet life – even in Depression, even in War – had to go on and people had to live as if the future was bright. And on the very eve of Flyers’ first game, there was still optimism.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was pronouncing peace at the Heston Aerodrome near London with “the settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem, which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe will find peace. . .” Later that day, on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, he intoned: “. . . peace with honour . . . peace in our time. And now I recommend you to go home and sleep quietly in your beds.”

With the excitement of a new ice rink and a new team, there may not have been too much quiet sleeping in Kirkcaldy beds that night and it was soon apparent that world peace too would not last.

The Fife Free Press editorial of 1st October had an optimistic – we can now say naïve – take on the crisis. It’s a sobering thought that you could be

reading this over breakfast whilst looking forward to the night's opening match at the rink:

"In the face of a world terror of what war would mean, commonsense had its chance and every sane man and woman will thank God that it has prevailed, for war would have been a crime against humanity and the civilisation we now enjoy. . . we think the quiet reading of what Mr Chamberlain disclosed on Wednesday convinced a good many people that the last thing Herr Hitler wished to see was an open conflict between Germany and Great Britain."

The town's MP Thomas Kennedy – see our Object No 9 – was less complacent, telling a public meeting; "We live in an ugly world. Fires have been lit that may well lead to a world war. The world crisis can only be regarded as the kick of a bankrupt capitalism. Nations at all corners of the earth are preparing for the coming struggle."

We know now that the pessimism was justified, though war was still a year off. It gave Fife Flyers a chance to play a debut season unbroken by hostilities but far from unaffected by the 'phoney war'. And the town was on alert for conflict in the week it was anticipating its first look at the ice rink.

The Fife Free Press of 1st October reported:

A. R. P. IN FIFE

Statement to County Council

PREPARATIONS FOR EMERGENCY

“With the rapid march of international events towards a crisis it was felt throughout the burgh that in the realm of effective precautions, Kirkcaldy was lagging far behind and the news of last weekend did much to aggravate an air of disquietude.”

The week in which Kirkcaldy was anticipating its first look at the ice rink, the town was also on alert for international conflict. Kirkcaldy Corporation was preparing for the worst. A vast corp of volunteers was being recruited to serve as Air Raid Wardens, First Aid officers, firefighters, etc and “responsible and active women are required to act as clerks, telephonists, and ambulance drivers, etc” There was an appeal for commercial vehicles to be offered as makeshift ambulances. Gas masks were being stockpiled at local centres the length of the Lang Toun from the Philp Hall in Linktown, via the Adam Smith Halls, and through Pathhead to Dysart. Trench-digging had been carried on apace throughout the week, firstly at the Beveridge Park and later at Ravenscraig Park, Volunteers’ Green and Loanwells Green at Carlyle Road.

A clear sign for hockey fans that things weren’t quite normal came in Dundee Tiger’s dilemma on the eve of the opening exhibition game of the season, the Flyers trip to Dundee on Friday 30th September.

According to the Courier, “Telephone lines between Dundee Ice Rink and London were buzzing last

night” after their goalie Bruce Thomson, a skilled aircraft worker, was called away on military work by his company in England, leaving Tayside rink boss Angus Baxter phoning a friend to fill the breach for the opening game at the new Kingsway rink. His efforts were exacerbated given the relative scarcity of phone lines at the time and due to the fact that many of them were buzzing with chat and official communications on the international crisis.

In the event, Perth Panthers’ custodian Scotty Milne was drafted in on loan and backstopped the Tigers to a 5-2 home win, watched by a sell-out crowd of over 4000, with over 1000 more turned away. The game’s first goal, the first ever against the Flyers, the first ever for a Dundee team, was scored, in a lovely tweak of fate, by one Al Rodgers, who was later to join Fife and coach them to post-war success. The Dundee rink was initiated by speed skating and an exhibition by Cecilia Coolidge, British and European Skating Champion.

As we shall see, Kirkcaldy Ice Rink was opened the next day and while it’s almost impossible for us to imagine the atmosphere of a ‘phoney war’ the records show that even while it was enjoying its first season of ice sports, Kirkcaldy meanwhile was slowly transforming into a cog in the war machine.

Impending war had a huge impact on local industry - AH McIntosh sold off part of their ground in Victoria

Road in 1938 and started diversifying to making aeroplane parts. The workforce changed as large numbers of men enlist, bringing more women into the workplace. A blog at OnFife.com - 'Women, War and Linoleum' also emphasises the role of women in taking over many vital manufacturing duties as the men signed up for the Forces in both world wars.

The men who came back had their years in uniform included in the company's long-service reckoning, recognition of how the war effort was fully collective.

For McIntosh, luxury furniture production gave way to more pragmatic concerns - 'Their stocks of wood were requisitioned by the War Department and they had additional orders to make coffins, pontoon bridges and ammunition boxes.' (Anne Watters, 'The McIntosh Story' (1995))

Linoleum giants Nairns also turned their plant and workforce skills to the war effort, producing torpedoes, gun mounts, fuel tanks for bombers and more. In 'Nairns 1939-1945' - published by the company in 1946 and still available for perusal in Kirkcaldy Library today, we find a real sense of how preparations for war were forging on, even as early as 1937:

'Tension was in the European air, crisis haunted the newspapers, sabres were rattling in Germany, but war to most of us still seemed unthinkable, impossible. Nevertheless, behind the quiet door of

Authority there were men whose duty it was to think about even the unthinkable, and plan as though the impossible were inevitable. So, late in 1937, a member of staff at the Admiralty asked us whether we in the linoleum industry could, if the need arose, undertake the linseed-oil proofing of cambric to prove a material for protection against mustard gas . . . By early 1938 we were all set and production began . . . when the storm broke in September 1939, we were turning out very big quantities indeed'.

But for the moment, the peace held. And hockey was coming, irony upon irony, from the Bavarian Alps.



Phil Drackett in 'Flashing Blades', recalls listening to the radio commentary on Great Britain's decisive 1936 Winter Olympic game, the result of which unarguably launched the new era of hockey in this country:

"A torrent of words, all in an unfamiliar Canadian accent, was pouring from the big old Pye radio in the corner of the room where a man and two boys huddled . . ."

The commentator was Bob Bowman, who was to become something of a celebrity on the strength of

his account that was allegedly somewhat embellished - who would know? The broadcast was infamously faded out before the climax - the BBC had not anticipated overtime, never mind three periods of it - prompting hundreds of complaints, but an impact had been made. In Drackett's words, "the great British public suddenly became aware that there was a sport called ice hockey."

Radio in 1938 was an expanding medium that was helping to shrink the world for listeners - not always smoothly. Little more than a month into the 1938/39 hockey season, America had a vivid example of the power of the new wireless medium when Orson Welles' infamous radio play version of 'The War Of The Worlds' caused mass panic amongst radio listeners believing the fake news bulletin format to be real.

Here, the BBC was broadcasting generally what they felt were 'improving' programmes, with Director General Lord Reith proudly stating: "I do not pretend to give the public what it wants."

Listening to what they didn't want was still incredibly popular with people - by the late 1930s the majority of homes in Scotland had a radio set and Kirkcaldy homes were no exception.

Clydesdale in the High Street had a full range of sets available at prices from 9 to 13 Guineas while Donaldson's - who had installed the sound

equipment in the new rink - had various receivers for sale, with down and monthly payment options available.

In these days, the Radio Times was literally a publication with radio times and the newspapers carried weekend listings.

For those staying in on this historic evening - or those who couldn't get a ticket - there was a local connection on the Scottish Programme, with a half-hour broadcast of the Tullis Russell Band conducted by John Haldane and recorded at Alexandra Palace at 6.15pm, followed by the Scottish Sports News. We would like to think that a new ice rink opening would rate a mention but both Celtic and Rangers had played that day so

Other broadcast delights on 1st October 1938 included - I kid you not - recorded commentary on a Ploughing Competition at Moreton-in-the-Marsh. This would be followed at 8pm by the Last Night of the 44th season of the Proms from the Queens Hall in London, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry J. Wood himself in a programme that was noticeably less jingoistic than it would become latterly - only the National Anthem to close the night would have the flags and Promenaders hearts fluttering.

So what picture can we paint of Kirkcaldy in 1938, on the cusp of indoor ice sports and bothered by war

on the horizon? We have not the space here to fill a complete canvas of this enlarging town but we can try to sketch the cultural and leisure background to the new arena.



The town had a population of approximately 46,000 (the closest census was in 1931). There were notices for 33 different churches on the front page of the Fife Free Press of October 1st, including

one for the Gallatown Church, sited just to the left of the ice rink gates.

Kirkcaldy High School (as the Burgh School) was still on its original 1852 site at St Brycedale Avenue augmented from 1929 by the Technical School (see Tom Reid's blog on Old Stone-Built Schools of Kirkcaldy on the 50 Objects site). Viewforth Higher Grade School in Loughborough Road was recovering from a fire that had badly damaged an extension at the start of the year and neither St Andrew's RC High School (1959) nor Balwearie (1964) had yet been envisaged. Balwearie was, in fact, no more than one of the High School houses.



A mere glance at the adverts or Trades Directories of the time confirms that Kirkcaldy High Street was

a mecca for shopping and specialist retailers abounded, many of them with national reputations. Some of them were well-prepared to attract the new rinkside audiences.

James Burt at 184-186 High Street was THE bookshop in Kirkcaldy, as it would be for many years. No doubt there were many solemn and educational tomes to be had - many families will have had (possibly unread) classics with the wee blue Burts sticker. A.J.Cronin's 'The Citadel' was the best-selling novel of the year. But Golden Age detective fiction was popular - this was the year of 'Hercule Poirot's Christmas' - and some new fiction releases hinted at more subversive literary trends - Graham Greene's 'Brighton Rock', Evelyn Waugh's 'Scoop', Daphne Du Maurier's 'Rebecca'.

In other literary forms, the 'Beano' was first published in July 1938, just a month after Superman had made his first appearance in the inaugural issue of Action Comics in the US.

Many, of course, could not afford to buy their books, far less their comics. But they could still read. P.K. Livingston's study of 'Kirkcaldy and Its Libraries', published a few years after the war, found that by 1937 one third of the local population were members of either a branch library or the jewel in the literary crown, John Nairn's Central Library, then barely ten years old. In 1929, the libraries stock

stood at 29,000 books and by 1950 was 65,000. The 1938 stock, reported in the papers, was over 50,000 'at the free disposal of everyone from 6 years old upwards'. The book-lending figures, which Kirkcaldy Public Libraries used to publish weekly in the Press show that a total of 6513 books were loaned in the week leading up to 1st October.

Hard to believe now, but the town had some style. Montague Burton Tailors had a full-page advert in the Press - 'Filling the Gap Between Price and Quality' - for the shop at the foot of Whytescauseway but also unashamedly plugging the company's scale and reputation - The largest distributors of Scottish Tweeds in the World . . . 15,000 employees on the pay roll . . . highest wages in Europe . . .'

Other stores had placed more modestly-sized, if barely more modest, adverts in the local papers - and the forthcoming ice skating boom was clearly going to be well-catered for, with outfits for the ladies to the fore and local firms advertising their goods in the papers and the Flyers' Opening Night programme.

Beveridges was proud of its local reputation - 'Beveridges Score Again With Their Skating Wear' - they had a special show window for skirts, jumpers and dresses at 263-271 High Street and claimed 'Correct skating wear is essential and you will be complimented on your good taste if you buy your outfit from us'

Grieve at 54 High Street claimed 'To skate well you must be correctly attired. We are specialists for Skating Dresses, Skirts, Cardigans, Jumpers, Scarf and Glove sets, Socks, etc.'

SKATING STYLES ..

To skate well you must be correctly attired. See our Special DISPLAY OF SKATING FASHIONS THIS WEEK.

SKIRTS, cut on generous lines, with Full Flared Skirt, complete with Zip Fastener. In shades of Black, Navy, Brown, Rust, Green, and Tan.
PRICES, 10/6 - 25/6

TWIN SETS, comprising Cardigan and Jumper, in a variety of Colours to match any Skirt.
PRICES, 12/6 - 32/6

WOOLLEN JUMPERS, Exclusive range of Smart New Styles in Plain and Fancy Knits. All sizes stocked.
PRICES, 13/6 - 27/6

SCARF AND GLOVE SETS in Yellow, Emerald, Red, Blue, and Tan.
SCARVES 2/11
GLOVES 2/11

WOLSEY SKATING PANTIES, in Navy, Black, Nigger and Bottle. 4/11
PRICES, Garment

GRIEVE
54 HIGH ST., KIRKCALDY
Phone 281.



SKIRTS, Made to Measure, as above model for 4/9
Plus cost of material.

Ladies are cordially invited to call and see
OUR SKATING OUTFITS
FOR THE ICE RINK



This **SKATING FROCK** of heavy quality lambswool is smartly tailored and finished with contrasting shades round collar, cuffs, hem, and hem, obtainable in a variety of new Autumn shades and tailored to special measures to give two-tone effect. PRICE 25/6. Ribber. Numbers from 25/6.

SKATING SKIRTS of heavy quality lambswool. Tailored on perfect lines in flared and scored slotted effect. Also obtainable in self-colours and two-tone effect. Tailored to special measures if necessary. PRICES: 11/6, 21/6, 22/6.

SKATING JERKINS in Gabardine and Poplin. Very newest Double Breasted style, in contrasting shades. 25/6 and 30/6.

POLD AND ZIP FRONT WOOL SWEATERS in all the newest shades, 4/4 to 5/6.

LADIES' SHORTS AND TROUSERS in Flannel and Tweed, perfectly tailored. 10/6 to 21/6.

LADIES' "DAKS" 3/6. **WOOL FROCKS** 21/6 to 25/6.

COSTUMES and COATS Tailored to special measures.

A.K. Melville & Son 132 HIGH STREET, KIRKCALDY, Fife

Not to be outdone, A.K. Melville & Son were displaying the dedicated Fife Flyers outfits.

For the rather more essential purchase of actual ice skates, you could visit Thomson Bros (Kirkcaldy Limited) at 238 High Street, 'Local Agents for Fagan's Ice Skates and Equipment' or The Skate and Boot Shop at the rink

itself, and enjoy personal service and advice from Olympic medallist and Flyers' star Jimmy Chappell



SKATES



FROM 14/6

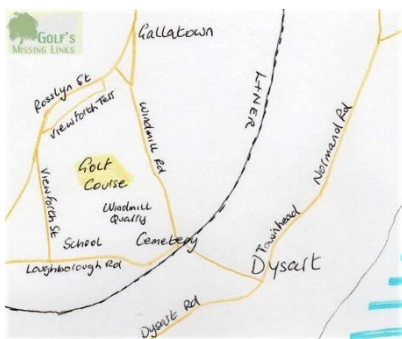
AND ALL OTHER EQUIPMENT AT

THOMSON BROS. (KIRKCALDY LIMITED)

Local Agents for Fagan's Ice Skates and Equipment
238 High Street, Kirkcaldy

Outdoor recreation was provided by two grand town parks, both still very well-appointed and well-used today - the Beveridge Park in the west of the town, the bequest of Michael Beveridge, and in the east Ravenscraig Park, gifted by Sir Michael Nairn in 1929.

The land around Dunnikier House was still part of the extensive Oswald Family estate and yet to become a public park, let alone school playing fields, golf course or crematorium, although 1938 was the year the Oswald family moved out and headed to pastures new.



Gallatown Park, to the north of the rink, dated back to 1924 while south of the new arena was Dysart Golf Course, on land now taken up by Sinclairtown Primary School and streets of housing (The Fairway is the clue).

Unknown to many modern gowfers, Dysart was acclaimed as a "Capital golf course, always kept in capital condition." (Who's Who In Golf 1907) and "A good, flat, inland sporting course of 2,732 yards, par 70" (Book of Scottish Golf Courses, 1947) and occupied the land "west of Dysart Cemetery, extending north from Loughborough Road to Gallatown School across to Windmill Road" (Fife Free Press, March 1888). The said windmill, by the way, was used to mount an air-raid searchlight

during World War II and the remains stand to this day.

The well-above-par website [Golfsmissinglinks](http://Golfsmissinglinks.com) tells us that Dysart Golf Club had a membership of around 250 in the late 1930s and cites "Ice hockey star Les Lovell (Dysart) returned a net 68, playing off 18" in a tournament in 1939. Decades on, Fife's fabled golf courses continue to help lure Canadian and American hockey players to the east coast – Dysart Golf Club must have had at least some small attraction to these early Flyers' players.

Just as Government legislation allowing a week's paid holidays (for some) and the rise of motor transport and private cars was enabling people to travel further and more often for leisure and pleasure, indoor entertainment was entering a new era, with bold modernistic designs for public buildings and the arrival of 'picture palaces'.

The advent of 'the Talkies' in the late 1920s had led to a vast and rapid expansion in provision of cinemas comparable to, but much more extensive than, the growth of ice rinks in the late 1930s. Kirkcaldy alone had numerous cinemas at the time the rink was being built and, according to one local, John Mathieson, quoted in Alistair McIntosh Gray's 'A History of Scotland' (1989): " (You had) . . . all these cinemas in Kirkcaldy . . . And for the average

citizen, especially the young people, you went to the cinema twice a week.”

The Raith Cinema in Links Street was to open in December 1938, with 1220 seats, and would later become the iconic Raith Ballroom. But Kirkcaldy already had plenty of big screens, all glowing in competition to the brand new live production at Kirkcaldy ice Rink.

In the High Street, the Opera House, initially the King’s Theatre (designed by John D Swanson and William Williamson, opened in 1904 and the stage for a young Charles Chaplin to perform in an early Sherlock Holmes stage adaptation). By the mid-1930s, ABC had bought it over and enacted a major refurbishment. Redesigned in the Art Deco style of the day, it had re-opened as the Regal Cinema in August 1937, with a seating capacity of 2,016. On the weekend of the rink opening, the Regal was showing ‘Bulldog Drummond’s Peril’ with John Barrymore, Louise Campbell, John Howard and Reginald Denny – Hollywood legends all!

Just along the road at the corner of the High Street and Esplanade was the Port Brae, open since 1913 with 600-plus seats while the Palace in Whytescauseway, originally opened as a theatre but now operating as a cinema and



about to be extensively modernised in 1939 had Clark Gable and Loretta Young in 'Call of the Wild'.

And a short stroll from here, at 204 High Street, was yet another cinema, the Rialto, which had opened in 1924 and would later become the Gaumont then the Odeon. Demonstrating the role of cinema as a form of pre-TV source of popular infotainment, the Rialto was showing a Special Added Attraction – 'The Life of Neville Chamberlain', including 'his return from the Four power Conference with the Signed Document for Peace'

At the Pathhead Picture House in Commercial Street Laurel and Hardy were showing in 'Fraternally Yours' on the night of the first game while just round the corner from the rink gates, the Palladium, which had opened in 1920 in a converted church, had John Wayne in 'Adventure's End'. Did they sell their 450 seats, I wonder, up against the rink's First Big Adventure?



If by chance you had left the hockey early and fancied a movie instead, you could go left to the Palladium or turn right and head down to the Carlton, on the corner of Park Road, later to gain fame as venue where several hundred thousand people (if they are to be believed) saw Houston Wells, the Fortunes and the Beatles

At the bottom of the hill, the 2000-seat Rio, opened in 1937, was showing 'Holywood Hotel' with Dick Powell and Rosemary Lane.

Gray's History places inter-war cinema in context - "The only place that could compare with the cinema for young Scottish people between the wars was the dance-hall. Scotland went 'dance-mad' in the 1920s as popular new dances swept across the country from Europe and America. The Charleston, the tango and the foxtrot spread like wildfire (thanks in large part to the radio and cinema) and dance-halls, or Palais de danse could be found in every town."

Strictly 1930s style saw you learn the steps at Curry's Jumpers or the Elizabeth Ann School of Dancing in Hunter Street before stepping out at the Masonic Dance Hall with the Melody Makers Dance Band, or the Plaza Ballroom above Burton's tailors in the High Street, or at Kirkcaldy's own 'Palais de dance', in the Olympia arcade.

The Burma Palais ballroom on the central esplanade brought a vast hall into play and this was the venue for a special ball to celebrate the opening of the ice rink. The Olympia Palais was closing its doors after the summer season and management and staff transferred to the Burma for the winter.

The Plaza had already put on a Welcome Dance for the Flyers in July, but with the rink ready to open and game one a few days away, the Burma event

was altogether more prestigious. Held on the Tuesday before the Flyers' first game, and attended by approximately 200 people paying 5 shillings (including buffet), the Ice Rink Opening Ball featured music from Jimmy Millar and his Band and a welcome from Sir Robert Lockhart, chairman of the Board of Directors, who then introduced the full Flyers' squad in the 1930s version of Shirt Launch Night. Coach and captain Les Lovell made a speech, which is so much of its time:

“(Lovell) thanked the people for the warm reception they had got and said that they would all do their best throughout the season, and they could do no better than that.”

It is clear that the dance halls saw publicity potential but also that hockey people were in touch with the zeitgeist from the start – decades later the same Burma site would host numerous Flyers players and fans winding down at Jackie O's – and the genius of the ice rink as it came to compete with cinemas and dance halls as places of entertainment was that it would challenge the dance halls at their own game. It wasn't long before the rink was hosting dances and bringing in big bands as alternative sources of income.

During the war and beyond, the rink had the likes of Joe Loss and Ted Heath, just the first of many alternative attractions. The variety of uses for the

rink may not have been wholly anticipated by the founders but their mission statement was imaginatively worded and open to developments.

From formal dancing, discos, big bands, rock concerts, dog shows, motor shows, ice motor bike racing, professional boxing, wrestling, street hockey tournaments, car boot sales, even a live screening of a Billy Graham Evangelical event, the rink has certainly lived up to that vision, if probably not as profitably as it would have liked.

So, what else was vying for the attention of local sports fans in 1938? Participation in sport was huge, as evinced by numerous sporting notices, often involving work-place teams and clubs.

Football was certainly the biggest spectator sport and the 1938 World Cup in France (destined to be the last one for 12 years) was won by Italy, while Arsenal had won the English First Division, with Manchester City relegated.



Celtic were reigning Scottish First Division Champions (to be usurped the following season by Rangers) but for Raith Rovers, 1937/38 had been an absolutely vintage year – Sandy

Archibald's side won the Scottish Second Division in barnstorming style, losing only two out of 34 games and setting a still extant League scoring record of

142 goals at a distinctively hockey-like average of 4-plus goals per game – star forwards Gilmour, Heywood, Whitelaw and Joyner netted 129 out of the 142.

Unfortunately, the Rovers' scoring touch deserted them slightly in a historic Scottish Cup quarter-final tie with East Fife as they drew 2-2 at the old Bayview in front of 19,000 fans and then lost the Wednesday afternoon replay 3-2 at Stark's Park watched by a then-record crowd of 25,000. The Fifers went on to become the first 2nd Division side to win the Scottish Cup, beating Kilmarnock 4-1 at Hampden. The attendance that day of 92,000 reminds us that there was a huge market for live team sport and ice hockey was certainly well-placed to attract some of that interest with its novelty and guarantee of a dry if not always cosy evening's entertainment.

As the fledgling Flyers were finding their feet in season 1938/39, Raith were crashing back to earth in the top division, losing 1-0 to Motherwell the same day of the Flyers' first game and eventually being relegated – illustrative of the inconsistency that has often dogged both of Kirkcaldy's sporting giants.

Meanwhile, Kirkcaldy Rugby Club were entertaining Watsonians having thrashed Madras College F.P. 27-0 the previous week.

Summer sports fans had seen Don Budge defeat Britain's Bunny Austin to become Wimbledon Men's Champion. England's cricketers had drawn their home Ashes series against Bradman's Australia. The 1938 British Open Golf Championship at Royal St George's in Sandwich was won by England's Reg Whitcombe for a purse of £100, horrendous weather conditions making it one of the highest-scoring Opens in history. Of the top-twelve placed golfers only one – Bobby Locke of South Africa – was not from either England or Scotland.

As autumn arrived and with it Kirkcaldy's first hockey games, the seven-club National Hockey League (compared to 32 clubs today) was about to embark on a new season that would culminate in Boston Bruins winning the first ever seven-game Stanley Cup Final series, although ironically they only needed five games, defeating Toronto Maple Leafs four games to one.

The previous season the Chicago Blackhawks had won the Stanley Cup over the Leafs in the last of the best of five play-off finals. According to the Hockey Gods.com site 'So certain was the NHL that the Black Hawks would not win game four, that the Stanley Cup was never sent to Chicago for the game, and the Black Hawks had no trophy to celebrate with.' (This does sound like the perfect motivation and strikes a chord with those who believe in the modern ice hockey world that certain

teams are often not quite granted the rub of the green from officialdom).

In 1937/38 seven teams had contested the English National League – Wembley Monarchs, Harringay Racers, Earls Court Rangers, Streatham, Harringay Greyhounds, Wembley Lions and Brighton Tigers with Wembley Lions winning the play-off finals.

The Scottish National League had been contested by Perth Panthers, Perth Blackhawks, Glasgow Mohawks, Glasgow Lions, Glasgow Mustangs and Kelvingrove – note the necessity for multiple teams to play out of the same rinks. After a 25-game schedule the Panthers (home ice – the Central Scotland Rink) pipped the Blackhawks (home ice – the Central Scotland Rink) by three points for the title – these were certainly the days of very local derbies! How fans chose which team to support I’m not at all sure!

For 1938/39, Flyers, Dundee and Falkirk replaced the Black Hawks and two of the Glasgow teams. And there would be no doubt of allegiances when Kirkcaldy Ice Rink opened on 1st October. It was the culmination of many years of

KIRKCALDY ICE RINK LTD.
 WILL PRESENT THE FASTEST AND MOST THRILLING GAMES OF ICE HOCKEY THROUGHOUT THE SEASON

The newly formed local team—aptly named the "THE FIVE FLYERS"—includes some of the most famous players from teams in CANADA, SWITZERLAND, LONDON, etc..... Three of the new team are shown here—

LEN McARTNEY—An old Perth favourite, who has had supporters at the Perth Pavilion.

TOMMY DURLING—One of Canada's best ice hockey players, who has been named "Star" of the team for his brilliant play.

NORMAN McQUADE—A star of the London Hawks, who has been named "Star" of the team for his brilliant play.

ARRANGE FOR A PERMANENT SEATING—Season Tickets, whether held for a year or for a shorter period, during the season and also Free Skating for about 20 days after each match. **SEAT'S NOW AT THE RINK**—

TIP-UP SEATS £2—BANKING SEATS 2/6—ALL OTHER SEATS 3/6

LEONARD STEWART—Former star of the successful team last winter at the Pavilion, London, has been appointed First Manager and Chief Skating Instructor.

SKATING SEASON TICKETS—
 School Children - 1/6

ADULT—Single, £5 5/- ; Double £8 8/-
 Country Members, £4 15/- ; Double, £8/-

RINK ADMISSION ONLY—Kirkcaldy 2/1—Country Member, 10/6

CURLING SESSIONS 1938-9

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00
10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15
12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30
2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45
5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00

LATE SESSIONS

10.15-12.15
 12.30-2.30

SKATING SESSIONS 1938-9

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00	8.00-10.00
10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15	10.15-12.15
12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30	12.30-2.30
2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45	2.45-4.45
5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00	5.00-7.00

NOTICE: A FREE SKATING IS FREE on Monday (12.30-2.30) and on Tuesday (10.15-12.15) and on Wednesday (12.30-2.30) and on Thursday (10.15-12.15) and on Friday (12.30-2.30) and on Saturday (10.15-12.15).

SEEK YOUR SEATS AND SKATES AT THE RINK EARLY. SKATING ON THE 10th SEPTEMBER.

dreaming and a very few short months of planning, preparation and actual construction. And behind it all were some very special people, the founding fathers of our ice rink.

At the helm was the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Sir Robert C Lockhart, JP of Allanbank, linen manufacturer and former Provost, who was Vice President of the RCCC, a past President (1931/32) of that august body. His interest in curling was obviously a huge motivation – when the rink opened he was waxing lyrical in a vein that ice hockey could fans could also identify with:

“Curling is an exceptional game in that it brings into friendly rivalry representatives of Scotland, England, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, New Zealand and the USA, so it may justly claim an international status, a world-wide bond of association. ‘The Matchless Game’ which feeds the flame of Brotherhood in Man”.

If Lockhart’s passion for curling hid what must have been an equally strong nose for business, others among the original directors also brought real enthusiasm along with commercial nous.

John C. Anderson, paper manufacturer of Fettykil House, Leslie, was described in his Fife Free Press obituary (‘Death of Noted Leslie Man’) as “very interested in ice hockey” and was first President of Fife Flyers. On his death in June 1939, he was

described in his Fife Free Press obituary ('Death of Noted Leslie man') as 'a well-known and respected Leslie business man', managing director of Smith, Anderson & Co, Fettykill Paper Mills. His daughter Sheila was a top-class ice skater and was the first lady to use the Kirkcaldy ice when relatives and friends of the directors were allowed to test the ice out after the Flyers' first practice session. 'Under the ice can be seen various coins, ranging from 6d to half a crown, which have been placed ther by wellwishers hanselling the rink'. (The Courier, September 19th, 1938)

Here we may digress to quote Bill Feit again, who doesn't dispute that Sheila Anderson was the first female to hit the ice but has this from the family of D. Mitchell & Son (Leslie):

"Don't believe who was stated in the records to be the first skater at Kirkcaldy Ice Rink. It was actually one of the Mitchell Joiners – he brought with him a set of skates that clamped on to his boots (like we used to do with roller skates) and skated around for a while."

Mr Anderson, whom we have already seen extoll the virtues of indoor skating, could see a future when he could justifiably claim:

"Here in Kirkcaldy nearly 200,000 square feet of perfect ice offers the skater every facility for enjoyment and health-giving exercise . . . it is

wonderful how quickly under ice rink conditions the beginner of today becomes the expert of tomorrow.”

Others on the first Board of Directors were:

Archibald Dryburgh, farmer, of Methilhill Farm, Leven

Lochgelly's Alexander Forrester - proprietor of Simpson's and Forrester's Omnibuses of Dunfermline (soon to be absorbed by W. Alexander & Sons)

George W. Adamson – motor haulage contractor of Parkhill, Leven

Alexander Fraser, a building contractor, who lived at Priory Park

James Ramsay, builder, of Allan Street, Leslie

James Glen, merchant, Burntisland

William Porter, flax spinner of Prinlaws mill at West Park, Leslie

John C. Rolland, painter & decorator – son of the late Provost, Rolland was appointed first manager of the ice rink in March 1938 and soon proved adept at networking and engaging some leading stars to join the new Fife team.

Captain David Welsh Rusack of the Fairways, St Andrews, of Rusack's hotel fame

E. Randall Williamson, merchant, of Kirkcaldy

The bankers were The Commercial Bank of Scotland in Kirkcaldy; auditors Anderson & Menzies, 154 High Street; solicitors were Beveridge & Aitken of 220 High Street, which was also the company's Registered Office with David Beveridge as Secretary Kirkcaldy's new rink is trailed in the Evening Telegraph December of 27th 1937, under the heading 'Scotland's Chain of Ice Rinks' – 'Aberdeen and Kirkcaldy stadiums planned', while into January 1938 the Courier tells us "A group of Kirkcaldy businessmen are negotiating with a view to acquiring a site in Rosslyn Street, Kirkcaldy, for the proposed new £40,000 indoor ice rink. Negotiations have so far been of a tentative nature . . ."

The proposals gain support in a letter to the Press of 8th January 1938, with somebody signing himself G.C.C. enthusing:

"I would like to write in support of the venture of several of our well-known businessmen in this ice-rink craze. I know Kirkcaldy would stand such a venture, for the love of the games, such as skating, hockey and curling has a firm hold in the people. What a delight it would be to bring those teams from Perth, Glasgow, even Birmingham up here. Why, the people would go crazy over the sport. Look at the good evenings there would be at the ice-carnivals. . .I would venture to predict that the

venture will be well supported by many in this town who are just itching to get on the ice.”

The writer claims to speak from experience having played for Perth Panthers but I have been unable to confirm his identity (G.C.C. anyone?). In any case, his tone is upbeat and probably representative of a large swathe of the population at the time.

On February 3rd, 1938 the Evening Telegraph confirms that things are no longer tentative with plans being prepared by Williamson and Hubbard Architects, Kirkcaldy for an ice rink with an ice surface measuring 195 feet x 97 feet. “A feature of the construction will be that when the floor area is not flooded and covered with ice it will be available as a hall for entertainment.”

Here we should pause and note that the little-recognised role of Kirkcaldy architect William Williamson in helping construct the stadiums of both of the town’s major sporting teams. In 1922 Williamson was submitting plans to the Dean of Guilds for a new grandstand and a new entrance turnstile at Starks Park. By coincidence Robert Stark, on whose land the Raith stadium was built, was a roper and victualler – and a ropeworks once occupied part of the land where the ice rink would stand.

Two days later, Kirkcaldy Ice Rink Limited is in full view, with an advert on the front page of the Fife

KIRKCALDY ICE RINK LIMITED

(Incorporated under the Companies Act, 1929.)

SHARE CAPITAL - - £30,000

In 30,000 Ordinary Shares of £1 each

**Issue of 25,000 Ordinary Shares of £1 each at par
WHICH ARE NOW OFFERED FOR SUBSCRIPTION.**

Application to be sent to the Company's Bankers:-

THE COMMERCIAL BANK OF SCOTLAND LIMITED
West End Branch, KIRKCALDY

Application may also be sent to the Head Office of the Bank, George Street,
Edinburgh, or to any of the Branches of the Bank.

PAYABLE AS FOLLOWS:-

ON APPLICATION	5s 0d per Share
ON ALLOTMENT	5s 0d per Share
ON 1st JUNE, 1938	5s 0d per Share
ON 1st AUGUST, 1938	5s 0d per Share
		<u>20s 0d per Share</u>

If preferred, the whole amount may be paid on application.

Free Press offering 25000 ordinary shares of £1 each.

In its prospectus, the company say:

“Curling, Skating and Ice Hockey are popular sports in this part of Scotland, but they cannot be indulged in outside for many days each

winter. Many devotees of these sports travel considerable distances to take advantage of the facilities provided in covered rinks elsewhere and they would welcome the provision of adequate facilities locally. There are many more who cannot afford the time and expense involved in going to other rinks who would take advantage of a local one. Ice hockey is becoming increasingly popular, and a full size rink is being provided with accommodation for over 4000 spectators, so this spectacular game should be played and seen under the best conditions.

“It is considered that Kirkcaldy is an excellent place for a rink, having a very large sporting population within easy distance of the rink”

“The Company has secured an option from Mr James Davidson, Branxton, Dysart, to feu a piece of ground extending to approximately three acres on the west side of Rosslyn Street, Kirkcaldy . . . and also an

option from William Wright, 4 Pottery Street, Kirkcaldy, Peter Bennet Wright [of Motherwell) and Mrs Agnes Brodie Wright or Young [of New Zealand], to purchase an adjoining piece of ground extending to approximately one and three-quarters acres with the buildings on it at a price of £950."

From here, things move on apace. On Thursday 17th February, the plans are considered by the Kirkcaldy Dean of Guild Court, Dean of Guild Simpson presiding, and are accepted on condition that certain minor alterations were made.

The plans provide for a one-storey building with seating accommodation for 4500 spectators. At ground level will be the entrance hall, general office, booking office and cloakroom. Provision is made for a large restaurant with milk bar, several club rooms, one of which will be equipped with a bar, two hockey team rooms equipped with lockers, store and spray baths, and rooms for the instructors, refrigerating plant, etc. Immediately above the entrance, provision has been made for a board room, manager's office and a band platform.

The plans are approved, with minor conditions, among them the insistence that all steel stanchions and beams supporting the seating should be encased in fire-resistant material.

An architectural sketch appears in the Fife Free Press of 5th February.

The one-storey building would contain seating for 4,500 and cost upwards of £37,000 to construct, a major undertaking for a town of Kirkcaldy's size. The fire station in Dunnikier Road also opened that year, costing a good deal less but sharing those 'Art Deco touches' and still distinctive today.



The rink – to lovers of Art Deco, Williamson's touch is like fairy-dust - would not have looked out of place at the Empire Exhibition that was running for most of the year at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow, showcasing numerous art-deco masterpieces, notably the imposing Tait Tower. Who knows

Locals can also still catch a whiff of this slick design era in various private houses in Kirkcaldy, and at the former Burton's in the High Street. The rink was said to be "a building of modern and pleasing design"

Fans of the style should track down Jack Deighton's idiosyncratic 'A Son of The Rock' webpage or better still, see Tom Reid's blog piece on William Williamson on the 50 Objects site.

Construction on the rink went smoothly, ensuring the arena was ready for the new season, "a building of modern and pleasing design" according to the

Press. No expense had been spared in equipping the building for a high-quality experience.

REFRIGERATION FOR ICE RINKS



Hidden beneath the ice at the new Kirkcaldy Ice Rink are ten miles of jointless steel pipe embedded in one unbroken jointless sheet of concrete.

This unique form of floor construction, for which application has been made for a patent, is the invention of J. & E. Hall, Ltd., Refrigerating Engineers of Dartford, Kent, who have also equipped the new rink at Dundee, and are now equipping the rink at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow.

J. & E. Hall constructed the skating floor and provided the refrigerating machinery for the pioneer Hengler's Circus Skating Rink, which opened in Argyll Street, London in 1895, and the Glasgow Skating Palace which opened in 1896.

The illustrations show the jointless steel piping before concreting was commenced, and one of J. & E. Hall's welders operating one of the special electric welding machines, designed and built by them and brought to Scotland from their Works at Dartford specially for this work.

J. & E. HALL LIMITED, DARTFORD KENT.
LONDON OFFICE: 10, ST. SWITHIN'S LANE, E.C.4


The ice plant was provided by J & E Hall of Dartford Ironworks in Kent, pioneers in the trade, whose advert drew attention to a “unique form of floor construction, for which application has been made for a patent” and which meant that “Hidden beneath the ice at the new Kirkcaldy Ice Rink are ten miles of jointless steel pipe embedded in one unbroken

jointless sheet of concrete.”

Even the ice plant room had the local press enthusing: “To the uninitiated the place looks more like a section of the engine room of a liner than anything else and when one realises that among other things the process requires 18 miles of piping, some 9.5 miles of which are underneath the rink floor, then one’s wonder is only increased.

The facilities were modern and comprehensive, with a range of refreshment options, a public telephone and tasteful furnishings including Parker-Knoll chairs and curtains by Dame Laura Knight in the clubroom.

This was state of the art stuff, built to last, a serious engineering and construction project, not some annexe to a shopping centre, and the rink's unbroken survival is tribute to its physical resilience as well as the human care it has enjoyed. Its unbroken history resides in the place as much as the people.

MONUMENTS OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

One's attention is often drawn to a new building in course of erection and great interest is taken in the work as it progresses. Once finished, the edifice is admired on its design, *incorporating good modern architecture* and on the excellence of workmanship. Buildings such as this, *in later years*, are monuments to the men who have used their skill in an appreciative effort of achievement

Builder of Fine Buildings.

JAMES RAMSAY
ALLAN STREET TELEPHONE 33 LESLIE

Even so the construction was largely the work of local contractors - the names of which will surely evoke memories and associations even 85 years on:

Builder - James Ramsay, Allan Street, Leslie; Roof Joiner Work - D. Mitchell & Son, 94 High Street, Leslie; Electricians - Martins, 302 High

Street; Joiner - Bogie & Nicol Ltd, 28 Dunnikier Road; Plumber - James Blyth & Sons, 3 Institution Street; Sound Equipment - E. Donaldson, 64 High Street; Furniture &



JOINT CONTRACTORS FOR JOINER WORK ON THE

KIRKCALDY ICE RINK

D. MITCHELL & SON
JOINERS
94 HIGH STREET, LESLIE

ALL CLASSES OF JOINER WORK UNDERTAKEN : ESTIMATES FURNISHED

TELEPHONE 39 LESLIE ESTABLISHED OVER A CENTURY

furnishings - M. Spears & Co, High Street; Concrete Work - Alex Fraser Ltd, Millie Street; Painter - J.C. Rolland and Son, 27 Kirk Wynd; Plasterers - J.S. Stobie & Co, Boglily Road; Slaters - Wm Currie & Son, Falloden Crescent; Glaziers - J. Haxton & Co, High Street; also involved were the Kirkcaldy Corporation Gas Department and prominent Kirkcaldy ironmongers Barnet & Morton and Thomson Brothers; Furnishings by M. Spears & Co, 96-98 High Street.

There are some great Kirkcaldy trade institutions there, but also a strong body of work from Leslie, where to this day locals joke that Kirkcaldy Ice Rink was built by Leslie! James Ramsay is credited at the Opening with being "instrumental in securing that co-operation of all trades which was so essential to an undertaking of this magnitude." Ramsay replied by noting "that he had an additional interest for it was his original idea that they had now seen blossoming into fruition."

To adorn the new ice pad, the management had assembled an all-star team for Fife Flyers' inaugural season.

THINGS TO COME

To encourage and inculcate the Ice Hockey cult amongst the youth of Kirkcaldy and district, a Saturday morning class will be formed under the personal direction of Les Lovell our hockey coach, who here, in a few words, will describe what he thinks and will try to do for the Junior players.

It is my earnest desire that full advantage of this class should be taken by budding young hockey enthusiasts and a great opportunity is here presented to boys between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age to emulate the spectacular feats of the Flyers, and it should engender an ambition to graduate through the junior ranks to the seniors. It is my intention to encourage the youngsters and teach them the fundamentals of the game to the best of my ability.

Central to the recruitment had been Les Lovell senior, the club's first coach and captain and a quite remarkable man. Born in Montreal Canada in 1913, Lovell had come to Britain in 1936 to play for Perth Panthers and then the Blackhawks. His experience there made him an ideal man to head up a new franchise. Described as 'a stylish defender' and a 'champion one-man rusher'

by journalist and fellow play Sid Montford, Lovell's other assets seem to have included great leadership skills and his partnership with rink manager Rolland ensured some top names helped launch the Flyers' first season. He was also a literal 'builder', joining work squads in the summer to help ensure the rink was completed in time.

At Fife he was keen to encourage young future talent and held Saturday morning coaching sessions for the locals. The 'Leven Mail' pen-portrait of him when he became Kirkcaldy Regal Cinema manager in 1944 is endearing:

"A defenceman with a flair for rapier-like attacks, Les was one of the outstanding players in the country and he took part in several international matches for Scotland. He was always a favourite with local fans and was extremely popular with the

young lads whom he introduced to the intricacies of the sport. Of a quiet and unassuming disposition, he has many friends, all of whom will be delighted at his new appointment."

Lovell's playing career was cut short when he sustained a serious eye injury, but when he died in 1988 he was rightly hailed in the Glasgow Herald obituary as "a pioneer of ice-hockey in Britain" having helped build two clubs and also founded a hockey dynasty through sons Les, jnr and Lawrie, who starred with the Flyers in the 1970s and grandsons Lindsay and Les.

The obituary continues:

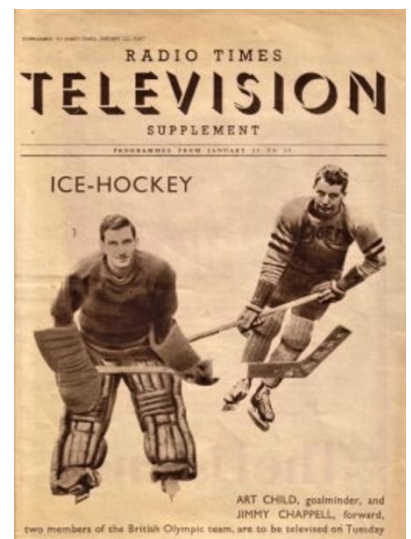
"After his retirement Mr Lovell moved into cinema management and became a well-known and respected figure. He is fondly remembered as one of the old school of smartly-dressed, "front-of-house" managers, who liked to establish a rapport with his regular customers.



"He took charge of two of Scotland's busiest venues - the ABC in Kirkcaldy and, from 1951, the ABC in Edinburgh's Lothian Road. There, he broke new ground by opening the cinema as a rock venue, with top stars such as the Beatles, Beach Boys, Troggs and the Rolling Stones performing."

Lovell was clearly a character - he won trade awards for innovation and presentation, including being recognised for a publicity stunt whereby anyone named Teresa would get free tickets for the film of the same name. When he left the Regal, Kirkcaldy (as it was before becoming the ABC) to move to the Regal in Lothian Road, Edinburgh in 1952, the Press stated, "there will be considerable regret that he is leaving Kirkcaldy. His going will be especially regretted by the members of the A.B.C. minors, to whom he was known as 'Uncle Les'.

The star recruit for the 1938/39 Flyers was Jimmy Chappell, a member of the 1936 Olympic-winning squad. Born in Huddersfield in 1915, Chappell emigrated to Canada with his family where he took up hockey aged ten. His return to Britain in 1935 saw him star for Earls Court Rangers for three seasons before moving north to join the Flyers for their inaugural season, finishing fifth highest scorer in the League. He then crossed to Fife's wee team in the first year of Dunfermline Vikings, again helping establish a new club at a new rink. Chappell was as close to an ice hockey celebrity as you would find in these days - featuring on the cover of a Radio Times ice hockey supplement. Working in the Kirkcaldy Ice Rink shop made him accessible to the fans in a way few would be today.



A national team regular and three-time European Champion medallist, his 16 appearances for Great Britain brought him 7 goals and 9 assists and he is described in the British Hall of Fame as "a fine stick handler and a gentlemanly player". He saw active service with the Ordnance Corp – rising to the rank of captain he took part in the D-Day landings. After a successful post-war career in Brighton, he took up refereeing when he retired before returning with his family to Canada, where he built a successful business career. He also represented Canada at cricket, undoubtedly the only Fife Flyers alumni to do so!

Other members of the team were Tommy Durling, who was renowned for his grit and determination and had an entertaining sideline in jumping ice barrels; tiny but tough netminder Chic Kerr, who sustained a deep head wound during practice the week before the first game but came through; defenceman Jack Stover; skilful stickhandler Len McCartney and Irish-born Norman McQuade, who had emigrated to Canada but returned to Europe, starring for Wembley, coaching in Germany, scoring prolifically for the Flyers and then literally helping to build Dunfermline Ice Rink as an employee of J. & E. Hall Refrigerating Engineers; and the three Scottish born players, Tommy McInroy and brothers Alec and Billy Fullerton.

Game One at Kirkcaldy resulted in a 4-1 defeat by the Dundee Tigers, Norman McQuade assisted by Tommy Durling scoring Flyers' first goal on home ice - but the result was definitely secondary to the occasion. This wasn't about winning a hockey game, this was about welcoming a new experience, it was a baptism.

Even in the early days of motor transport, the Gallatown streets became logjammed with a two-mile tailback. 4265 people, with all standing room also taken, were there for the evening's game and attendant revelry.

Lord Elgin, RCCC President had earlier thrown the first stone and been presented with a pair of curling stones by William Williamson, renowned architect. Lord Elgin then gave a rousing speech praising the head of Hall's refrigerating empire and linking the new rink to the zeitgeist:

"Only a few years ago, if we wanted to indulge in curling or skating, we had to wait on the elements. Now thanks to Lord Dudley Gordon, the elements can go to blazes. You can come here and enjoy your curling, skating or ice hockey at any time. That is what science can do to help us" With words that could apply to all the ice sports, he said: "It is the spirit of the game we are playing for, the spirit of teamwork, friendship and companionship and above all we are all on a level on the ice."

Mr Frank Stuart, vice-president of the RCCC, also spoke at the opening gala, taking a pop at the alternative entertainments available to Kirkcaldy's young folk:

"In all my experience I have never seen anything more wonderful . . . I make an especial appeal to parents or guardians of young people in Kirkcaldy. If you encourage your youngsters to come here to skate or play ice hockey you will help the national movement to keep fit and this to their great advantage and to the advantage of the nation. If they are doing that they are not sitting in the cinema with the lights out. I apologise if I am trespassing on the feelings of anyone connected with the cinema world. I enjoy the cinema, but this is a national movement."

If this sounds a bit like somebody who has had their pickled onion confiscated at the ABC Minors, it must be asked – who would have thought on that October night that 85 years hence Kirkcaldy would still have precisely one ice rink, and precisely nil custom-built cinemas?

There was a display by Glasgow Speed Skating Club and the rink's resident skating teachers, Leonard Hill, Cicely Hill and Marjory Webster, the first of many gifted and influential skating teachers in Fife. World Champion Figure Skater Megan Taylor

performed twice, receiving a nicely idiosyncratic set of golf clubs as a reward!

“Miss Taylor is an artist on ice and her various exhibitions throughout the evening both delighted and charmed.” Said the Press.

Free skating followed the official programme, a tradition that became set for generations of Flyers’ fans to wind down after games.

And the Press concluded “Altogether the opening night was eminently successful and was a happy augury for the future success of the rink.”



Fife Flyers’ first season was the tenth in the League’s history, with six teams competing. The season was split into two distinct competitions. The Points Competition – a precursor of the Autumn Cup and arguably the Challenge

Trophy – ran from October to January and was designed largely to enable new team rosters to gel and build momentum for the main business of the regular season.

Falkirk Lions won the Points Competition, by two points ahead of Dundee Tigers, who turned the tables on them in the Regular Season to win the

league and Canada Cup.

With a 10-6-4 record in the Points Competition and 10-7-3 in the Regular Season, the Flyers finished third in both competitions – a creditable debut season, in which they beat every other team at least a couple of times. A lack of consistency was a source of some frustration – not the last time Fife fans would register that emotion!

A note in the Leven Advertiser and Wemyss Gazette in January 1939 sums up the feeling under the heading 'Meteoric Flyers' –

“Talking about the Flyers as a team, there is something really meteoric about them. When they hit their proper game, the other side just doesn't exist, as was shown for instance by their recent 7-nil victory over the combined Kelvingrove and Mohawks team representing Glasgow and their still more recent 5-nil win over Kelvingrove, both at Glasgow. But unfortunately the literal meaning of 'meteoric' is transiently brilliant and that just about sums up the Fife lot. From the heights they occasionally come down dizzily and make their supporters wonder if they are really seeing the Flyers in action. That they have the stuff in them goes without question, so here's hoping that Flyers settle down in top form and give Kirkcaldy and district fans plenty to cheer about.”

Of all the words written about Fife Flyers in the past

85 years 'transiently brilliant' surely runs through the club's DNA. Plus ca change . . .

There was first year silverware for the new boys, though, as they lifted the John Anderson Trophy, which had been put up by one of the Flyers' original directors, the club's President and a great figure in the establishment of ice sports at the rink.

The John Anderson Trophy was a rink tournament hosted at Kirkcaldy and was won by the Flyers in both 1939 and 1940. After the war, the trophy would be awarded to the winners of the Scottish National League play-offs until 1954.

The 1939 Final saw the Flyers edge Perth Panthers by the only goal of the game.

The Edinburgh Evening News opined "The Flyers were a little fortunate to win, although their defenders played splendidly, (Chic) Kerr giving probably his best display of the season in goal. There was little excitement at the start but the game livened up as it progressed and the winning goal was scored by W. Fullerton in the final period."

The Courier reported, "The game was remarkable in respect that there were only two penalties and one goal in a fast and exciting encounter. On the whole, defences took the honours, especially that of Flyers . . . A big bouquet goes to Chic Kerr for his heroic work in goal . . . just before the close Panthers were swarming round Flyers' cage in a desperate and

unavailing endeavour to equalise.”

Flyers' matchwinner Fullerton had only been declared fit for the Final at the last minute after a bout of flu and was unable to travel as planned to Richmond the next day to take part in the British half-mile speed skating championships.

One more piece of silverware was to end up in the Flyers' 1939/39 cabinet – the Simpson Trophy over two legs against Dundee. The Fife Free Press acclaimed Dundee 'the team of the season' but felt Fife deserved their trophy success for a 'stonewall defence', seemingly a feature of the squad's efforts.

The next night – a Thursday, which was Flyers' home game night in these early days – Fife rounded off their inaugural season with a 5-3 league victory over Perth Panthers in a match that would surely strike a chord with fans today.

“The handling of the game by referee Gardiner did not meet with the approval of the home supporters and in the last session play was held up for about five minutes while disgruntled spectators threw programmes, newspapers and other odds and ends on to the ice in protest.”

If you are one of the many who think that the officiating in British Elite League hockey has never been worse, maybe reflect on the gnashing of teeth in 1939. The Fife Free Press reporter is forthright:

“Referees, as has been mentioned before, are favourite bait in most sports, but there is undoubtedly a great need in ice hockey for a higher standard of refereeing, and we cannot say any less than that.”

Indeed. Different worlds, same problems.

That game marked the end of Fife Flyers’ first season. It had been an eventful one, vastly entertaining not just for its novelty, and quite a demanding one on the players. A total schedule of 61 games in six months was, in the words of the Press hockey man at the end of April “pretty hard going”.

“Ice hockey definitely has a public of its own and it has certainly had a most successful season. . . . There are some, of course, who don’t think that ice hockey is as strenuous a game as football. How they arrive at that conclusion is a mystery, for in a game of this speed there is no hanging around idly waiting on a pass such as one finds frequently in football. When you consider the amount of gear the players have to wear, the continual zooming up and down the ice and the various knocks and spills, ice hockey is no Sunday School picnic. There is no doubt that the puck-chasers deserve a nice long rest – not in the ‘cooler’ but in some sun-drenched spot.”

Thus, the writer bids farewell to Fife Flyers Year One with a heartfelt wish that “the day is not far away

when local personalities should be ready to take their places in the lineup. If ice hockey reaches that stage, it should be here for keeps”

It hadn't been a great season for the Flyers, but it had been a season for the Flyers and by no means a bad one for starters. Just as the entire GB Olympic winning squad has been inducted to the British hall of Fame for their trail-blazing achievements, this whole 1938/39 team is Flyers' Hall of Fame material for being the First. But along with Lovell and Chappell, three other individuals from that first season are perhaps worthy of extra mention.

While many hockey players of the 1930s era were sons of some privilege, winger Tommy McInroy was celebrated as Scottish hockey's first 'working-class hero'. The son of a ploughman, born and raised in Blairgowrie, he served his apprenticeship as a slater and found work in construction near to the newly-opened Perth rink in 1936. For a lad whose first sporting love was cricket – having represented Perthshire – his subsequent rise to international hockey honours was remarkable, encouraged largely by Les Lovell, who coached him at Perth and brought him down to Fife in 1938.

When McInroy was selected for the Great Britain team midway through the 1938/39 season, the aforementioned Montford Daily Record wrote in the 'Daily Record':

“McInroy has come to the fore with a sensational rush. His selection is something of a romance when we think that two years ago he couldn't even skate, far less play the world's fastest.

Tommy McInroy spent the war on active service abroad with the Black Watch, eventually reaching rank of Sergeant and later went into business, retiring to Elgin.

Billy Fullerton, along with solid defensive mainstay brother Alec, started a proud tradition of brothers in Fife Flyers' colours.

It truly is a family sport. In my own lifetime I can recall – and if I've forgotten any, my apologies – the famous four George, Hugh, Jim and John 'Slack' Taylor; Willie and Chic Cottrell; Gordon and Dougie Latto; Lawrie and Les Lovell; Bobby and Gary McEwan; Derek and Steven King (see picture); Ronnie and Ally Wood; Bobby and John Haig; Ian and Scott Plews; Todd and Mark Dutiaume; Tim and Paul Crowder; Jason and Bryan Pitton.



Billy Fullerton was a young stand-out of pre-war Scottish hockey, regularly selected for All-Star teams and international games. Tall and slim, his backchecking 'as good as any Canadian' (Ice Hockey World) and a lightning fast

skater he had been recruited into hockey partly on the strength of his reputation in speed-skating, at which he was British One Mile Indoor Champion in 1936. We also find that a 19 year-old Billy had won the Scottish One Mile Championship in front of crowds of thousands at an ice carnival at Loch Leven in 1933 - surely impressing one of his future employers, Mr Anderson.

Fullerton was famous for being one of the few players of the period to continue wearing old-style 'automobile' skates rather than the modern 'tubies'. He had been slated to perform as a speed skater as well as hockey player on Opening Night but an injury in training left him a mere spectator.

Billy was born on the family's Renfrewshire farm in November 1913 and played initially for Glasgow Mohawks, his exceptional pace having him monikered 'the Flying Mohawk'. Head-hunted - along with Alec - by Mr Rolland for the new Flyers, he netted 18 goals in that season.

Sadly, Billy Fullerton was to perish in WWII. Having been the first Scot to pass the Civil Aviation Guard examination in September 1939, he joined the RAF



and trained as a pilot, quickly being promoted to an officer, and was awarded his 'wings' in October 1940. His last appearance on Scottish ice was for the RAF against Paisley Pirates in December 1940, when he scored five goals.

Let David Gordon and Martin C Harris, in their book *Lion In Winter*, take up the story:

"On 17th January, 1941, Pilot Officer Fullerton was at the controls of a twin-engine Whitley bomber, which was approaching RAF Abingdon near Oxford, in a snowstorm. An engine had cut out due to icing and two crew members safely bailed out. The aircraft, however, crashed on the Wooton Road next to the airfield, killing the remaining four airman, including Billy Fullerton. He was aged 27."

The former Montreal Canadiens goalie Ken Dryden wrote: "In the Canadiens' dressing room, on a wall above the players' lockers, is a line from John McCrae's poem, "In Flanders Fields." It reads: 'To you from failing hands we throw the torch, be yours to hold it high'."

Of so many Flyers' players in the 85 year annals can that be said; few more poignantly than Billy Fullerton.

The other very notable figure from Opening Night that simply demands mention is 'Wee Smith', as the Fife Free Press dubbed the Flyers' young team mascot, barely 14. Dysart boy Bert Smith famously

rose from team mascot to British Olympian. Smith was one of the first local youngsters to take up early morning hockey training sessions with Les Lovell and, along with his life-long pal Jimmy Mitchell, was to make a huge impact and prove a pathfinder for future Fife skaters looking to break through the import ceiling.

Smith and Mitchell weren't the first Scots to play for Fife Flyers but they were the first Fifers – and two of the best in a long line of talent nurtured through the years at Rosslyn Street.

'Wee Smith' went on to captain the Flyers, play for his country and establish himself as one of the greats. He was one of the first Brits to play in Europe and a member of the Great Britain team that came fifth in the 1948 Winter Olympic games in St Moritz, a European silver medallist in 1950 and a part of the

GB team in the World Championships in the USA in 1962. He also played in Holland, Switzerland and France, everywhere impressing with his skill, skating ability, fearless leadership and gentlemanly manner off the ice.

I actually saw Bert Smith play – for the Grousebeaters in an International Old-Timers tourney at Kirkcaldy in 1980 but I am quite ashamed to this day that it did not quite register with me at



the time, taken as I was by the old boys of Canada and Sweden, that I was watching hockey greatness from my own streets.

His obituary in The Scotsman of 5th April 2001 is substantial and tells of a substantial life.

“He was a clever stickhandler with a good accurate wrist shot. But it was as a skater that he truly excelled. He was a fluid mover on the ice with a blistering burst of speed”.

After hockey, Smith took over control of the family butchers’ business, owning four shops in Kirkcaldy at one time. Before retiring to enjoy his family, golf, his skiing and his reminiscences.

“He never had a bad word to say about anyone” said the obituary, “and above all he had a sparkling well-developed sense of humour and that rare ability to laugh loudest about himself.”

Such characters are rare and perhaps not immediately appreciated but over time their legacy becomes settled, like the arena they graced.

Kirkcaldy Ice Rink’s first Annual Report to its shareholders in July 1939 showed a profit of £5235 10s 10d in old money – shareholders received a dividend of 5% less tax and with £3000 transferred to future reserves, a balance of over £1300 was carried forward. Considerable sums at the time, and an indication that an ice rink could be profitable,

given investment, innovation and industry, all things that the company had demonstrated in its first year.

The directors, shareholders, fans, hockey players, curlers, skaters, staff and everyone involved in that first year could not have known what lay ahead – WWII was now unavoidable and then beyond that were some lean times during peace time.

After a post-war boom-time, during which the Flyers enjoyed much success, the mid 1950s saw ice hockey in the UK struggling. In fact summer 1952 almost saw the Flyers grounded for good when it took an Extraordinary General Meeting of shareholders to back an earlier pledge to keep the team going and recognised the 'roller-coaster' nature of the sport. By keeping their heads and holding their faith at that time – remember the rink was just 14 years old and had been only partially active due to the war – the shareholders helped store up future memories and careers. We should salute them and those who guided the rink through wobbly times when its prospects were inextricably linked to the health or otherwise of British ice hockey and the Flyers place in it, sadly not always at the top table.

Team and rink have been written off a number of times since. Only this summer a few 'auld heids' were convinced the 'auld barn' was doomed.

Fortunately, they were wrong. Back in August 2008, a Fife Councillor pronounced "If it's still standing in the next five years, it will be nothing short of a miracle."

Well, it is still standing of course, not by a miracle, but by the hard work, investment and loyalty of the owners, management and the wider community. Changes have been made in personnel, fans have pledged their support in season tickets and sponsorship initiatives. Hockey fans and all ice sports enthusiasts will be hoping the 'new era' proves successful, however that is measured. Financial stability is key – and harder than ever to achieve in the current climate. With goodwill, enthusiasm and some 'transient brilliance' there may still be many more golden years ahead.

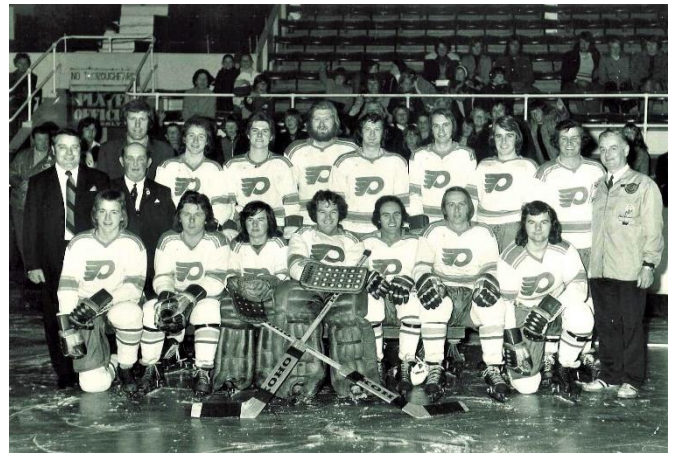
The 'roaring game' was central to the social and recreational lives of many of those behind the rink. After years of hearing 'Hurry hard' echoing around frozen lochs and ponds, the curlers had their 'hoose' within a permanent home. In 1982, the rink staged the European Curling Championships and Kirkcaldy was to host and nurture new generations of top-class skaters and ice dancers under their own roof, not to mention countless hours of recreational skating. And dating.

As we have seen, Kirkcaldy Ice Rink set out to diversify from its inception and over the years has

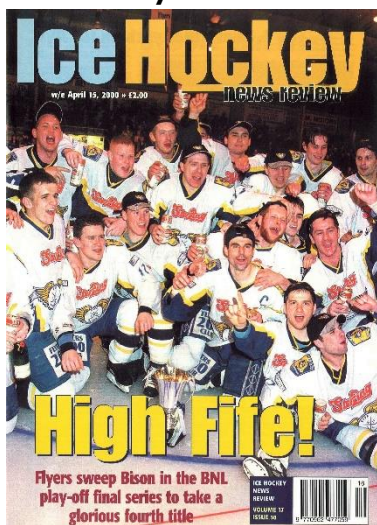
housed much varied cultural and sporting activity in the name of entertainment.

We've seen dancing, big bands, rock concerts, dog shows, basketball, motor shows, ice motor bike racing, professional boxing, wrestling, street hockey tournaments, even a live screening of a Billy Graham evangelist event in 1991, when a few hundred people were invited to come forward and proclaim their new faith.

A form of faith may have had something to do with it, but it is largely ice hockey that has sustained the arena through countless crises of confidence and each fresh season is met with the hope that this will be the One. Successful Flyers' teams have always pulled in crowds - the 10th Anniversary



year team coached by Al Rodgers who clinched the Scottish League title in 1949; the 1964 multiple trophy-winners, the 1976/77 team that dominated the British game, the 1985 Wembley-winners, the one-season Czech experiment that drew huge admiring crowds not just to Kirkcaldy but to rinks around the country, winning no silverware but many admirers and converts; the millennium-year Grand



Slam squad, the various new combinations of the Elite League era.

Great players and characters pulled on the first Flyers' jerseys, led by first captain and mentor Les Lovell and Olympic gold-medallist Jimmy Chapell. Countless others followed through the generations - Opening Night mascot and future Olympian Bert Smith, Floyd Snider ("without doubt one of the greatest defencemen ever to play in Scottish hockey" – Hall of Fame citation) , Verne Greger, the languid but lethal Les Lovell jnr, pint-sized blueliner Ally Brennan, gifted stick-handler Gordon Latto, top rookie and future coach Chic Cottrell, inspirational player-coaches Pep Young, Lawrie Lovell, Ronnie Plumb, Mark Morrison and Todd Dutiaume, the eternally classy Danny Brown, Czech masters Milan Figala and Vincent Lukac, NHL-thoroughbreds Al Sims and Doug Smail; teenage netminding prodigy Stephen Murphy; player, coach, manager, visionary Jack Dryburgh., who perhaps encapsulated best the spirit of the rink, with his deep interest in skating, curling and hockey, his flair for marketing and absolute enthusiasm for ice sports.



There have been so many so many more, standouts or stalwarts – everyone has a favourite . . .line after line of personalities, home-bred and imports . . . favourites fly past, legends of their time and part of a unique heritage that started in 1938.

That year really was the start of a 'new era'.

Kirkcaldy Ice Rink's roots lie deep. It was conceived and built by local people who had a vision. A name change to Fife Ice Arena sought to broaden its identity but for many it's still simply 'the rink'.

It is also for many some kind of home. Generations of ice sports enthusiasts, players, performers, coaches, workers, fans have found more than employment or enjoyment there. They have found a focus, friendship, relationships, something close to family.

It's also been a kind of portal to the world - world-travelled hockey players, skaters, curlers and performers, fans from other towns and countries, broadcasters, advertisers can find Kirkcaldy on a map because of its ice pad.

In celebrating Kirkcaldy Ice Rink - one of the larger and more permanent objects in our project - we cannot aspire to even a highlight reel of Fife Flyers. We have isolated a moment in time when Kirkcaldy suddenly had an ice rink and almost straight away became a hockey town. It still is.

For that we owe thanks to the rink founders, and to those who have respected and protected their great legacy. Above all, we acknowledge our debt to the people who built Kirkcaldy Ice Rink it for future generations and trusted that they would come.

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