

Old Edinburgh Club, 16 October 2019

The World's First Foot-Ball Club, founded in Edinburgh in 1824.

SLIDE 1 - TITLE PAGE ON SCREEN AT START

Good evening, and thank you for coming along to hear the story of the world's first known club dedicated to football, founded in this very city almost 200 years ago, in 1824.

And don't worry if you are not a football fan, sporting history impacts upon all of society and the Foot-Ball Club takes us into all sorts of unexpected aspects of Edinburgh life: religious intolerance, pioneer photographers, juvenile abstainers and the volunteer movement, to name but a few.

It began in the early nineteenth century when, as a legacy of the age of enlightenment, Edinburgh was a city of clubs and societies – religious, charitable, philosophical, educational and so on – and a fair number of them were related to physical exercise.

The city's innovative sportsmen had already established the world's first archery club, first golf club and first gymnastic club, and active recreation played a significant role in the daily life of middle class men.

It was only a matter of time before someone focussed on a sport which had been enjoyed in the city since medieval times: football. The new club was called, simply enough, The Foot-Ball Club. No prefix was needed, it was the first and only one of its kind.

SLIDE 2 – JOHN HOPE portrait

The founder was John Hope, a student at Edinburgh University. This rather austere portrait of him as an old man, which now resides in Old College Library, gives little clue to his youthful achievements.

He ran the Foot-Ball Club for seventeen years: he paid the bills, he wrote the rules, he found places to play and most importantly he had hundreds of willing participants.

His club was way ahead of its time, thriving two decades before the first attempts to codify the rules of football at Cambridge University. It was

going strong 40 years before the Football Association was formed, not to mention almost 50 years before the Rugby Football Union was founded.

Hope's Foot-Ball Club was not only ground-breaking, it was crucial to the early development of football, yet he is not given much credit for his innovation.

Most historians who research the origins of association football focus on English universities and the public schools, and on the founding of the FA in 1863.

SLIDE 3 - Sheffield

Then you have Sheffield FC, founded in 1857, who claim to be 'the world's first football club' and have actually incorporated that slogan into their crest. It simply isn't true. They might be the oldest surviving club, but the world's first? Not at all.

That honour belongs, most certainly, to Edinburgh.

SLIDE 4 – JOHN HOPE photograph

So, who was John Hope, the instigator of the club?

He was much more than a sportsman. He was an influential character in nineteenth century Edinburgh: a fighter of causes in many fields, a philanthropist, a town councillor.

Born in 1807 in Dalry House, a building that is a rare survivor among the tenements west of Haymarket, he was a lawyer like his father James, and followed in his footsteps at the Royal High School and then as a Writer to the Signet. He lived almost his entire life in the New Town, in Queen Street and then the newly-built Moray Place. He was extremely wealthy, never married, and devoted both his fortune and his boundless energy to causes he believed in.

Some of his beliefs will be judged by today's standards as extreme, bigoted or blinkered. His views on religion, for example, included ferocious and sustained attacks on Popery, or Catholicism. He was so obsessed with abstinence from alcohol that he insisted his staff sign the pledge, and he fell out with numerous churches over their use of fermented wine, rather than the unfermented variety, for communion.

But he was also a passionate reformer who spoke up for the poor and the downtrodden, for example leading a campaign to introduce the Saturday half-holiday, organising regular excursions to the countryside for thousands of slum kids, and providing educational opportunities to help them escape those slums.

Throughout his life, he promoted the benefits of sport and exercise, and could loosely be described as an advocate of Muscular Christianity, although of a particular Scottish variety.

And thankfully for researchers, John Hope was an obsessive hoarder. He filed away every scrap of paper during his life, an accumulation which, by the time of his death, amounted to well over 200 boxes.

Those papers were preserved, largely because of a long and messy legal challenge to his will, then carefully stored by a succession of conscientious Edinburgh lawyers, above their office in Moray Place.

SLIDE 5 – notebook cover

Had it not been for this duty of care, the Foot-Ball Club might have been lost to history. It didn't make waves at the time and there were almost no contemporary reports or publicity.

So, while the Foot-Ball Club papers may represent only a small proportion of Hope's extensive archive, they are of immense historical significance, one which few other sporting organisations can emulate. There is no equivalent archive for Hibs, Hearts, Rangers or Celtic.

It all started with this little notebook, the first item among a treasure trove of accounts, receipts, letters and even a set of fledgling rules. These all now reside in the National Records of Scotland.

SLIDE 6 – membership list

To me, the crown jewels are the membership lists, meticulously maintained each season. They show that the club attracted hundreds of young men from 'the great and the good' of Edinburgh society, each paying a small subscription to take part.

Finding out about the members has been a primary focus of our research, to shed light on who these trailblazers were: where they lived

and worked, where they were educated, and what their position was in society.

Among its 300-odd members we have identified future MPs and Law Lords, several future Sheriffs and Sheriff Clerks, three clan chiefs, Presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons, the brother of the Archbishop of Canterbury, a founding member of the French Jockey Club and many leading lights in the law, the church, the army, medicine and business in Scotland.

But this was not some quirky, historically-isolated football club for gentlemen.

We have discovered close links between the Foot-Ball Club and the next generation of footballers. The club and its members had a significant influence on the early development of the game of football, and in wider society generally.

But back to basics. Why form a football club in 1824?

SLIDE 7 – High School print

John Hope was 17 years old and had just matriculated as a first-year student at Edinburgh University. He and his friends had all played a form of football at the High School, where study was balanced by active recreation and the boys were actively encouraged to participate in sport and exercise. There are numerous references of football being a popular game in the school yards, back to the time of Sir Walter Scott.

This engraving shows how the school looked in Hope's time, albeit the boys pictured here are playing cricket rather than football. This is the old High School building in Infirmary Street.

In the confined spaces of the High School Yards, a hard surface bounded by stone walls, football evolved on a similar pattern to that enjoyed by boys at Charterhouse and Westminster in London, where full body tackling was likely to cause injury and damage to clothing.

Right from the start of football history, players from these urban schools tended to favour the non-carrying game and hence became early advocates of association-type football.

SLIDE 8 – High School then and now

That playing environment has hardly changed in two hundred years since, even though the school moved out in 1827 to its new site on Calton Hill. The old High School is now the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation, part of Edinburgh University, and the High School Yards remain intact.

SLIDE 9 – High School boy

However, football was generally considered a game for boys, not for responsible adults.

John Hope and his friends broke that convention when they decided that they would carry on playing after leaving school, whether going up to University or into the world of work. They soon found that plenty of others were of the same mind.

As well as the schoolboy love of football, there was another important factor, the established sporting culture in Edinburgh.

SLIDE 10 – Earliest known illustration of football

In fact, the heritage of sport in Edinburgh can be traced back hundreds of years. For example Archibald Flint, a student who graduated from Edinburgh University in 1673, drew some remarkable sporting doodles on his dictates, or lecture notes: young men (presumably students) playing tennis, billiards, archery and a curious game of football between men wearing hats and strange double-barred goals.

SLIDE 11 – Edinburgh sporting firsts

There is plenty of evidence to show that Edinburgh was a sporting hotbed long before the Foot-Ball Club was formed, and middle and upper class men in the city subscribed to clubs where they not only played sport, they socialised together.

This included a number of world firsts for Edinburgh.

In this city the Royal Company of Archers was founded in 1676, the world's first sporting archery club. The following century witnessed the formation of the first golf club and the first gymnastic club. We later had the world's first national association of clubs, for curling.

And where there are clubs, inevitably there are rules, so that members can take part in competitions, and win cups and trophies. So again there are world firsts in golf, bowls, gymnastics, curling and – as we shall see – in football.

You can see, therefore, that the template of sports club membership was well established in Edinburgh by the 1820s, a decade which saw a national movement towards athletic exercise and more vigorous sports. In this context, the formation of the Foot-Ball Club makes sense.

SLIDE 12 – Edinburgh football firsts

The world's first club not only led to the first rules, but also, as you can see from this slide, there are a number of other world firsts in football, which started with John Hope but which continued in Edinburgh far beyond those fledgling years.

You have to bear in mind that football was a generic description of many similar games until the great split between handling and kicking in the 1860s, which led to the modern games of rugby and association football.

These events indicate how important Edinburgh was to football, and conversely how important football was to the city. And we have more pictorial evidence of that.

SLIDE 13 – Calton Hill

By the 1840s, when this rather attractive print was published, football was clearly a part of everyday life. This is the view from Calton Hill, looking south, with the roof of the new High School just over the brow of the hill. It is such an important image that we used it on the cover of our book.

Having set the scene for why a football club was formed, I'd like to move on to the activities of the club itself, and provide some details of how they played, where they played and who played.

SLIDE 14 – rules of 1833

In 1833, John Hope wrote down a few basic tenets of football on the back of a scrap of paper. They are not much to look at, and they are brief, but they are generally seen as the earliest attempt at football codification.

These rules of football easily predate the Cambridge University Rules of 1846, the Sheffield Rules of 1857, the attempts by schools such as Rugby and Eton, and of course the founding of the Football Association and the Rugby Union.

They indicate an organised game between two sides, where the ball was kicked between two goals, within a defined playing surface.

But there was also concern to make sure that it was a sport to be enjoyed. The first two rules indicate a concern for safety and a desire to avoid injury

1. *Single soled shoes, no iron*
2. *No tripping*

Rules three and four introduce the method of scoring, and a defined playing area

3. *Ball to pass imaginary line*
4. *A free kick if ball out of bounds*

Rule five indicates a controlled amount of physical contact.

5. *Pushing is allowed. Holding not illegal*

The meaning of rule six is less clear, and from the crossings out it seems that Hope himself was unsure of the best form of words. It appears to mean that the only time the ball could be handled was when it was out of play.

6. *Allow the ball to be lifted between fields*

Underneath, he notes the attributes of the game:

- Aff [affirmative] Fun, air, exercise*
Neg [negative] No tripping

With no handling, carrying or running with the ball, there is a strong indication that this was a precursor to what became association football rather than the rugby variety,

SLIDE 15 – Christie receipt 1831

The playing equipment can be discovered through receipts, accounts and letters.

This receipt, from James Christie and Son of George Street, shows that if you wanted a football in 1831 you had to have it made specially and pay handsomely: the costs vary from 2/6 to 7/6. You also had to get the ball repaired when it burst, so the club required a regular supply of fresh pig bladders.

SLIDE 16 – club accounts 1834

This aspect is outlined in more detail in the club accounts, in which the paraphernalia for playing football are itemised:

3 bladders at threepence each, 6 laces at a penny each, tin pipe, wire.

Then 8 more bladders (clearly they didn't last long), oil to soften the leather, a cloth brush, a moreen bag (which was a type of heavy canvas), and a bottle of whisky – which was used to clean out the bladders.

There are also payments to an attendant, whose primary job was to blow up and maintain the footballs and who also set up the goalposts, looked after the equipment and fetch any wayward balls.

SLIDE 17 – where they played

On top of acquiring the right equipment, finding somewhere to play was a challenge. The city's primary recreation space at Bruntsfield Links was already crowded with golfers who reacted vigorously against any encroachment on their enjoyment.

John Hope and his fellow footballers, however, had a solution. They used their subscription money to hire fields in the city suburbs, and not only paid farmers for keeping cattle off the grass, they even paid a premium in summer months to have the grass cut by manual labour.

Their first football ground was in the vicinity of Dalry House, Hope's birthplace.

SLIDE 18 – Dalry Park receipt

This is a receipt for ground rental in 1826. It shows that Hope also rented the ground for archery practice, prior to him becoming accepted as a member of the Royal Company of Archers.

Dalry Park served them well until an unexplained incident caused damage which John Hope had to pay 15 shillings to rectify.

The footballers then moved to Greenhill Park, just south of Bruntsfield Links on what is now approximately Greenhill Gardens. Then finally they rented Grove Park, the city's first dedicated enclosed sports ground. It opened in Grove Street in 1836, primarily as a home for Grange Cricket Club, but was available for hire to other sporting groups.

SLIDE 19 – Henry Logan letter 1825

As a flavour of how they played, there are hints in the extensive correspondence in the archive, albeit that is largely limited to letters which Hope received, rather than those he sent. This one in 1825 is from Henry Logan, a founding member who had gone to London, saying how much he missed the action, the kicking of shins and the tumbling.

Another letter was from a member who went to Cambridge University in 1828, in which he effectively said that he didn't see much prospect of football catching on there – somewhat ironic given the Cambridge rule-makers of the 1840s, but a further emphasis that Hope's Foot-Ball Club was ahead of its time.

SLIDE 20 – membership numbers

And what of the club members?

The records are not complete, covering 1824 to 1828, then 1831 to 1834, and finally 1836. In all, over 300 members are recorded over those nine years. Some had a fleeting membership, some came back year after year, and three of them were members throughout the club's existence. These are the numbers season by season, and as you can see it had a buoyant first few years.

1824/25	61
1825/26	77
1826/27	84
1827/28	72
1831 summer	70
1831/32	60

In 1832, however, the numbers started falling away. It is hard to know

the reason for this but it is not hard to guess there were a combination of factors. Key among them was John Hope becoming more occupied with his business and developing the obsessive interests that would dominate his life, combined with external factors such as a flagging economy and a wider choice of alternative recreations.

1832/33	30
1834	27
1836	26

There are no membership records after 1836 but the correspondence indicates it did carry on for another five years.

SLIDE 21 – membership list 1832-33

So, who were the football players? The early membership lists give only a name, then in the 1830s they also include an address which does make research a bit easier. We have managed to identify who most of the members were, where they came from, and what they did with their lives.

Not surprisingly, their origins were largely within Edinburgh, and most of the young men had been at school here. There are strong links to the High School as you would expect, but another school which features largely is the Edinburgh Academy, which opened in 1824.

The Academy, as you may know, subsequently played a role in introducing rugby football to Scotland in the 1850s, and that code remained dominant in Edinburgh until the 1870s. However, before the adoption of rugby rules many Academy boys, as well as High School boys, played for the Foot-Ball Club, and the game they played was of the kicking rather than the carrying variety.

A significant proportion of members were schooled further afield before making their way to Edinburgh University. When these young men came to Edinburgh to study, the fact that they chose to join the Foot-Ball Club infers that they had already played a form of football at home or school.

Within Scotland, they came from Dumfriesshire and the Scottish Borders, to the northern isles of Orkney and Shetland, and many in between. There was also a scattering of English members.

For example, George Witham, an English member of the club in its first two years while a medical student in Edinburgh, was a Roman Catholic

who had been educated at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit school in Lancashire, which had a tradition of playing a form of football known as The Grand Match.

SLIDE 22 – member addresses

Where did they live? The membership rolls include virtually every major street in Edinburgh's New Town: Melville Street, Heriot Row, Moray Place and so on.

Less than ten per cent of the addresses were from outside the New Town area, and apart from three in the vicinity of the University, probably in student lodgings, none were in the historic Old Town.

What about careers? While most members were students when they joined, almost all went on to be professional men. There is no evidence of occupations such as shopkeepers and clerks.

Given Hope's family and professional connections, it is little surprise that over half of the members whose careers have been identified became lawyers. Edinburgh, then as now, was a city of lawyers, and many lawyers had the time, the affluence and the social status to join clubs and indulge in recreations.

There are also strong connections to medicine, with a number of quite prominent surgeons and doctors – such as Alexander Wood, who invented the hypodermic syringe, and James Dunsmure, President of the Royal College of Surgeons. There were several army officers, such as General Robert Wardlaw who fought in the Crimea with the Dragoon Guards. There were two Cockburns of Cockburn's Port, there were accountants, landowners, churchmen and politicians – men who shaped Scotland. They are all detailed in our book.

Some fascinating stories come up in other fields. For example,

SLIDE 23 - calotypes

Several early members of the football club posed as subjects for the pioneering photographers Hill and Adamson in the 1840s, and for the Edinburgh Calotype Club. So these pictures are probably the first ever photographs of football players. From left, *James Moncreiff* (a future MP, Lord Advocate and founder of Grange Cricket club), *Robert Dundas Cay* (a lawyer, later Registrar of Supreme Court of Hong Kong) and *James*

Rannie Swinton (noted portrait painter, whose brother Archie – also a club member - was great-great-grandfather of actress Tilda Swinton).

I mentioned earlier the Foot-Ball Club's influence on the development of football. One of these men has a notable link to the next generation:

SLIDE 24 – Moncreiff father and son

James Moncreiff was a club member in 1832-33. His son Francis was Scotland's captain in the first international rugby match against England in 1871.

SLIDE 25 – Kirkpatrick father and son

That link is echoed by James Kirkpatrick, captain of Scotland in the first unofficial association football international of 1870, not to mention an FA Cup winner with Wanderers in 1878. He was a son of Charles Sharpe Kirkpatrick, a member in 1831-32.

So, the captains of the first two Scotland football teams, association and rugby, were both sons of Foot-Ball Club members. If you believe that sons learn from their fathers, that is quite a remarkable legacy.

That principle was repeated in other families, and several sons of Foot-Ball Club members played football after it was codified in the 1860s.

There are other links between John Hope and the modern game, although there is a frustrating gap after the club wound up in 1841. There is little evidence in the 1840s of organised adult football being played in the UK, outside the schools. The 1850s, however, witnessed a burst of football activity, with Edinburgh again at the forefront.

SLIDE 26 – medal from 1851

The next event in the city for which we have hard evidence dates from January 1851, when the Edinburgh University Football Club challenged the 93rd Highlanders, garrisoned in Edinburgh Castle, to a match in Holyrood Park. The losers agreed to present the winners with a silver medal – and here it is, the world's oldest football prize.

Won by the soldiers, this medal is preserved in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders museum at Stirling Castle, and depicts clearly a kicking, association-type, form of football. It's the only picture we have of soldiers playing football in a kilt!

The link to John Hope? The Edinburgh silversmith who designed the medal was James Mackay, whose son Robert was at the Royal High with John Hope and also a member of the Foot-Ball Club – so he was no doubt able to advise on the correct manner of play.

SLIDE 27 – Stockbridge rules

As the 1850s progressed, John Hope continued to be a catalyst for football. In 1854 he opened a playground in the city, right next door to Raeburn Place, where the first rugby international was staged two decades later.

At Stockbridge Park, he encouraged boys *and girls* to play football, writing ‘the game is strongly recommended as giving most exercise and fun in a short time’.

SLIDE 28 - Stockbridge rules with highlight

He also laid down the rules of play – and his 1854 printed rules bear similarities not just to his 1833 rules, but also to the future codes for association football.

For example:

- No hacking - the great divide between rugby and what became association football.
- The method of scoring is between the posts – as in association football.
- There is no handling – as in association football.
- The players wear distinctive uniforms, with different colour caps
- And good behaviour is a must.

Unfortunately Hope could not renew his lease of Stockbridge Park, which later became a cricket ground, and that inadvertently opened the door to the handling code.

That’s because in the same year, by an accident of fate, rugby football first took off in Edinburgh at the ground next door.

The brothers Alexander and Francis Crombie came to Edinburgh after a couple of years at Durham School, which played football to rugby rules. Francis went to Edinburgh Academy in 1854 just as the school opened its new sports ground in Raeburn Place, and that fact he had his little

booklet of rules which described how to play football was very useful. His elder brother Alexander, meanwhile, didn't attend the school but was a founding member of the Academical Football Club.

So the Crombie brothers, rather than John Hope, fulfilled the need for organisation and codification, and the other principal schools in the city followed the Academy's lead in taking up the rugby code.

SLIDE 29 – Edinburgh first rugby international 1871

The ultimate conclusion of that arrangement was that Edinburgh, and specifically Raeburn Place, hosted the first rugby international match in March 1871. This recently discovered engraving shows an fiercely contested scrum during the game, looking north towards what is now Inverleith Park.

However, although rugby football was widely adopted in Edinburgh from the 1850s, John Hope continued to promote the non-handling code as a healthy recreation.

He organised and paid for regular outings for deprived children, and made sure that boys and girls had the opportunity to play football.

SLIDE 30 – Third ERV team photo

Then, when association football finally came to Edinburgh in the 1870s, thanks to the missionary efforts of Glasgow side Queen's Park, Hope encouraged the soldiers in the volunteer regiment he had founded, the 3rd Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers, to form one of the city's first clubs.

Hope kicked off their first match in 1874, and when they won their first trophy in 1876, the Edinburgh Shield, it was presented not to the club captain, but to him.

The 3rd ERV later developed into St Bernard's FC, who won the Scottish Cup in 1895. So you could say that John Hope is part of a thread which runs throughout the nineteenth century, from the formation of the Football Club in 1824 to victory in the national cup competition.

SLIDE 31 – John Hope gravestone

However, he wasn't around to see that triumph. When John Hope died in 1893 he was one of the city's richest men, with a fortune which would be worth about £50 million in today's money.

He had had the good fortune to have inherited a large portfolio of property and money from his father and two wealthy unmarried uncles. He had a good head for business, never married, and was free to devote himself and his money to campaigns which can be broadly defined as total abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, and a virulent anti-Catholicism. By modern standards the latter, in particular, paints him as an entrenched bigot, although in his lifetime he was far from being a lonely voice and his views have to be seen in the context of the times.

He was a generous philanthropist and his initiatives included setting up the British League of Juvenile Abstainers, which held mass gatherings of up to 20,000 young people, and provided them education and moral guidance. He was a town councillor for 30 years, supporting better housing and the Saturday half-holiday for tradesmen. Overall, he was an influential figure in the life of Victorian Edinburgh.

When he died he left almost all of his fortune to the Hope Trust, a religious charity set up to perpetuate his life's work. This horrified his extended family who were distraught at getting nothing, so they mounted a challenge which claimed he suffered from insane delusions when he wrote the will.

The legal battle took six years to resolve, the family lost, and the outcome was the Hope Trust was well funded to continue his work in temperance and religion, and it is still going today.

SLIDE 32 – the book

Clearly, although I have mainly talked about football today, John Hope's story is not *just* about his football club, important as that is.

Together with my co-author John Hutchinson, I recently published a book about John Hope and the story of his Foot-Ball Club. I hope you will have heard enough of interest today to think about buying it, and I have copies on sale here tonight, rather more cheaply than you would pay online.

But most of all, I hope this talk has persuaded you that sport is a vital part of our city's heritage, and deserves to be celebrated.

Thank you for listening, and I will be happy to try and answer any questions you may have.

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