

Edinburgh's football decision in 1854: kicking or carrying?

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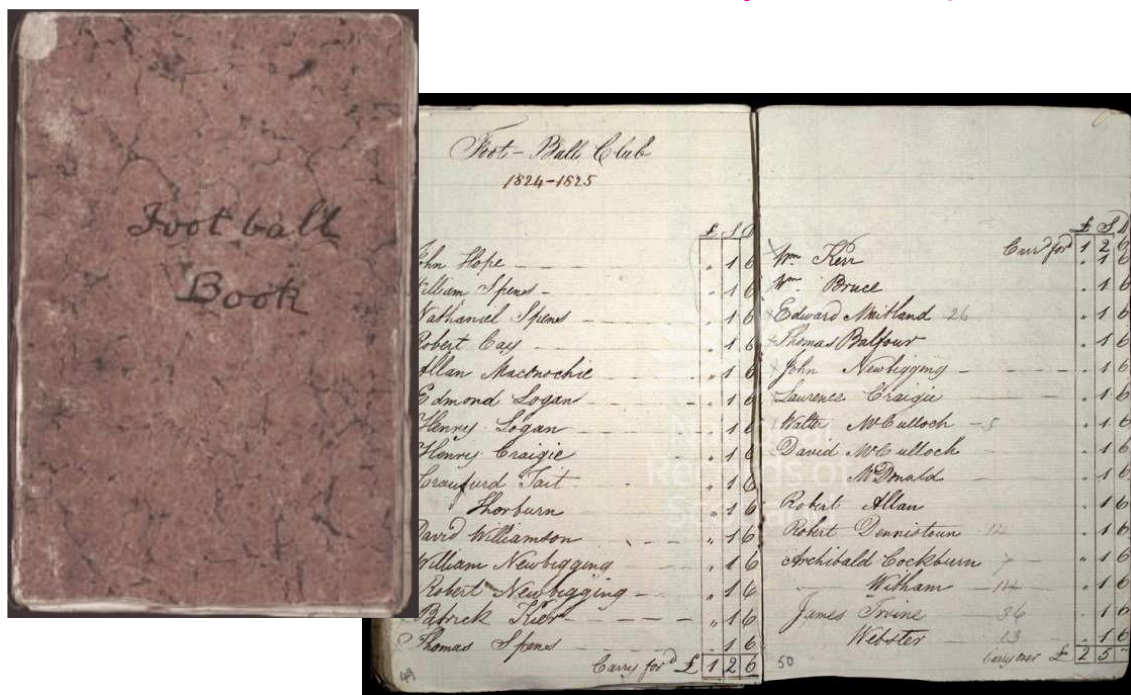
Edinburgh: Home of Football. Now, there's a slogan I could get behind. Not Sheffield, not London, not Glasgow, but the capital of Scotland.

And this is not just make-believe, it nearly happened. It all comes down to one week in the summer of 1854, when the city of Edinburgh saw the opening of two sports grounds, side by side. One of them hosted rugby football, the other hosted football of the kicking variety, the kind that would develop into association football.

What happened? In brief, rugby won. And that changed the landscape of sport in the city for decades. But had events transpired differently, there is no doubt in my mind that Edinburgh would be celebrated as the true home of association football.

I'll try to explain why.

The Foot-Ball Club, founded 1824 by John Hope



(National Records of Scotland)

Every story has a start and an end. The starting point here is 1824 and the foundation of the Foot-Ball Club by a young Edinburgh student called John Hope.

He and his friends played for the world's first football club and its story is known thanks to the remarkable survival of its extensive archive, with membership records, accounts, correspondence and even a fledgling set of rules.

Edinburgh's first association football club: The 3rd Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers, 1874



Regiment founded by John Hope in 1860; football club founded in 1874

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The end point of this story, or perhaps I should say the end of the beginning, was in 1874, with the formation of the city's first association football club. It was for members of the Third Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers, under the watchful eye of the regimental major, again, that man John Hope.

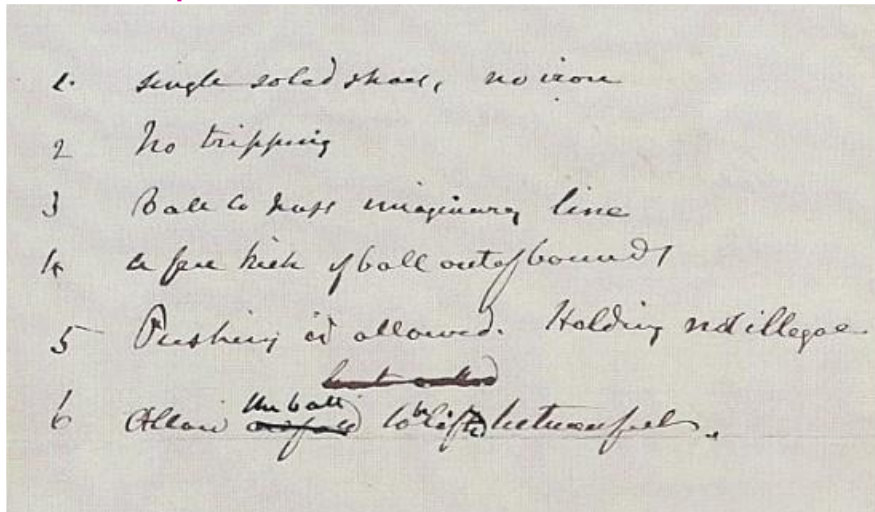
John Hope's influence over that fifty year period between the Foot-Ball Club and the Third ERV could, and should, have seen Edinburgh recognised as the birthplace of association football.

But between 1824 and 1874, although football continued to be played in Edinburgh, the thread was broken.

And I believe that break can be pinpointed to 1854, when fate dictated that Hope's kicking style of football was pushed to one side in favour of the carrying game.

Edinburgh hit a fork in the road, and – depending on your viewpoint – chose the wrong road.

John Hope's football rules, written in 1833



- 1 Single soled shoes, no iron
- 2 No tripping
- 3 Ball to pass imaginary line
- 4 A free kick if ball out of bounds
- 5 Pushing is allowed. Holding not illegal
- 6 Allow the ball to be lifted between fields

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So, what kind of football was played in Edinburgh before 1854?

The clearest indication comes in these rules from 1833, written by John Hope.

It is clear that the Foot-Ball Club members played a game on similar lines to association football, with an emphasis on kicking the ball, in which handling was not routinely allowed.

Football in Edinburgh – part of everyday city life



View from Calton Hill (Macgill & Schenck's Panorama of Edinburgh, 1841)

The original Foot-Ball Club was wound up in 1841, but football continued to be played in the city and there is plenty of documentary and pictorial evidence to show that Edinburgh schoolboys enjoyed the game.

For example, this view of the city from Calton Hill, showing a football match in the foreground. It is such an impressive image that we used it on the front cover of our book.

The world's first known
football prize:
the 1851 silver medal



(Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders Museum,
Stirling Castle)

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Furthermore, students played football, as evidenced by this silver medal from 1851.

The University Football Club challenged the soldiers garrisoned in Edinburgh Castle to a match in Holyrood Park, and the losers agreed to present the winners with a silver medal.

It was won by the soldiers and is preserved in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders museum at Stirling Castle. It clearly depicts a kicking, association-type, form of football, and is now thought to be the world's oldest football prize.

**John Hope
(1807-1893)**

‘I may mention the regret I have often experienced from the difficulty of finding places for healthy recreation to which the young men of Edinburgh are exposed.’



(Photo taken c1867; National Records of Scotland)

Meanwhile, even after he gave up playing, John Hope continued to encourage football, as he was convinced of the benefits of healthy recreation for reasons which could be best summed up as Muscular Christianity.

As Edinburgh was expanding rapidly and finding open space was not easy, he appears to have spent a lot of time looking for suitable playing fields, long after his own Foot-Ball Club no longer needed one.

He wrote in one letter: ‘I may mention the regret I have often experienced from the difficulty of finding places for healthy recreation to which the young men of Edinburgh are exposed.’

The Stockbridge Playground, 1854



‘that the young men of the trades might have a place where they should have their games of cricket, football, quoits, and the like, without inordinate expense’

He found the solution to the lack of pitches in 1854 by taking a one-year lease on ten acres of sheep grazing land on the north side of the city, a large field which he modestly called a playground but which he turned into a sports arena.

The stated aim of his project was ‘that the young men of the trades might have a place where they should have their games of cricket, football, quoits, and the like, without inordinate expense’.

Hope – who was a wealthy man – spent about £100 to fence the area, mark a 60 yard ‘racetrack’, erect football goalposts, provide a water supply, and install a sentry box for a watchman.

It was essentially a philanthropic experiment to bring fun into the lives of young working men, keep them off the streets and out of trouble, while teaching them the benefits of fresh air and exercise, with a dose of moral education thrown in.

John Hope's
Stockbridge
Playground
opening,
May 1854

INAUGURATION
OF
THE PUBLIC PLAY GROUND AT STOCKBRIDGE,
BY THE
MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH LEAGUE AND THEIR
FRIENDS,

(IF THE LORD WILL,)

ON SATURDAY, THE 20TH MAY 1854,

THE QUEEN'S BIRTH-DAY.

A PUBLIC PLAY GROUND having been secured at Raeburn Place, Stockbridge, it is proposed (if the Lord will) to open it publicly on Saturday, 20th May,

THE QUEEN'S BIRTH DAY.

We trust that the Lord Almighty, the Giver of all good, will favour us with suitable weather and kind protection, and that all the members of the British League, with their companions and friends, will meet with us on the occasion, and that the proceedings of the day may conduce to much enjoyment, and the advancement of the British League.

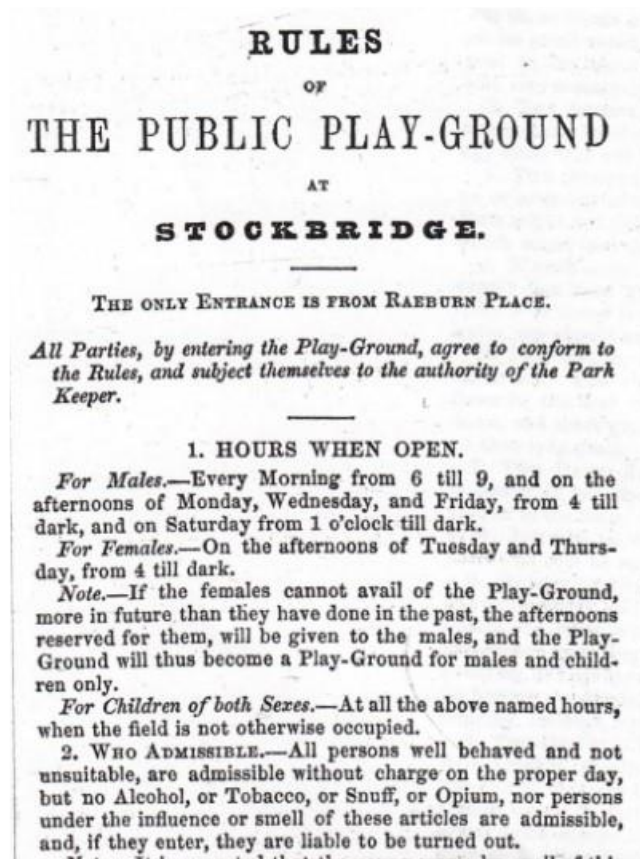
It is also our anxious wish, that those members of the League who are no longer juveniles, and who have from vari-

Hope inaugurated his Public Playground on Saturday 20 May 1854 – the Queen's birthday – and the city's Lord Provost and Magistrates testified their approval by subscribing £10 out of public funds.

There was a big opening ceremony with games, speeches and hundreds of members of the British League of Juvenile Abstainers taking part.

John Hope's
Stockbridge
Playground
rules, 1854

'no swearing or
improper language,
no fighting or
quarrelling, no
betting or playing for
money, no dogs, nor
anything to annoy
can be permitted.'



Hope went to great lengths to ensure that the users of the park behaved and published detailed guidance in the *Rules of the Public Play-Ground at Stockbridge*.

'All persons well behaved and not unsuitable are admissible without charge, but no alcohol, or tobacco, or snuff, or opium, nor persons under the influence or smell of these articles, are admissible and, if they enter, are liable to be turned out.'

He also specified: 'no swearing or improper language, no fighting or quarrelling, no betting or playing for money, no dogs, nor anything to annoy can be permitted.'

There was even a warning about the grazing sheep: 'The stock must not be chased or disturbed,' as they were needed to keep the grass down.

He was clearly worried about maintaining good relations with the landlord and constantly made references to the need for good behaviour lest the lease be revoked.

John Hope's football rules of 1854

The Game of Foot-Ball is strongly recommended, as giving most exercise and fun in a short time. There must be no kicking of shins, nor tripping—for these are apt to produce quarrels and hurts, and do not form part of the game. The ball is not “hailed,” unless it is sent *between* the posts, by one of the side whose duty it is to send it through, and unless it touch the ground. If the ball is sent through by one of the other side, it is not “hailed.” The ball should not be kicked out of bounds. When this occurs, it should be lifted up by the hand, and brought within bounds. The party thus lifting it, is entitled to a “free kick,” but the ball must not be lifted *by the hand* from the ground at any other time. The British League Cap, to distinguish sides, cost 2d, is recommended. Beware of kicking the ball over the fences. Mr GRAY, saddler, 18, South Hanover Street, can supply round cases of stout grain dressed shoe leather for 3s. 6d. each. They will be found cheapest in the end, and save bladders.

(National Records of Scotland)

Most pertinently, Hope gave instructions to the park users on the type of games they should play, writing ‘the game of football is strongly recommended as giving most exercise and fun in a short time’.

And of particular interest in the context of football's origins, he gave this detailed description of how he believed the game should be played:

- No kicking of shins or tripping – essentially a ban on hacking, the great divide between rugby and what became association football.
- The method of scoring is to send the ball *between* the posts.
- The football pitch was laid out according to a defined plan.
- There is no handling of the ball unless it went out of bounds.
- The players played in teams, with different colour caps.

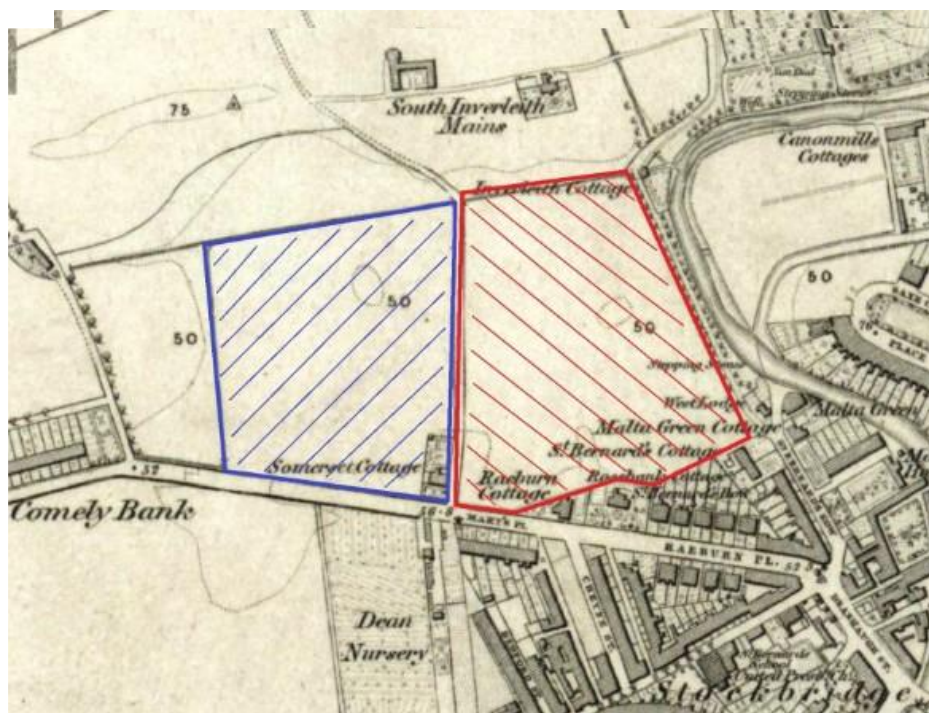
It is clearly football of the non-handling, non-hacking kind, with defined playing boundaries, a method of scoring between goalposts, and contested between two teams wearing distinguishing colours.

Here, in 1854, is an easily understood set of rules which found many echoes when the laws of association football were written in the following decade, and they can also be traced back to the Foot-Ball Club's rudimentary rules of 1833. So there is a clear, long-term, thread.

The booklet also anticipates future developments in football with the idea that players from workshops and offices should get together to form football clubs, making it possible to play against other. Those clubs could book a pitch for a specific time, in much the same way that local councils maintain municipal football pitches to this day.

The Stockbridge Playground was well used and it all went swimmingly, yet to Hope's intense frustration the landlord refused to renew the lease the following year. Although Hope made pleas to the agent, the newspapers and even the Lord Provost, it was to no avail. The Stockbridge Playground closed after just one year and was allowed – for the time being - to revert to grazing.

Two sports grounds opened in the same week in 1854: Raeburn Place and Stockbridge Playground



So how did rugby gain a foothold? By an extraordinary quirk of fate, another playing field opened right next door, in the very same week.

This was the catalyst for a decisive moment in the history of Scottish sport.

The adjoining nine acres to the west was leased to the Edinburgh Academy, one of the city's leading schools, and just three days before

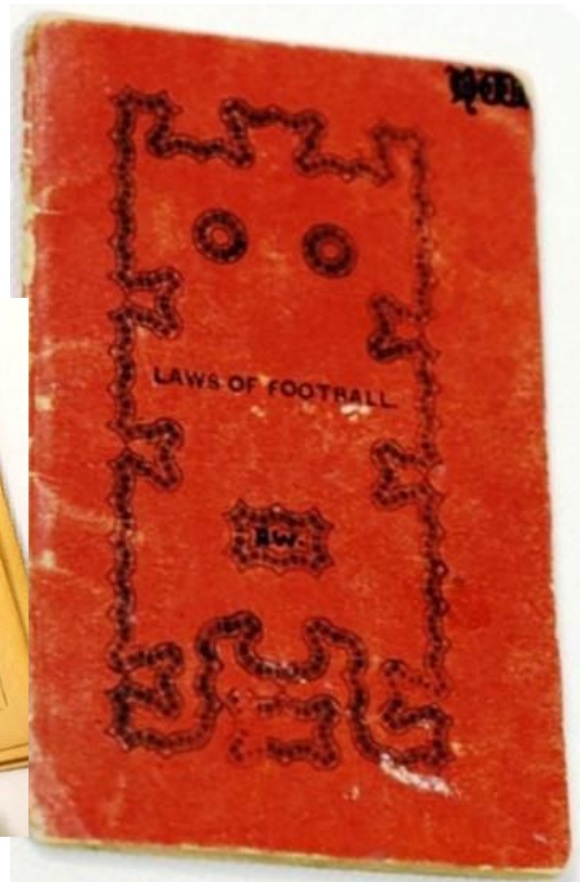
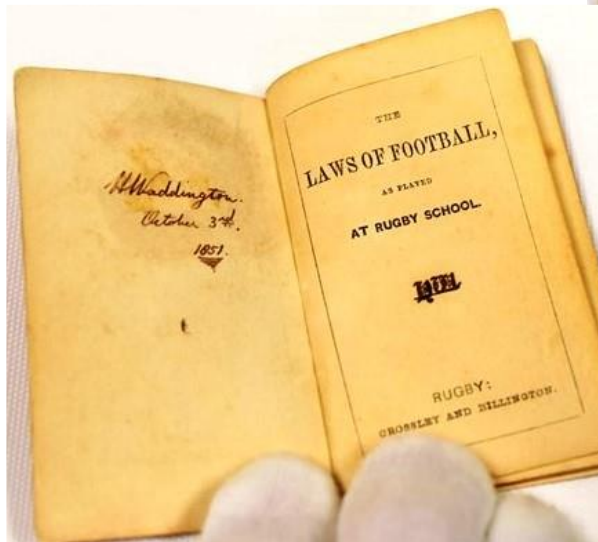
Stockbridge Playground opened, the Edinburgh Academy opened the first private school sports ground in Scotland.

They named it after the adjacent street, Raeburn Place, and it hosted cricket that summer, then in the autumn the attention of the boys turned to football.

A form of football had been played for many years by boys at the Academy, and although it was rough and disorganised, many of them went on to join John Hope's original Foot-Ball Club, and indeed their influence went much further as two former Edinburgh Academy pupils – WH Gordon and WJ Mackintosh – took part in the founding meeting of the Football Association in October 1863.

The creation of a dedicated sports ground with grass pitches prompted a desire for greater organisation, and according to legend, the solution was provided by a 16-year-old newcomer to the school, called Francis Crombie.

Francis Crombie
introduces Rugby
rules to Edinburgh
Academy, 1854



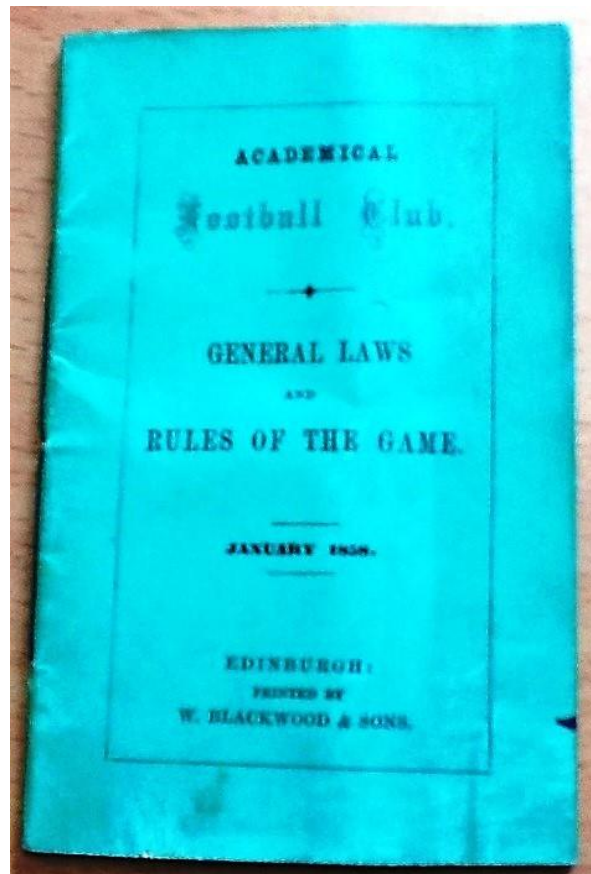
Although brought up in Edinburgh, Crombie had spent the previous two years as a boarder at Durham School where he appears to have played Rugby football.

He was therefore in the enviable position of having a booklet of printed rugby Laws of Football in his pocket, together with the knowledge of how they should be applied.

This was probably the first time anyone in Edinburgh had come across such a document, and thanks to Crombie's influence, the Academy boys soon adopted Rugby football as their preferred code.

It did not take long before their lead was followed by other schools in Edinburgh.

Edinburgh
Academical Club
publish their own
rules, 1858



The boys enjoyed rugby football so much that they continued playing the sport into adulthood, and the Academical Football Club – for former pupils of Edinburgh Academy – was founded in 1857. Its first president was Alexander Crombie, elder brother of Francis.

The Academical Club contested Scotland's first recorded representative football match in December 1857 against students from Edinburgh University, and the following month they printed this rulebook.

That month also saw the first inter-school match in Edinburgh, between the Royal High School and Merchiston Castle, and by the end of the 1850s several schools had started playing rugby against each other, and the boys had taken the game into the universities and on to adulthood.

Edinburgh hosts the first rugby football international



Scotland v England at Raeburn Place, 27 March 1871

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Therefore by the 1860s, the only type of organised football played in Edinburgh was Rugby football, and the city's first football clubs were all based on the old boy clubs of the schools.

The first international was played at Raeburn Place in 1871, and the inter-city rugby matches between Edinburgh and Glasgow were launched the following year.

FOOTBALL MATCH - SCOTTISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION.
 A GAME (Association Rules) between two teams picked from the leading Western Clubs, will be played TO-DAY, on the GROUND of the ROYAL HIGH SCHOOL, at BONNINGTON.
 Kick off at 2 P.M. Admission 5d.

Football arrives,
 Dec 1873

FOOTBALL.
ASSOCIATION MATCH.
 WITH the object of giving Edinburgh football players an insight into this style of playing, a show match between two teams chosen from various Glasgow clubs, under the captaincies of Messrs Gardner and Thomson, took place on Saturday in Mr Ralnes' Park at Bonnington, the use of which had been kindly granted for the occasion by the committee of the Royal High School Football Club. Notwithstanding the novelty of the event and the fineness of the day, there was not above two hundred spectators, including a sprinkling of ladies, and a large number of past and present players of note under the Rugby mode. To the latter, as well as to a number of the spectators, the game seemed to be characterised by great sameness. Lacking nearly all the excitement of the Rugby game, with its running, dropping, chucking, and touching behind, made so famous by the author of "Tom Brown's School Days," a mode which is almost universal among our schools and principal Scotch clubs, it was not much to be wondered at that ere the close the number of spectators had gradually diminished, as, beyond an occasional good piece of "dribbling," and a good deal of "heading" which considerably amused the spectators, there was little to sustain the interest. It must, however, be stated that there were

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It was not until December 1873 that association football was first played in Edinburgh. But it took a missionary effort from two teams from Glasgow, bringing their own goalposts, to demonstrate the alternative to rugby.

That belated introduction gave another opportunity for John Hope to promote the kicking, non-handling game he had always preferred.

The Rifle Volunteers formed a club, which was sanctioned by the regiment on condition that football did not interfere with drill, and Hope kicked off the Third Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers' first match on the Meadows. Then, when Third ERV won the first Edinburgh Cup in 1876, the trophy was presented to John Hope by the team captain at the Corps' annual soiree.

So, he did get there in the end, but things could have been so much different had it not been for the schoolboy Francis Crombie, rather than the social reformer John Hope, fulfilling the need for organisation and codification.

The broken thread – football in Edinburgh

1824 – John Hope founds the Foot -Ball Club	
1833 – first set of kicking rules	
1851 – first football medal	
1854 – two sports grounds open:	
Stockbridge Ground	Raeburn Place, Edin Academy
Kicking rules adopted	Rugby rules adopted
1855 Ground closed	1857 Academical Club founded
	1858 First inter-school match
	1860s Edinburgh schools & clubs
	1871 First international, S v E
	1872 Edinburgh v Glasgow
1873 First association match	
1874 Third ERV founded	
1876 John Hope presented with cup	

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To conclude, I would argue that the refusal of a new lease on the sports ground, which led to the rejection of Hope's scheme after 1854, had an irrevocable influence on the development of football in Edinburgh.

Hope's preference for a kicking, non-handling form of football never had the chance to take root and develop, while the city's schools took a different road and adopted the handling code of rugby football.

Association football effectively went to the back of the queue in Edinburgh, while the Football Association was founded in London in 1863, then Queen's Park of Glasgow led the way in Scotland from their formation in 1867. It took two decades for the capital to catch up.

But had things gone differently, Edinburgh could well have been recognised as the true home of association football. Such are the vagaries of fate.

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