

Chapter 78

St Cyrus - Summer and Autumn 1969

Since going to live and work in St Cyrus we had taken only one trip back south to Stirling, and that had been during the 1969 Easter break, but, thereafter, we drove the Forfar-Perth-Stirling road 'home' to live with Aunt Neta Henderson at 11 Abbotsford Place, Riverside during subsequent school holidays for about a week's change of scene each time. It was strange, particularly in summer, to be driving away from the seaside instead of going in the opposite direction. But it was good to be near the rest of our close family for a wee while ... and I at least got a welcome rest from gardening until, of course, meeting the inevitable weeds and long grass on our return.

School resumed as usual in mid-August, and, in the space of the first three weeks in September, we had two separate visits from Her Majesty's Inspectorate – the first checking-up on progress in the our Physical Education curriculum, and the second on Art and Design. The Phys.Ed. inspector just happened to be, Mr Crawford Leitch, one of my former tutors at Jordanhill College! He spent a happy day with us, and also, of course enjoyed a nice lunch prepared by Olive in the schoolhouse. He was well aware of our almost total lack of suitable indoor facilities for gymnastics, but was pleased with the improvisational efforts I had been making to make full use of the huge outside playground whenever the weather permitted, and also accepted that concentration on music and art had been eminently sensible in the circumstances. He also applauded my fielding of a school soccer team independently from the former combination of human resources with the equally small neighbouring Johnshaven School. He agreed that increased participation, not victories, was what should be sought; then laughed when I told him that our first match had ended in a 12-0 defeat but undaunted (*children's short memories at work!*) we had gained a 1-1 draw in a local derby on our own village playing field. - I had cut the grass myself with my own push-power-driven mower, but not too short, thus slowing up the run of the ball considerably! Our wee lads were so proud of themselves all kitted out in our all black uniform of [*cheap*] 'T' shirts, shorts and stockings bought with money from the June concert. All of them had appreciated my initial jocular remarks in August – “We may not become much of a football team to watch, but at least we will be smartly dressed!”

The Art Inspector also proved to be a very sympathetic and helpful gentleman - and my being a fairly un-artistic type, I learned much from the loads of relevant teaching and administrative advice he provided about this aspect of the primary school curriculum. However, music still being a 'trump card', my next ploy was the use of my collection of mission hymns to target choir and solo singing by members of my senior class in church some Sundays, instead of only going to (*fairly unpopular*) Sunday School. The Rev. Maclean welcomed this likely boost to the attendances at church on one or

two more Sundays twice-yearly communion services being the only time when the dust had to be wiped off many of the normally empty pews!

On the rugby front, although Montrose always struggled to field 15 players because of the September hay harvest, we continued to show the form that had surprised many in the Spring. Thus we remained unbeaten up to the 18th of October, and our new fixture against 'Mighty Shire' i.e. Aberdeenshire RFC, at Mannofield, Aberdeen. By that time it was potato and carrot picking time for a number of our farming team-mates ... and before we left Montrose at lunch-time that Saturday, only 12 players had made it in time. Frantic phone calls made brought only one more half-promise to try to get away and up to the granite city by 2.15pm So off we went north, somewhat dejectedly, knowing what an insult it would be to our hosts if we only fielded 12 or 13 players. Worse still (*to our benefit eventually*) it was drizzling rain when we reached the ground.

Often in such circumstances, the home side can dig up volunteers to make up the numbers in any stricken visiting team. But, they had only 15, and their 2nd XV were playing away from home. Thus, after a pep-talk from me to my lads about making the best of things, and revealing the plan of action I had thought out on the journey etc etc., and much to the surprise of the Shire-lads, twelve of us stripped and took the field on time No thirteenth man had arrived to minimise our likely 'cuffing'!

My plans had both tactical and psychological bases. Instead of having eight forwards for scrums and line-outs, we would have five ... so we would always lose scrum ball. They would have to shorten their line-up to five for line-out throw-ins, so with giant John Forbes in form we might get some possession there. As I had hoped, we won the toss and elected to kick down the considerable slope with the wind and rain at our backs the premise being that the wind and/or rain might just ease a bit during the second forty minutes. I hypothesised that when they were in possession, they would think us such 'easy-meat' that they would run the ball wide by hand at every opportunity hopefully forgetting, or being unaware, that we had a complete back-line of seven very experienced defenders! I knew that our weakness could be most exposed by breaks by our opponents close to the scrums, mauls and rucks where we were three men short. But would they be sharp-witted enough to take advantage of this? I hoped not! As we all realised that we would need all our energy in the open for defensive running and tackling, I also ordered that we would not run the ball by hand, but punt it down-field whenever we happened to get some possession ... for down-field we might even get some kickable penalty point chances!

Oh how the Gods smiled on us as our hapless opposite numbers fell for the wide-running temptations I had predicted And for the whole first-half, as we just kept on tackling, tackling and tackling and halting their progress, they never managed to cross our line. But I kicked two long-range penalties for us, down-wind! But the second half would be a different kind of torture Uphill!

Somehow or other we kept them down to one try to them going into the last 15 minutes or so, but they also conceded another penalty to me, ... 9-5 for us, at that point. Then, all of a sudden we were down to eleven fit players when a stray boot sliced a gash in my forehead. I had to go off to the pavilion to get a strong 'elastoplast' on my cut, but as quickly as possible returned with a bandage 'turban' wound round my head. While I was off 'Shire' had reduced the leeway to one point ... 9-8 for us.

'Twas then, from good ball from a line-out, that I did the unexpected from about thirty yards out. **I RAN WITH THE BALL IN HAND** instead of delivering the kind of punt that they had been dealing with all afternoon. I may have sustained a head injury, but my rugby brain was still functioning efficiently ... and I also had had a wee rest from the fray. Two side-steps, a sprint and another swerve later and I was over their line half-way out towards the corner flag ... then I rubbed salt in their wounds by adding the extra points ... 14 -8 for us, and time running out. I couldn't quite work out the final score at the finish ... but I did know that a Montrose twelve had beaten an Aberdeenshire fifteen!

I was normally a very modest fellow as a player but I certainly basked-in the glory of being the match-winner that day which feeling was further encouraged when, an hour or so later, neatly stitched and full of penicillin, I returned to Mannofield from the city hospital to a hero's welcome from my team-mates. **The following Saturday, I was brought down to earth with a bump!**

Aberdeen 'Press and Journal' - Mon. 27th Oct. 1969

ST CYRUS HEAD BREAKS JAW AT RUGGER

THE headmaster of St Cyrus Primary School, Mr John Henderson (30), had his jaw broken in two places when he was accidentally kicked in a rugby match on Saturday. He will be out of teaching for several weeks.

His injury came in the second half after he had converted three tries for Montrose and District against Glenrothes at Broomfield. Mr Henderson had three stitches in an injury the previous week and these were removed only on Friday.

He was X-rayed at Montrose, then driven to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary by John Forbes, Slains Park, a forward with the Montrose club.

He underwent an operation yesterday morning.

Aa Weer'd Up

Dominie Jake is aye rugby mad
Him bein reteered noo it maks him sae sad
Fur watchin games oan the Sky TV
Is nae guid eneugh noo fur sich as he.
Oan a Seturday he'd luv tae-be-kickin
Pynts as he eest tae pit ow'r richt fine
Noo he jist recaas mony'a match
He played back in auld lang syne

Lik thon windy day doon at Broomfield
In cauld October o saxty-neen
Whaur tacklin the Glenrothes backs it seen wis
Mair kittle nor aiven Montrose hid foreseen.
Sae ull it cam whan leukin tae stap an attack
Jake gaed tae cowp nae jist yin man bit twa
Booncin aff o the feerst, he gaed oantae the neist
Whaur an elbow hit the pynt o his jaw

Gnashers an gumshield fleed oan tae the gress
As Jake gaed birlin richt oan tae his erse
Luft'd himsel up kinna slawly lik
Wi his mou hingin apen an bittie sleek
Traiked 'wa aff o the pitch syne tae sik
The kin o tenter wha'd tak him alang
Tae medic wi his bleed boorached face
An fun oot whit aa wis wrang

It's eneugh tae ken t'wis the Infirmary
In Aiburdeen fur oor Jake loon thon day
Whaur airly neist morn they bored wee keyholes
Afore windin weer roon his sair jawbane in rolls
Bit bi Monday Jake felt mair up nor doon
Whan finin oot thit he wis the jaa o the toon
Frae the newspaper's report fur aa tae weel ken - thit ...
The Dominie wis oan the mend.