

Doug McCracken

The Editor well remembers the arrival of the crew cut American at School in 1959. He was a few years ahead of me, but the School Rugby team was probably the best in Scotland at the time, and hero worship was rife. That this incomer could convert from American Football in a few months, and become a regular player in his first year was testament to his sporting prowess. I recollect watching a few first fifteen games as a fourteen year old, and marvelled at Doug's ability to throw the ball torpedo style (and accurately) into the lineout, giving his team a great advantage. He was also a great athlete, winning medals in 8 of the 14 disciplines at the Annual Games, including four first places, and also became the Scottish schools junior pole vaulting champion. He also played for the Edinburgh Schools rugby team.

It was a welcome surprise when Doug contacted the RHS Club via the club website, offering some photographs from his brief time at school for potential inclusion on the website. I jumped at the chance of making an article out of his offer and, a few emails later, an entertaining account of Doug's Scottish sojourn and his later life emerged. Stuart Macmillan, captain of the rugby XV in Doug's first year has also contributed photographs.

An American at Schola Regia Edinensis

With my country and the world faced with Covid-19, I've had a lot of quarantine and lockdown time, allowing many useful activities, including going through old memorabilia.

Among those activities were those from my time at The Royal High School, where I was a student from August 1959 to May 1961. It was a very enjoyable time in my youth, even though I was an American in Scotland, and I have very fond memories of that period of my life. It gave an American youngster a very new perspective on the World that was to serve me well throughout my career. I had the opportunity to travel internationally, but sadly never back to Scotland, but maybe one day... I've always enjoy looking at the club website and reminiscing, and hope that the photos I can provide will be of use for your archives.



As Stuart Macmillan has recollected, my Dad worked for Uniroyal, and a job assignment for him brought the family to Edinburgh. The photo on the left shows workers leaving the Uniroyal factory in Fountainbridge in the 1950's. As a team mate in the school first fifteen rugby, I remember Stuart as a good captain and leader who readily involved a newcomer into the game. That helped me greatly improve as I learned and enjoyed rugby. He was a recipient of many of my lineout throws.

I was one of three Americans at RHS for the 1959-60 session. The others were Colin E Bell and Stanislaw J Siudzinski (Joe) who both left at year end while I stayed through May of 1961. They returned to the United States (US) and have had highly successful careers, as page 4 of the Schola Regia 1960 Christmas Edition illustrates. Joe, an engineer, had a 1948 Triumph motorcycle that we rode through the Highlands, enjoying the beauty of the scenery in stark contrast to the countryside where I was raised. The Triumph was a bit sluggish and occasionally I had to hop off to push up hills and knolls. Colin was a Professor; both are now retired living on our west coast.

While in Edinburgh we lived near Braid Hills, about a block from the golf course which I played after school many a night. It cost a shilling! One of Scotland's best features for me was that it stayed lighter much later in the summer than the US. I'd occasionally still be playing golf at 10pm. Scotland also had the Links Courses which the US did not really have at that time.

Many days I would ride the double decker buses to school, something I had never seen, and of course driving on the wrong side of the road – I almost got nipped a few times looking the wrong direction. They were however handy to transport my 12-foot aluminium vaulting pole. After a few trips I had to hide it, as many drivers would not stop for me. Aside winning the Schools junior pole vault event, I was fortunate enough to come second at the Scottish Amateur Athletic Association Championship meet in July 1960.



I enjoyed the two international RHS trips with other students, one to the Netherlands and another to Italy. The travel via British and European trains systems was an awakening - at home all travel was by car. The countryside, scenery and history was interesting. We saw sights going back centuries, whereas the Americas were only discovered about 500 years ago, gaining our Independence just over 200. We also had a trip to Dublin and Belfast – the team is shown on the left prior to departure (I'm centre front row, Stuart behind me).

The classrooms at RHS were a distinct difference to those of my US high school. The RHS was housed

in a building probably a hundred years older, with a massive Hall and Library and many large classrooms. The building at Regent Road was unique and beautiful. I do hope that Edinburgh can preserve it.

I travelled to Ruislip, England representing the Scottish Schools Team at the English Schools Basketball Association, International Tournament. I remember the Rugby training in the Pentlands and trips to the Midlands, and often playing in wet and muddy conditions at Jocks Lodge. Besides the Rugby trips throughout Scotland, and the Irish Rugby trip, our family vacationed in the Scandinavian countries the summer of 1960. This international exposure gave me a new prospective on our World and has served me well throughout my career and life.

I really enjoyed the opportunity to play Basketball with the RHS FP team. It was a privilege to play with Pringle Fisher. I remember one game we played where one of our opponents was my Maths teacher. It was attended by many of his students and to their delight and mine RHS FP prevailed. On the right is an article from the Scotsman newspaper about my basketball, no doubt dated about winter 1959.

Mostly I remember the friendliness of the Scottish people and that my classmates readily accepted me. There are very fond memories of my teammates in Rugby. We bonded well though in many ways were quite different. Friends on and off the field and during the Athletics competitions were fierce but fair competitors. That was the Scottish people that I remember.

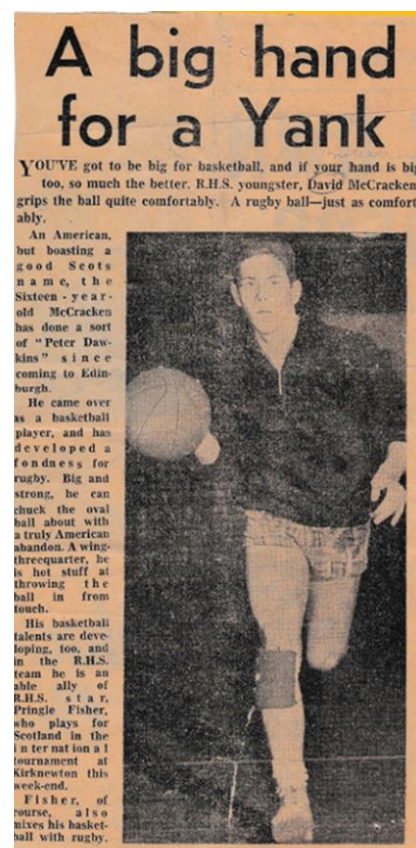
I was a bit of a bother to some of the teachers though. I was often seen wearing white athletic socks and Loafers, not school attire. My Aunt had sent me a dozen pairs for Christmas, the loafers were much more comfortable than the Scottish equivalent, at least that was my story and I stuck by it. I also once turned an RHS tie into an RHS bow tie for one of the schools mixed parties, much to the delight of most students, but not necessarily the staff. Being American I got away with many things.

One of my biggest regrets was not staying in contact with my Scottish friends. There was no internet, e-mail, Facebook, etc. at that time, and I was not a letter writer. I got too involved in life back in the United States.

(At this point, Doug adds more reminiscences, having been sent a number of new archive images, and a list of questions...)

Thank you for the additional pictures and memories. Stuart (Macmillan) looks very distinguished in the photo with his wife Margaret at the Prize Giving. He was always a leader, and it's not surprising that he would become President of the RHS Club - An 'Old Boy' with no grey hair!

You were right that having left in May 1961 I did not have the privilege of the leaving ceremony, departing through the Memorial Door. I remember the ceremony in 1960, and how special it was for all those leaving, taking the next step



in their careers or vocations. I do not remember sitting any exams, no doubt since I had already been accepted by a University back in the US. When I returned, I played soccer, football, and basketball. I also played some club rugby for about 3 years after college. Through school I enjoyed Mathematics, Economics and Anthropology, an interesting variety that broadened my perspectives on life and people. I had an Economics teacher in University who was my counsellor and mentor, and helped shape the career path that I eventually followed.

Edinburgh was a fascinating city in the late 50's and early 60's. There were still signs of the hard time Britain faced during WW II. This was pre-supermarket era. Butchers, bakeries, confectioners, chemists and fish and chip shops were scattered throughout the city. People were still shopping every day or few days since there was no central place to get the food necessities. I learned to eat fish and chips out of newspaper and to like vinegar on my chips, a habit which has continued throughout my life.

I remember in July of 1959 my Father (who had gone ahead of us to Scotland) sent us the front page of an Edinburgh newspaper, with a picture of Princess Street Gardens and the headline SUMMER HEAT WAVE. In the picture was an old man sitting on a bench wearing a tweed sport coat. The temperature was about 74 degrees (23C). The US was in the high 80's (32C), so Edinburgh appeared to be a relatively cold place. Our family stayed for the first four weeks (August 1959) at the Caledonian Hotel overlooking the Castle and the Gardens. Exciting for my sister and me.

Though we all spoke English I did have some initial problems understanding the Scottish brogue. After months it was much easier to understand, but many of the terms differed from my English, for instance, 'bobby' for police, 'boot' for trunk, 'bonnet' for hood, and so on. It was all remarkably interesting and very educational.

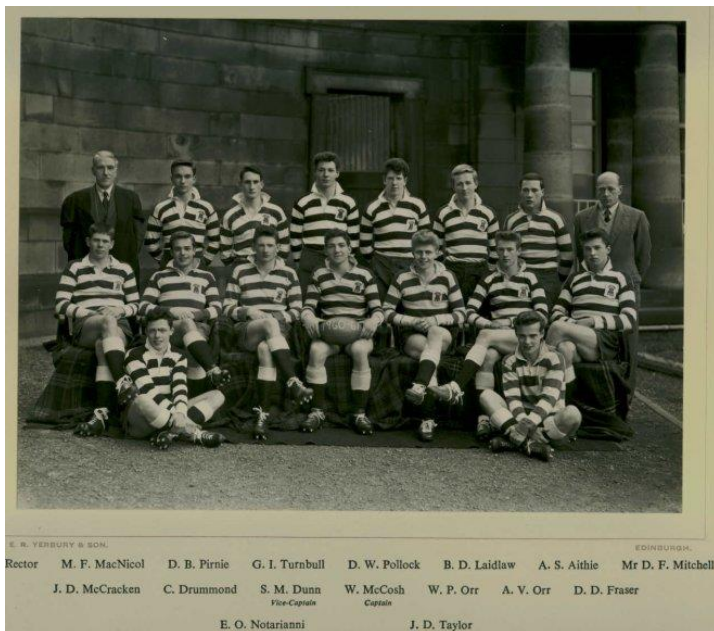
I worked in sales and administration, initially in the steel industry in Detroit, Michigan. Then, as had my father, in the rubber industry for a company in Fort Wayne, Indiana for seven years. In 1980, I was fortunate to join Robin Industries, Inc., a multi-plant rubber company in Cleveland, Ohio. Our business grew to six facilities in northeast Ohio. In the early 2000's, we expanded internationally with plants in Queretaro, Mexico and Xiamen, China. That gave me the tremendous opportunity to travel - 2 or 3 times a year to each location which I enjoyed. I probably spent a total of 30 weeks in Mexico and 13 weeks in China. We had a strategic partnership with a firm in Wales which was the closest I ever got to getting back to Scotland. Those formative years in Edinburgh and that exposure to other cultures made the transition to international travel and business comfortable for me. I had the privilege to serve as Robin's President and CEO for the last 5 years of my career, retiring at the end of 2009.



My wife, Elaine, and I have two daughters. We met in university in Detroit where we married and then moved to Indiana. We currently reside in Aurora, Ohio, though we now split time between here and Naples, Florida in the wintertime. That practice (avoiding cold weather in winter) is very common in North America and we are described as 'snowbirds'. The photo on the left is of Elaine and me at our daughter's wedding in 2015 in Dallas, Texas. I have enjoyed retirement, though miss many of the people, especially internationally, with whom I worked. In retirement I play golf, a game I learned to love in Scotland, read extensively and enjoy cooking and experimenting with foods - no Haggis though. I have been very blessed to have had so many opportunities in my life. A strong family, friends, co-workers, and faith have supported me throughout.

(At this point Doug replied to a few more questions – these were regarding rugby coaching, his memories of teachers, and his favourite school subjects).

I do remember Coach Mitchell but not in much detail, I think your note on the Easter 1961 School Regia summed it up. Given that only one game was lost, there was still criticism – but that was Curly Bill and we worked hard. My first Rugby Coach was Mr. Bowie the Music teacher - he was also a fine coach. He had the 2nd XV in 1959-60 and that is where I began. I moved up to 1st XV later in the fall, I suspect after just a few games. I believe that Bruce Laidlaw was on that team during the season. I think the good camaraderie and the carryover experience from the previous year on 1st XV of 1960-61 allowed us to have such a successful season. It was a team that shared the ball well and had some good additions like Bruce Laidlaw. They contributed to a very solid team.



I remember most of the players in both the 1959-60 & 1960-61 1st XV photos (the latter shown on the left), some better than others. Colin Drummond and Frank Dick were supportive in Rugby, as were all my teammates, but as mentioned fierce but fair competitors in Athletics. Peter Orr was in my Form in 1959-60 so I got to know the Orr brothers well. Arthur was also a good rugby player and good all-around athlete. We did do somethings socially after school. They showed me around Edinburgh on weekends and I remember they introduced me to several Scottish lasses.

The music class was held in the Assembly Hall which had a piano. My recollection of Mr. Bowie was of his discipline, a swat of a ruler on the wrist. He once asked me if I was singing, response - "I sing solo, so low you can't hear me" – swat! I also recall many pranks were played in our Science class, but I will leave those to

your imaginations.

The other teacher was Mr Mowat, our Maths teacher. I believe he was the basketball player whom I mentioned earlier. He rode a motor scooter to school and at some point, had a cast on his foot after a car had run over it when he stopped in Waterloo Place after school.

One of my English teachers, I'm not sure whom, taught me brevity in speech and when to be concise when writing. This created some problems when I returned to US for University. My first English assignment was a written essay on a specific topic, and I compiled a concise 300 word piece. The Teacher returned and said he wanted 500 words, agreeing that they were not needed to cover the topic, but I had to add additional words regardless. I think he was trying to train Politicians.

I learned many valuable lessons while in Scotland, notably to have a good sense of humour, to be able to laugh at yourself, listen (I had to concentrate to fully understand the brogue) and not to take yourself too seriously.

Alastair and Stuart (and other RHS Former Pupils);

I hope that you and your families are safe and well during this Covid-19 pandemic. I look at BBC news every day to get a global perspective on the world. Looks like Nicola Sturgeon has done a fair job in tackling the situation in Scotland and your lockdown. Just do not reopen too soon as we have done here in the United States. This has sure changed all our lives and will continue to have an impact for quite a while.

Regards and Best Wishes.
Doug

Some extra photos

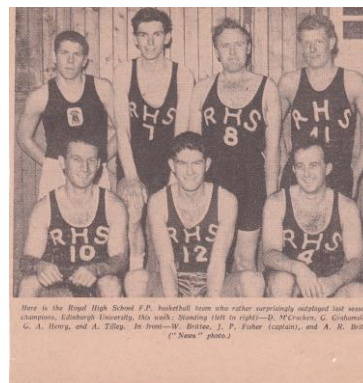
Doug and Stuart provided a number of photos.



1960 – on the train to Dublin - Lumsden-Macmillan-McCracken (at the back)-Orr



1960 Methodist College Belfast v RHS action – Doug has just thrown in at the lineout



Royal High FP basketball 1960 – Doug standing back left, Pringle Fisher captaining