

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF KING'S PARK FOOTBALL CLUB

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Had it not been for the possibly unintentional action in July 1940 of a German plane dropping a land mine on the original Forthbank Stadium, the home of King's Park Football Club, football supporters in Stirling might still be watching a club without the name of the city in its title.

### The early days

If the group of young men who had been kicking a football in the King's Park had held a meeting to discuss forming a football club in 1875 it did not get reported in either the local newspapers. During that year the *Stirling Journal and Advertiser and Gazette of News, Politics and Literature for the Midland Counties of Scotland* was published on a Friday and the *Stirling Observer and Midland Counties Advertiser* on Thursdays and Saturdays. Both of them gave coverage of a range of sports and pastimes; Aquatics (Rowing), Bowling, Coursing, Cricket, Curling, Draughts, Fishing, Golf, Pigeon Shooting, Quoiting, Scottish Games, the Moors and the Turf. By far the greatest space was given to Cricket in the summer and Curling in the winter and the reports on other sports were very brief. Newspapers at that time sometimes reported a meeting at which it had been decided to form a football club but the only indications, discovered so far, that King's Park (Stirling) was formed in 1875 are newspaper reports of annual meetings in later years.

At this time in Scotland Rugby football was more popular than Association Football. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1873, under the heading *Stirling Football Club*, an article in the *Stirling Observer* stated *We understand that a football club has been formed in Stirling to be conducted according to Rugby rules. The members of the club intend to have their first game in the King's Park at 2 o'clock on Saturday first if the necessary appliances can be got by that time.* The *Journal* also reported the meeting and ended their report with a somewhat pompous phrase *and as there is now a club we hope the youth of Stirling will avail themselves of this opportunity to participate in this healthy and manly sport.* The appliances must have been got because a 25 a-side match took place.

In March 1876 the *Journal* decided to add more information by printing the names of the players due to play for Stirlingshire Football Club (Rugby) against Clackmannanshire and they probably wished they had not. The aggrieved club secretary, Mr Adrian M.M.G. Kidston who had been a prime mover in the formation of the club in 1873, wrote to the paper the following week to say he had been surprised to see the list of those due to play as it was not correct, it had put some of the club members to great inconvenience and he had been getting the blame!

The first mention of King's Park, as an Association Football Club, was in November 1876 when the *Journal* and the *Observer* reported that the first elevens of Stirling King's Park and Bonnybridge Grasshoppers had met in the King's Park, the game ending in a draw one all. On the same day the second elevens of the two clubs had played at Bonnybridge and the home side, who claimed to be the oldest senior Association Football Club in Stirlingshire, had won 3-0.

The first mention of players was in May 1877 when Stirling, King's Park played a newly formed club, Thornhill, on a field provided by Mr Moir, farmer, Netherton and Thornhill won 2-1 in front of a crowd said to be between three and four hundred. Young and M'Innes played well for King's Park.

The first time the names of the whole team was given was for the game at Balfron in October 1877 which Balfron won 2-0. In the early 1870s the standard formation was to have eight forwards but towards the end of the decade the number had dropped to six and for this game King's Park lined up as follows;

J McKenzie, goal;  
 A Nicol and J Young, backs  
 W Marshall (captain) and J McKinnon, half backs  
 H Morrison, P Lennie, J McDermid, W Murdoch, J Watson and J Oliphant  
 forwards.

It was not long before disputes and crowd problems began and in November 1878 the only comment in the report of a 2-2 draw against Bonnybridge Grasshoppers was the interference in the play by some of the spectators who rushed onto the pitch whenever there was a dispute. The *Journal* report said it was hoped that this would not be repeated but this was a forlorn hope. Disputes and protests, both by the crowd during a game and especially at committee meetings after the formation of the County Association, soon became a feature of many reports of matches and meetings.

The Scottish Football Association had been formed in 1873, with 16 member clubs, and by the end of 1879 there were 123 member clubs with 7000 members. The first competitive King's Park match was a first round Scottish Cup Tie away to Milton of Campsie in 1879, a landmark ignored by both the *Journal* and the *Observer*, which the home team won 3-1.

One clear disadvantage of playing on a public park was the inability to charge spectators to watch matches and although most home games were played in the King's Park the Stirling County Cricket Club ground at Easter Williamfield was used from time to time. Clearly this was not ideal and in 1881 the club leased a private park in front of Raploch Farm House on Drip Road from the farmer, Mr McKerracher, which they named Gowanbank Park. The first match there was on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1881 against Rangers (Swifts) who proved much too strong winning 8-2. At the end of December a soiree, concert and assembly were held in the Guild Hall during which a report was presented

which said the club was in a prosperous state, had 50 members and that it had been decided to add a third team, the Gowanbank eleven, to the playing sides.

### **Formation of the Stirlingshire Football Association**

The next significant development for the club and for organised football in Stirlingshire was on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1882 when the representatives of various Stirlingshire clubs met at the Athole Arms Hotel in Glasgow and agreed to form a Stirlingshire Football Association. It was decided that a cup, valued at 25 guineas (£26.25), would be competed for. King's Park won the Stirlingshire Cup in 1899, 1911, 1912 and 1915 and the Stirling and District Charity Cup in 1886, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1893 and 1894.

The first club colours were dark blue jerseys and knickers with a red stripe and red hose and in July 1882 'Pilgrim', in the *Stirling Observer*, reported that the club had decided to change the team colours from navy blue to marone (sic) and he suggested that the hose should be maroon and white striped because *it would be ever so much prettier*. In 1886-87 a change was made to cardinal striped jerseys with white knickers and, using more modern wording, red and white striped shirts and white shorts were the club colours, nearly all of the time, until the end.

As soon as football matches were reported in newspapers it was likely that some spectators would have a different view of events. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1883 King's Park travelled to Doune to play the local Doune and Deanston side, Vale of Teith, and the report in the *Stirling Journal* 6 days later said there had been the usual turnout of enthusiastic spectators and that the matches were usually productive of a hard fought and exciting game but this one was not. King's Park had arrived with only nine players and Fraser, there as a spectator, was pressed to fill one gap but this was nullified as during the first half Owen was injured. However, according to the *Journal*, Vale of Teith won a pleasant game 3-0 and after the match the teams had tea together at the Woodside Hotel.

'Playfair' wrote a letter to the Editor of the *Journal* from Doune on 4<sup>th</sup> December with his view of the proceedings.

*SIR,- On sauntering through the streets of Doune on Saturday after a week's hard work, I observed a large bill stuck in the window of one of our principal shops intimating that a grand Football Match would be played in the afternoon at the "Tullochan Knowe" Park, between the Vale of Teith (Doune) and King's Park (Stirling) clubs. I naturally thought if I went down that I would see a good game, and besides the round globe, with its historical associations, has a charm for me. Consequently I made my way to the spot, paid my threepence on entering what was once called a free park. The advertised hour to start was 3 P.M. but it was long past that hour before the respective teams took their places on the ground. At last, however, a start was made. The contesting clubs played one hour only, and at the finish I was sorry to admit that a more miserably*

*played game never took place on the same ground, and by that time all my sanguine anticipations of seeing a good game had melted away into the thin cold air of disappointment. It was said the Doune men had won by three goals to nothing, but it was a poor victory, if true, as throughout the entire match the usual concomitants of the scientific game of to-day were abolished during "this got up farce." In fact the style of play on both sides was something akin to "mere slabbering" to what I have seen on the same ground on previous occasions. Now, Mr Editor, I say it is not fair for the public that two Football Clubs should arrange a match to take place at a certain hour, invite the public, and not turn up at the appointed time, then too late put in a certain appearance, only to lift their "black mail", play a sham game in the dark, then bolt to Woodside Hotel, there to have a grand jollification at the expense of "their victims." I do not think that Mr Burn Murdoch of Gartincaber meant such a beautiful little park as that of the "Tullochan Knowe ground" for such a purpose, and after this, as the exhibition and payment of the price, take place at simul et semel, the public should keep their money in their pockets until the Football Committee fulfil their obligations, as after Saturday's proceedings they are not entitled to any credit. These contretemps of the said Football Clubs unquestionably call for an explanation! – I am, &.,*

After 4 years it was decided that Gowanbank Park was too far away from the town and the club moved to a ground at Laurelhill Park, Southfield and they played their first match there on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1885 against Dunblane. Admission was 3 pence and ladies were admitted free.

After 4 years at Laurelhill the next move was to Forthbank, a ground just to the east of the railway line south from Stirling and close to the bridge which still carries Kerse Road over the railway.

In 1889-90 one of the most famous teams in Britain, the Corinthians, for the first time included King's Park in their Christmas tour which extended into early January. On the 31<sup>st</sup> December the *Observer* reported that the King's Park were due to play the flower of English Amateur Football, the London Corinthians and the visitors were due to be entertained after the match at Hendry's Station Hotel. *This tit bit has been arranged by H E D Hammond of Blair Lodge School in Polmont.* Mr Hammond was a member of the Corinthians and played thirteen times for the club between 1888 and 1890 and eight of those games were during the 18 match tour but he did not play against King's Park. The Corinthians included King's Park in their Christmas and New Year tour for the next 5 years. They won the last of the series 8-0, and may have felt by then that King's Park no longer provided worthwhile opposition. Three Corinthian club histories have been written in 1906, 1933 and 2007. In the first, the *Annals of the Corinthian Football Club* edited by B O. Corbett, a member of the club, the only mention of King's Park is in the lists of matches played in some of which they were said to have played Stirling in Stirling. In the second book by another Corinthian, Norman Creek, as well as the list of matches played there is a brief, unflattering, mention in the report of the Christmas Tour to Ireland

and Scotland in 1891-92 when the pitch at Forthbank was described as "a stretch of mud three inches deep, relieved by alternate zones of cinders and pebbles" and the third book repeats this comment. King's Park won the game 3-2 and it is possible they were more used to playing on mud, cinders and pebbles and throughout the time that King's Park played at Forthbank there were frequent uncomplimentary remarks about the state of the pitch. During this same period other clubs who visited Stirling were Newton Heath (who became Manchester United), Everton, Sunderland and the Canadian International Touring XI.

When there was a change of ownership of Forthbank in 1899 the club moved further away from the town to a field on Springkerse. The Patrons of Cowane's Hospital met a deputation from the football club in June 1899 and set a list of twelve conditions which included *Park to be used for football but also grazed with cattle or sheep and also for holding, not more than four times a year, athletic sports*. The Patrons agreed to fence the east side of the entrance road and the football club was required to fence the road to Clayslaps. An open ground, clearly a field, that was a bit further away from Stirling probably was not ideal and in 1906 King's Park went back to Forthbank where they stayed until 1940.

### **Champions of the Northern Counties**

As founder members of the Stirlingshire Football Association King's Park had competed for the Stirlingshire Cup from the start and reached the final for the first time in 1885-86, when they lost 3-1 to East Stirlingshire in a replay, and they won it for the first time in 1898-99. This meant they had qualified to compete for the Dewar Shield (Plate 13), a new competition with only four entries, the champions of Aberdeenshire, Forfarshire, Perthshire and Stirlingshire. They defeated Orion, the Aberdeenshire champions in the semi final and met Arbroath in the final at Recreation Park, Perth on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1899. The headlines in the *Arbroath Herald* on the Thursday after the match were clear.

#### THE DEWAR SHIELD CONTEST AT PERTH REFEREE WINS GAME FOR KING'S PARK ARBROATH PLAYERS THREATEN TO LEAVE THE FIELD.

In the first half Arbroath had the ball in the net four times but the referee, Mr Baillie of St Bernard, Edinburgh, only allowed one of them to stand and disallowed the other three for offside. King's Park equalised before half-time and in the second half, according to the paper, a ball rebounded off the head of the referee into the Arbroath net and was allowed to stand. The players appealed and the crowd protested but it made no difference. An Arbroath player kept hold of the ball and the team said they would leave the pitch but the captain, Robert McGlashan persuaded them to stay and with the wind behind them thought they might still equalise. King's Park effectively packed their goal and the game ended 2-1.



Figure 1. The Kings Park Team 1898 winners of the Stirlingshire Cup, the Dewar Shield and the Stirling Charity Cup. Kind permission of Dave Moor.

At a supper in the evening after the game the medals were presented by Mr P.M. Dewar, the nephew of the donor, who said he had not seen many football matches in his day but he felt that two of the disallowed Arbroath 'goals' should have been given. The shield (Plate 13) was not ready to be presented after the match as it was still being chased by a first class London firm so the presentation took place on Friday 15 September 1899 in the Golden Lion Hotel in Stirling (Figure 1). When league competitions began the interest in county cups and associated trophies gradually faded over the years and the last winners of the Dewar Shield were St Johnstone in 1982-83 and the Shield now adorns the trophy cabinet at McDiarmid Park.

### **League competitions**

King's Park joined the Scottish Alliance when it was formed in 1891-92, switched to the Midland League in 1892-93, were champions in that season, and moved to the Central Combination in 1897-98. In the early years of the twentieth century the club was very close to going out of existence. A public meeting was held in July 1904 to consider the position of senior football in Stirling and to try and increase interest in the affairs of the club. The membership had fallen from 81 in season 1900-01 and was now only 20 but the club staggered on playing mainly friendly and cup matches. They did win the Central League in 1904-05 although there were only four other teams, Camelon, Dunblane, Alloa Athletic and Stenhousemuir. The Central league medal awarded to half back James Edmond still exists (Plate 14). The next move



was to the Scottish Union for three seasons and then to the Central League where they stayed, although no matches were played during the First World War. They became members of the Scottish League Division Two in 1921.

Before they joined the Scottish League the decision was taken to become a limited company. The Prospectus stated:-

*This company has been formed for the purpose of promoting senior Football in Stirling and District. The Directors are confident that the central situation, and steady growth of the district, on a moderate estimate, is over 30,000 inhabitants and is increasing, and is likely to increase in the near future.*

The capital was £3,000 divided into 3,000 shares of £1 each and the King's Park Football and Athletic Club Limited was registered on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1919. When the company was formed there were 16 directors and among the five who left after a year was the Chairman Thomas Adam M.A., M.D., D.P.H., the County Medical Officer. Of the 16 only two, John Henderson, a painter of Alexandra Place and William Stevenson, a potato merchant of Beechcroft, were still directors 21 years later. The memorandum of association included a long single sentence giving the objects for which the company had been formed:-

*To carry on a Football Club, and in connection therewith, to promote the practice and play of Football, Baseball, Cricket, Lacrosse, Lawn Tennis, Hockey, Bowls, Cycle Riding, Running, Jumping, the physical training and development of the human frame, and other athletic sports, games and exercises of every description, and any other games, pastimes, sports, assault-at-arms, recreation, amusements, or entertainments, and to buy, sell, exchange, or hire all articles, implements, fixtures, furniture, apparatus and things used in the playing or practice of such games or pursuits, and any other implements or things used or required therefor, or for the promotion of the objects of the Company, including prizes to be given in any competition or competitions promoted by the Company.*

The balance sheet on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1920 stated that 1668 of the 3000 shares had been issued. Subsequent annual reports show that in ten of the 21 seasons the balance sheet showed a profit but the total of profits for those seasons was greatly exceeded by the losses and finding the money to keep the club going was a continual struggle.

There was an attempt in November 1920 to make a change to the team strip when a local clothier, James Harris, supplied new shirts which were red with white sleeves but these proved unpopular with the fans who thought it was too much of a 'Bolshie' appearance and they were soon abandoned in favour of the traditional striped shirts.

### **The home game which was not played at home**

As a result of crowd trouble a Scottish Division Two league match was played in Dunblane in 1921 the first, and last, time a game was played there.

In the first half of the match at Forthbank against St Johnstone on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1921 the referee Mr J. Aitken of Glasgow disallowed what the King's Park players thought was a perfectly legitimate goal early on in the first half after which St Johnstone scored to lead 1-0 at the break. The visitors scored a second and Tommy Mannion scored one for King's Park within a couple of minutes. King's Park were then awarded a penalty which was taken by goalkeeper Archie Buchanan. He hit it straight at the St Johnstone keeper and in the ensuing melee the ball ended up in the net but the referee disallowed the goal. Shortly afterwards King's Park had the ball in the net again but this was also disallowed. The players surrounded the referee and some of the crowd came over the barrier and joined in. Play was held up for 5 minutes while the pitch was cleared and after order was restored Tommy Mannion scored an equaliser 10 minutes before the end. As the players left the field after the match a youth was said to have pushed Wiltshire, the St Johnstone goalie, and he pushed back. The man was arrested by the police and then some of the crowd started to throw cinders at the police. The directors and some of the players tried to calm things down but about 200 people gathered in front of the grandstand at which point the police drew their batons and order was restored.

The outcome of the disturbance was the closure of Forthbank for 2 weeks during which the only home game scheduled was against Vale of Leven. This was played on 5<sup>th</sup> November at Duckburn Park in Dunblane, the home of Junior Club Dunblane Rovers. Around 2000 supporters went by train from Stirling and a good many unemployed fans walked from Stirling only to see a dull goalless draw. In earlier years 'The Heather' had been a senior club and the match was described as the first big game played at Duckburn Park since Dunblane had played Leith Athletic in a cup tie 16 years before. There are still Duckburn Park signs on the site, one an impressive metal one on a stone wall, which identifies the small commercial estate which has replaced the football ground.

### **The record attendance and the closest they came to promotion**

In January 1925 the record attendance for Forthbank was set in the first round Scottish Cup tie when 8,911 spectators packed into the ground and saw Cup holders Airdrieonians win comfortably 4-0.

King's Park were never promoted from the second division, the closest they came was in 1927-28 when they finished third and but for an exciting cup run might have finished higher. In the first eight matches left winger Frank Toner scored one goal and in the next game against Armadale centre forward Alex Scoular was injured and Frank took his place, with Alex limping on the left wing, and he scored twice in the 5-2 victory. He kept his place at centre forward and scored a hat trick in the next match which began a run of 17 games only five of which were lost. By the end of December King's Park were second in the league table.



In the Scottish Cup, having disposed of Civil Service Strollers 3-0 away in a game played in torrential rain in the first round and Armadale 4-2 away in the second round, for the third round they were drawn at home to Rangers. For financial reasons the directors switched the tie to Ibrox which caused a public outcry, many irate letters were sent to the local press and there was talk of a boycott. However the prospect of a day out in Glasgow proved too much of an attraction and three special trains took 1,500 supporters to the city. The Rangers side which included Dougie Gray, Dave Meiklejohn, Alex Archibald, Andy Cunningham, Bob McPhail and Alan Morton did not have it all their own way as King's Park's right winger Martin Lennon was in sparkling form and scored after 30 minutes. King's Park held the lead for 43 minutes when Alan Morton scored. He added another after 15 minutes before the end and a late goal made it 3-1. However the club's share of the entrance money paid by the crowd of 20,451 was a great help to the finances.

Rangers went on to achieve the cup and league double beating Celtic 4-0 in the final at Hampden, their first Scottish Cup success for 25 years.

As so often is the case it was an anti-climax after the defeat at Ibrox and King's Park had a six match run without a win which shattered all dreams of promotion.

### **Eight goals on a debut**

Another memorable game, in which a scoring record was equalled and nearly broken, was on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1930 when King's Park beat Forfar Athletic, a team above them in the league table, 12-2. The pitch was heavy in places, not unusual at Forthbank, Forfar were missing four of their regular defenders, the game was the day after a full league programme which had followed New Year's Eve celebrations and King's Park had a centre forward making his debut for the club. James (Jimmy) Dyet, a centre forward with Cowie Juniores, was the younger brother of Gilbert Dyet the King's Park left half, and he was only in the side as a triallist because the regular centre forward Hugh Martin had been injured in the match against East Stirling the day before. Jimmy scored six goals in the first half; King's Park led 7-0 at half time, and added two more in the second half to equal the record of eight goals for a player in a senior league match by Jimmy McGrory for Celtic against Dunfermline and Owen McNally for Arthurlie against Armadale. Not surprisingly he was signed on immediately after the match and played in the next game 2 days later away to Stenhousemuir and although he did not score, King's Park won 1-0, the *Observer* report said *In the Forfar match he demonstrated his deadly opportunism and at Stenhousemuir he pleased the crowd with his fine distribution of the play.* In the next ten games, seven in the league and three in the Scottish Cup, he scored a total of twelve goals. By the end of the season he had scored 25 goals in 16 league matches. Interviewed, when aged 96, in 2004 Jimmy Dyet said he did not think his eight goals in the match against Forfar had been such a great feat.

### **The marathon cup tie against Ayr United**

Over 60 years after King's Park played their last competitive match more than one of those supporters of King's Park interviewed referred to the cup ties against Ayr United in February 1935 as a high spot in the history of the club. In January 1935 they beat Edinburgh City 3-1 in the first round of the Scottish Cup and in the second round were drawn away to Ayr United. The marathon began on Saturday February 9<sup>th</sup> at Somerset Park with a 1-1 draw. On the following Wednesday the score at Forthbank was 2-2 after extra time and before the teams could meet for the third time there was a league game to play at home to Brechin City on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February. Six team changes were made for this game which King's Park won comfortably 8-1 and one of the changes was bringing in right half Hugh Brown. He was the father of Craig Brown who is currently the Aberdeen manager and who was the Scotland team manager from 1993 until 2001. Two days later the second replay was at Firhill with the same side as had played in the first two cup matches and although King's Park were twice ahead in normal time when the full time whistle went it was 3-3. There were two goals in extra time but they were shared so the following day the teams met again at Hampden Park in front of a crowd of 14,300, of which 6490 were admitted at the unemployed turnstiles. Hugh Brown replaced Tom Fowler but otherwise the team was the same as that for the previous three games and this time Ayr took the lead. Bryce and Baird both missed penalties for King's Park and so for the first time the teams were not level at half-time. Eleven minutes after the restart Andrew scored and 5 minutes later he scored again after a mistake by the Ayr goalkeeper to take King's Park into the third round the following Saturday. Bryce, Lang, Temple and Young played in all five games over the 18 days and Andrew, Baird, Hillan, Laird, Milton and Soutar played in all four cup ties. The cup run came to an abrupt end the following Saturday when Aidrieonians won comfortably 6-2.

### **Memories**

In 1999 Daniel Morgan, who remembered as a small boy scrambling with other boys under the fence to get into Forthbank, recalled a man called Jimmie Wordie who worked as an odd job man for an antiques dealer called Yates. Jimmie used to go to matches wearing a top hat bedecked with red and white ribbons and proved he had the high degree of optimism found in many true supporters. In February 1937, after beating Elgin City in the Scottish Cup first round, King's Park were drawn away to Hearts in the second round. Jimmie Wordie did not go to the match, he may well have not been able to afford to attend, but he rang up a paper in Edinburgh to ask the score. When he was told it was 15-0, he asked "Who to?"

In 2000 Alexander McIntosh recalled that the longest sloping embankment at Forthbank was behind the town end goal and that was where Jimmie Wordie held sway every home game with his vocal encouragement "Ability is bound to

tell". There was a long but not so high embankment on the north side of the field opposite the grandstand. The ground there fell away to a fence which separated the ground from the railway property and during games there would be a long line of railway engines with railwaymen cleaning out the fireboxes etc but usually paying more attention to the progress of the game. In bad weather the pitch was very muddy and a hefty clearance would travel no more than thirty yards and when players headed a heavy leather ball it seemed to him as though it must have felt like heading a boulder.

In 2002 Willie Jenkins thought he first went to Forthbank as an 8 year old in 1931 and he remembered the first of the three replays of the Cup tie against Ayr United. He also recalled either being lifted over the turnstiles or slipping through the railway sleepers which formed a fence in the north east corner of the ground. The lads would collect beer bottles left on the ash terrace and get 1d each for them when handed in at the 'jug' at the pubs.

Coal merchant Tom Fergusson, best remembered now as the man who was instrumental in the formation of Stirling Albion after the Second World War, was a director of King's Park over a 12 year period but for the majority of those years they were a club in name only. He became a director in 1936 and in 1938 he found himself in trouble with the Scottish Football Association. The referee, Mr R.E. Carruthers of Airdrie, had reported an incident which had taken place, on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1938, during half-time in the King's Park versus St Bernard league match at Forthbank. When he had entered the King's Park dressing room after the interval to tell the players to resume the game he heard a voice say "Now boys get stuck into them. If any of you are ordered off I'll pay the fines." The referee also said the only way of identifying the person alleged to have made the remark was that they were the donor of gifts to King's Park players after the Scottish cup-tie against Penicuik Athletic and the draw with St Bernard at Gymnasium Park in Edinburgh. The SFA Referee Committee met on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1938 and rejected the King's Park claim that the club knew nothing about the incident and banned Tom Fergusson from football until 16<sup>th</sup> May 1939 and suspended the King's Park players W. Clark (right-half and captain) and W. Deans (centre-half) until 1<sup>st</sup> January 1939. Tom Fergusson was also vice-president of the Scottish Juvenile Football Association and secretary of the Stirlingshire Juvenile Football Association and had to relinquish these posts as well.

### **The beginning of the end**

The 1939-40 season started well for King's Park and after their four league matches they were unbeaten and third in the table and then on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany and, although they could not possibly know, it was effectively the end of the club. On the declaration of war the government had announced that all football grounds were to close. This was an understandable response because, unlike 1914, there was a serious risk of aerial attack.



Figure 2. The grandstand at Forthbank after the bomb, dropped by a German plane, landed on it in the early hours of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1940 (with kind permission of The Smith Art Gallery and Museum).

On September 6<sup>th</sup> 1939 the Scottish Football Association suspended all football and players' contracts were consequently declared void. The total closing of grounds had been a panic reaction and the government aware that boredom could lead to anger changed its mind and regional leagues in Scotland began. Kings Park were in the Eastern Regional League for the rest of the season and the *Stirling Journal* on the 9<sup>th</sup> November included a photograph of the new regional team, the same photograph appeared in the Christmas number, in red shirts with white sleeves with the caption. *Here are the lads who now sport the red and white, many of them stars from English and Scottish clubs who have 'evacuated' themselves for the purpose of securing jobs in civil employment.* The five players in the team group from other clubs were Laird (East Fife), Muir (Rochdale), Binnie (Chesterfield), McMillan (Chelsea) and Black (Heart of Midlothian). Of these the best known was Stirling born Andy Black who had made three appearances for Scotland the previous season. Ironically the profit for the season was over £450, the biggest since 1926, but then in the early hours of Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July 1940 two bombs were dropped on Stirling (Figure 1). One landed in an open field but the other landed on Forthbank. It missed the pitch by between twenty and thirty yards but it completely shattered one wing of the grandstand and produced a crater 18 feet deep and 30 feet in diameter. Part of the terracing was demolished as well as the press room, dressing rooms and

offices and part of the entrance and turnstiles were damaged. Remarkably no one in the houses in Springfield Place, which was on the south side and close to the ground, was seriously injured. Censorship meant that the *Journal* on the 25<sup>th</sup> July had a report "sent by a *Journal* reporter from a town in south-east Scotland (where he had been spending a few days)". As the paper also included pictures of the shattered grandstand quite how the inhabitants of Stirling responded to such a report we can only imagine. The caption over two pictures of the shattered grandstand read *Why do German Bombers pick on our Football Grounds?* After the Chief Constable visited the scene of devastation later in the day and had spoken to some of those affected he said "I don't know if we are all made of the stuff as these people, but if we are, then I am not afraid of any lack of morale on the part of the people of this country" On the same page was a report of a meeting two days before in Dunfermline chaired by Tom Fergusson, which attempted to form a new Midland League but nothing came of the initiative.

By now there were only three directors. Councillor Mcfarlane Gray, the interim secretary in the absence of his brother Peter who was on military duty, resigned and Tom Fergusson became both the Chairman and Secretary. In August a King's Park team lost 8-3 to an Army eleven and four days later lost 5-4 to Queens Park Strollers. In September 1940 only 200 spectators turned up at Forthbank Park, when a King's Park side defeated an Army XI 9-2, the majority of whom were soldiers. Despite the lack of support Tom Fergusson, now the secretary-manager, was determined to try to carry on and was trying to arrange a game with Rangers A for the following Saturday but to no avail.

The steel girders from the old Forthbank Stand were used by the Kelvin Construction Company of Glasgow to build the bus station in Stirling which was opened on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1941 and demolished in 1991 in preparation for the next phase of the Thistle Shopping Centre development.

At the annual meeting of the club at the offices of Fergussons, coal merchants in Wallace Street, Stirling in January 1943 it was announced that Forthbank Park had been handed back to the superiors of the ground. As a result the club still existed but had no team and no ground.

As late as August 1944 a 'King's Park select' played an RAF eleven on the Back o' Hill ground in Stirling. An application was made to join the North Eastern League but it was turned down. If that bomb had not fallen where it did in 1940 as Stirling was a garrison town King's Park might even have flourished during the Second World War.

A number of Scottish Second division clubs had struggled for years but the two which did not survive the war probably would not have been the clubs anyone just before the outbreak of war would have said would fail. St Bernard, formed in 1878, competed in the Eastern Regional League in 1939-40 and even though they closed down after one season, 1941-42, in the North Eastern

League it was thought they would restart after the war. In 1943 their ground, Royal Gymnasium Park, was sold and the club, who had won the Scottish Cup in 1894-95, disappeared.

Emotionally, if not technically, the ashes of King's Park gave birth to Stirling Albion but 5 years after the land mine there appeared to be still hope that there would be no need for a phoenix to rise. A meeting of the shareholders was held in late April in 1945 when the chairman Mr Robert McGilvray, Tom Fergusson was the Secretary, said he believed there was a fair demand for the club to be resuscitated and that "They fairly wept when Chamberlain started the war, because the club was right on top at the time!"

The landmine which fell on Forthbank in July 1940 effectively ended the club but in strict legal terms King's Park lingered on for another 12 years, it remained in existence as there was a claim outstanding for compensation for War Damage and the final chapter of the story of King's Park Football and Athletic Club Limited ended in the Golden Lion Hotel in Stirling on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1952 when it was decided to wind up the company. Mr W.S. Gibbon C.A. of 20, Barnton Street, was appointed liquidator.

When a new senior professional club, Stirling Albion, was formed they played on a new ground built on the Annfield estate but when they moved to a new purpose built stadium it was gratifying to see it given the name Forthbank. As it is much closer to the bank of the river than the old Forthbank was it is even more appropriate. It is now very unlikely that anyone in the crowd at a Stirling Albion game is tempted to shout, or even whisper under their breath, "Come on the Park" but perhaps they did in 1945.

## Sources

If the minute books or treasurer's account books still exist they have not yet come to light so the main sources of information for this article have been *The Stirling Observer*, *The Stirling Journal* and *The Stirling Sentinel*. In addition to information gathered by Paul Doherty and the late Roger Harris considerable assistance has been provided by past and present staff at the Stirling Reference Library and The Stirling Council Archives.

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