

# A medal of the Newtongrange Lothian Cricket Club, 1887

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## ABSTRACT

*Cricket was a popular game in lowland Scotland between 1870 and 1914, but material survivals from this period are rare. A medal of one minor club is described and set in context.*

## INTRODUCTION

The fact of Caledonia being stern and wild has long been a matter of congratulation to the poetic child, but it is a constant source of disgust to the cricketer. (King, 3 (1873), 6.)

Relics of the zenith of popular cricket in Scotland, between 1860 and the First World War, are rare, so the recent acquisition by the National Museums of Scotland of an unusual medal (NMS H.1994.1097) is worthy of being recorded. It was awarded in 1887 to Thomas Blackie, a member of the Newtongrange Lothian Cricket Club.

Cricket had grown to become the English national game between 1740 and 1800, and it was played to a limited extent in Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the 18th century. The painting by David Allan of William Schaw, 1st Earl Cathcart (1755–1843), and his family at Schaw Park, Alloa (1785), has often been said to show the first cricket match in Scotland. This is not true in the literal sense, but it was the first match which involved leading cricketers from the south of England, the first match of the highest standard, including among others George Finch, 9th Earl of Winchelsea (1752–1826). He holds a high place in the history of the game, for he was one of the founders of the Marylebone Cricket Club (1787) and one of the two men who persuaded Thomas Lord to lay out the cricket ground which – though he moved it twice – still bears his name.

The spread of cricket in Scotland can be divided into three phases: the initial period, during which a few clubs were scattered across the country, was over by 1840. The earliest clubs were formed at Perth in 1812, in Edinburgh (Brunswick 1830, Grange 1832), Glasgow (the University c 1828, Albion c 1832, Thistle c 1838), and Barrhead (c 1838). From 1840 until about 1870 there was a rapid expansion as, by a variety of means, knowledge of the game was imported from England. ‘The Scotch are ... beginning to turn their attention to it, and clubs are formed for the furtherance of the game’ (Box 1869, 21–2). In the third phase, growth was self-sustaining within Scotland: this period ran from about 1870 to 1890. Between 1871 and 1889 there was a sufficient level of interest to support a Scottish cricket annual on the model of the more famous English *Wisden* (King 1871–89). After 1890 there was a slight contraction, although it did not become

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fully evident until after the First World War. The number of cricket clubs in Scotland in 1873 was estimated to be 200 (Bone 1898, 31), an impressive number when compared with the 436 curling clubs affiliated to the Royal Caledonian Curling Club in the same year (Taylor 1884, 288): curling was by far the most popular sport in Scotland during the first seven decades of the 19th century.

The most important mechanism for the growth of cricket in Scotland was the arrival of Englishmen who were already familiar with the game: almost invariably they had travelled north to take part in Scotland's economic development by applying their technical skills. Textile workers from Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Leicestershire introduced cricket to Hawick about 1844. Two Yorkshiremen who had been brought in to install looms in the tweed mills started the club in Selkirk in 1851, and Andrew Lang (who was a boy there) wrote a vivid description of the cricketing rivalry between the Border towns in the 1850s. At Dalbeattie, the game was promoted by southern workers in the granite quarries. At Penicuik and Stoneywood (Aberdeen) the clubs were founded by men who had come to work in the paper mills. When the Findhorn viaduct was being built for the Inverness & Aberdeen Junction Railway in 1857–8, English engineers fostered the foundation of two clubs in Forres.

Another means by which Scotland became aware of cricket was through touring teams made up almost entirely of professional cricketers, which travelled the length and breadth of the British Isles from 1846 onwards, arriving first in Scotland in 1849. They played against local sides, strengthening the opposition by lending them players and allowing them up to 22 men in their teams. These matches were attended by crowds of several thousands and were well reported in the Scottish newspapers. The Newtongrange Lothian CC was founded in 1879, and it is significant that the previous September an Australian team had first visited Scotland. They were already a sensation by the time they reached Glasgow, and *Punch* had parodied Byron:

The Australians came down like the wolf on the fold,  
The Marylebone cracks for a trifle were bowled;  
Our grace before dinner was very soon done,  
And Grace after dinner did not get a run.

The Australians' dinner in Glasgow was hosted by the Lord Provost. Dr W G Grace had visited Scotland several times before 1878, and his medical qualification was a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, which he was awarded in 1879. He has been said to have been the most famous commoner in England, and when he first came to Scotland in 1872 he was paid to play in Glasgow as a means of spreading the game, and drew a crowd of 7000 – a very large sporting gathering at that time (Bone 1898, 89).

## NEWTONGRANGE

The building of the village of Newtongrange began in 1835 with miners' rows near Newbattle Colliery; by the time the Cricket Club was founded there was also an oil works and a paper mill. The real expansion of the village did not take place until the Lady Victoria Colliery, the remnants of which now form the Scottish Mining Museum, was sunk in 1890–4. In its industries, Newtongrange was much like dozens of other small towns in central Scotland, and it was similar in playing cricket. Its opponents were nearby teams such as Bonnyrigg, Easthouses, Dalkeith Star, Dalkeith Brushmakers, and Lasswade St Leonards.

J W Scorgie, the donor of the medal, was probably the founder of the club. He was the master at Newbattle Colliery School for Boys and, significantly, he came from Fraserburgh where one of the first cricket clubs in north-east Scotland had been established in 1862 (Miller 1984, 50).



ILLUS 1 The Newtongrange Lothian Cricket Club's medal for batting, 1887: obverse (left), the cricket match; reverse (right), the inscription recording presentation to Thomas Blackie (Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

## THE MEDAL

The medal (illus 1) is circular with a hollow cast rim of acanthus leaves, and has a suspension loop with pierced scroll supporters. It is fully hallmarked: MS&Co (unidentified); Castle (Edinburgh); Thistle; U (year mark for 1876–7); queen's head. The medal is 53 mm in diameter. A boss on the rim bears on one side the maker's initials and on the other the queen's head. The inscription on the obverse of the medal reads 'NEWTON GRANGE / LOTHIAN CRICKET CLUB / Presented By / Mr. J.W. Scorgie, / WON BY / Thomas Blackie / Session 1887. Blackie received the medal at a dinner that autumn. The *Dalkeith Advertiser* for 17 November 1887 recorded that

Last Friday evening the members of the Newtongrange Lothian C.C. held their first social gathering in the Justinlees Inn, Eskbank, when about 26 gentlemen sat down to the excellent repast provided by Mr Noble. Mr William Inglis, captain of the club, occupied the chair and Mr Johnstone N. Armistead officiated as croupier. During the course of the evening the president's medal for the best batting average was presented to Mr Thomas Blackie, and the club belt for the best bowling average to Mr David Traill. Songs, &c, by Messers Inglis, J. Currie, K. Currie, Armistead & Blackie & others of the Newtongrange, as also J. Gray and T. Gray of Salisbury C.C. made the evening pass all too quickly & when 'Auld Lang Syne' had been sung, and the company dispersed, it was with the feeling that a really pleasant & enjoyable evening had been spent.

The reverse of the medal is engraved with a cricketing scene. It shows a batsman in the action of playing at the ball, and as well as the bowler there are four other players. The picture is derived from a painting at Lord's by Francis Hayman (1708–86): *Cricket in the Marylebone fields* (c 1744: Simon & Smart 1983, 86–7). The general arrangement of the players is the same, except that they are reversed from left to right. The engraving of the figures on the medal is rather naive. Two points deserve notice. First, although the batsmen wear pads, the wicket-keeper does not. Second, the bowler is bowling underarm. Both of these practices were all but obsolete by the 1880s and tie the engraver to Hayman rather than to contemporary practice.

An engraved print from Hayman's painting was published in 1748 and became the most common image of cricket before S H Mason published his 'A cricket match played between the Counties of Sussex and Kent' (1849), and even then Hayman's picture remained the standard image of 18th-century cricket. It is startling to find it on Chinese export porcelain of c 1786 (Rice 1987, 21), and it was still an active source when *The Graphic* (10 August 1878) published an illustration of 'Cricket in India' with the grouping of the figures modelled on Hayman. The painting was reproduced in one of the most popular Victorian books on the game, *Cricket* (1888) by A G Steel & R H Lyttleton; Steel, we may note in passing, was brought up in Lancashire but had close connections in Dumfriesshire and played cricket there in the 1870s. From the late 18th century onwards, Hayman's image was distributed widely on handkerchiefs and at the head of broadsheets setting out the Laws of Cricket. The dispositions of the players are always the same, but the backgrounds vary: sometimes a large tent with women taking refreshments and a windmill on a hill behind them; sometimes an accurate delineation of the buildings around a famous cricket ground. Little can be read into the shapes of the hills on the Newtongrange medal: they might be the Pentlands, the Pennines or the South Downs.

Cricket medals are not common in any part of Britain. A more usual prize was a bat with a silver label attached to the top of the handle. One awarded by Clydesdale CC of Glasgow (1855) has been recorded (Courtney 1954, 8), and a snuff-box made out of two such labels of Kirkintilloch Thistle CC is in a private collection. There is a particular association between the awarding of medals and sport in Scotland. All over Europe it was the practice before the 19th century to add medals to sporting trophies – silver arrows, bows, belts, cups of various kinds – but golfers and curlers were notably active awarders of medals, and the Royal Caledonian Curling Club in particular presented medals for many of its competitions.

Cricket acted as a springboard for the growth of other sports. Members of Hawick & Wilton CC bought a rugby ball in 1872, to keep fit during winter: the rugby club soon devolved itself. The founder of Clydesdale CC, the most prominent of Glasgow's early clubs, was the first President of the Scottish Football Association in 1873, and two other Clydesdale cricketers were on the first committee. Clydesdale's first ground at Titwood (Pollokshields) was used as a venue for major matches against English teams when Hampden Park was being rebuilt in 1883–4. The West of Scotland's cricket ground at Hamilton Crescent, Partick, was the scene of the first international football match in 1872, and of three subsequent ones, and of four early rugby internationals.

Scottish cricket has been in slow decline for most of the 20th century: Newtongrange Lothian played their last match in 1962. Today the game enjoys a modest popularity in Scotland as a game for players rather than for spectators, but for a few years it provided institutions and facilities which aided the development of other sports, and for half a century before the First World War it was a common game in the villages and towns of Scotland.

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