

Lacrosse in South Australia from 1885 to 1939

Michael Harry

For my father and his friends

Although I have never played or followed lacrosse, I have a personal connection to the game through my father. This comes from vivid childhood memories of watching mid-winter lacrosse matches in the early 1960s at University Oval. My father took me with him on Saturday afternoons to see the Blacks play football in their heyday. At half time, we would wander over to the eastern side of the Oval to take in five or ten minutes of lacrosse. It is such a striking game. The speed and flow, the aggression, the long sticks, and the almost ritual elements in the field play are hallmarks.

The inspiration for this presentation came from a small album my father kept in the 1930s of press clippings, photos and memorabilia from his lacrosse career at the University of Adelaide. The album came to light some years after his death when a cousin visiting from Melbourne handed it to me, saying: "I don't know why I have this. I think your father would want you to have it".

The presentation is in two parts: first, an overview of the development of lacrosse in South Australia from its beginnings to the start of the Second World War; and second, a more intimate study of lacrosse at the University of Adelaide in the 1930s drawn from my father's album and my own research.

Lacrosse in South Australia 1885 - 1939

The early years

Australian lacrosse began in Victoria in 1876, seemingly through the influence of Canadian men who had migrated to the Victorian Goldfields.

Following the lead of Victoria, lacrosse started in South Australia in 1885 with the formation of the Adelaide Lacrosse Club. On 3rd July *The Advertiser* reported:

Mr C Wilkinson presiding, the Adelaide Lacrosse Club met and appointed Mr W Paterson captain, Mr A Wilkinson vice-captain, Mr H Conigrave honorary secretary, and Messrs F Cornish, D J Byard, R Tribe, F Goode and G Boundy as committee. The costume decided on was a navy jersey and hose, white knickerbockers, navy blue cap with gold band, and the club monogram in gold on the left breast of the jersey.



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A historic photo, most likely the first lacrosse photo in South Australia, shows the Adelaide team that played Noarlunga in August 1886 at Victoria Park. Third on the left is William Bragg, who was awarded a joint Nobel Prize with his son William in 1915. Aged 23 at the time of the photo, he had just arrived from the United Kingdom to take up the position of Professor of Mathematics and Experimental Physics at the University of Adelaide.

The Noarlunga, Knightsbridge and North Adelaide clubs were established soon after. At the outset, lacrosse was a gentleman's game, played mainly by educated young men studying or working in business and the professions. The early Knightsbridge club included men from Elder Smith, Adelaide Steamship Company, wine merchant WG Auld, the Lands Department, the Engineer-in-Chief's Office, the Post Master General and Treasury, and two accountants, a barrister and the son of a doctor.

Interstate rivalries grew quickly. A four game tournament between Adelaide and South Melbourne was held in 1887 at Adelaide Oval and Noarlunga. South Australia and Victoria played the first inter-colonial match at the MCG on 1 September 1888. Victoria won 5 goals to 1 goal.



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South Australia was the dominant team in the early years. It was reported in 1892 that they beat Victoria at the Richmond Cricket Ground “by first-class all round play, and the better condition of its men”

The University of Adelaide Club was formed in 1889 with the assistance of Professor Bragg, who was also a founding member of Adelaide and North Adelaide. The Club was successful almost immediately, winning eight premierships before 1915 when finals were introduced. Their 1896 premiership team was captained by notable South Australian sportsman Phillip Newland. As well as playing interstate lacrosse, Newland captained the Norwood Football Club and was controversially selected as reserve Australian wicket keeper in Joe Darling’s 1905 Ashes team. A solicitor in later life, he died in 1916 aged 41.

Another prominent Adelaide identity, Arthur Blackburn, played in the University B Grade premiership team of 1912. In 1915, Blackburn was a member of a lacrosse team formed in Mena Camp in Egypt by the 10th Battalion before embarking for Gallipoli. The team played a match against an English team from the Manchester Regiments, the first offshore lacrosse match for an Australian team. A year later Blackburn won the Victoria Cross at Pozieres. He went on to serve in World War 2 in the Middle East and in the Dutch East Indies where he was captured by the Japanese. After the war, he continued his legal career, finishing on the bench of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration.

Melbourne University and University of Adelaide played their first match in 1905 in Melbourne and became traditional rivals. Intervarsity matches grew in popularity as the game spread to the other states.

Lacrosse became popular in country towns, particularly in the mid North.



Jamestown Lacrosse Club 1912

After the First World War

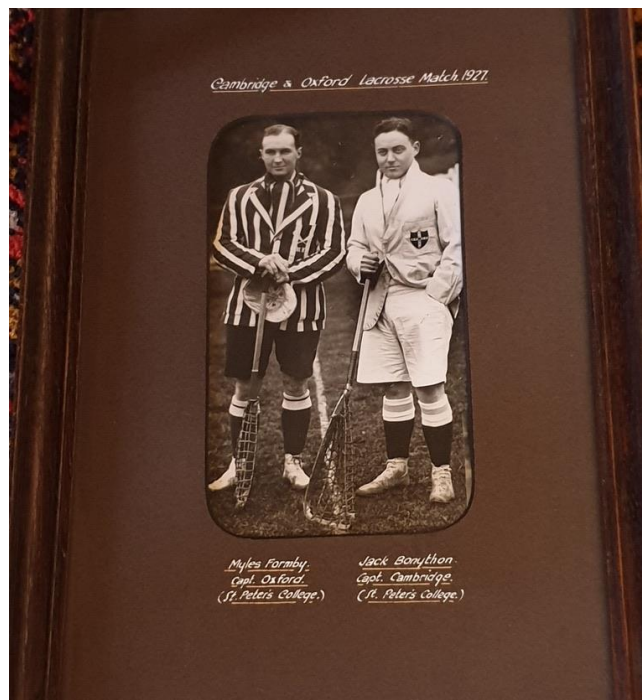
Despite the loss of so many young men, lacrosse recovered quickly from the trauma of war. The game grew in popularity in the 1920s and 1930s and remained strong up to the outbreak of the Second World War.



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Lacrosse at Jubilee Oval 1919

University won further premierships in 1923 and 1924, however the club went into gradual decline thereafter as Sturt, North Adelaide, East Torrens and later Brighton took over as the leading teams.



The game remained very popular among educated young men from prosperous families. The captains of Oxford and Cambridge in 1927, Myles Formby for Oxford and Jack Bonython for Cambridge, were both formerly students of St Peter's College.

Lacrosse was at its peak in the 1920s and 1930s, its popularity reflected in the frequent and extensive newspaper reports of results, previews, team selections, awards and photos of play. An interstate tournament in Adelaide in 1926 attracted great interest. Players and officials were welcomed at a Mayoral reception at the Adelaide Town Hall.



Mayoral Reception for 1926 Interstate Lacrosse Tournament

Lacrosse in the 1930s at the University of Adelaide

My father, Richard Harry, entered Law at University of Adelaide in 1932 aged 18 while working as a law clerk. When I enrolled in Law nearly forty years later, he told me I should not follow his example. He felt he had been a poor student, wasteful and disinterested. I knew he had played lacrosse, losing his front teeth and ruining his knee cartilages in the process, but really nothing more. Lacrosse was part of an earlier life that he did not wish to discuss.

From studying his album and other sources, including an excellent centenary history of the Adelaide Law School published in 1983, it became clear to me that my father was passionate about lacrosse and very proud of his achievements at the time.

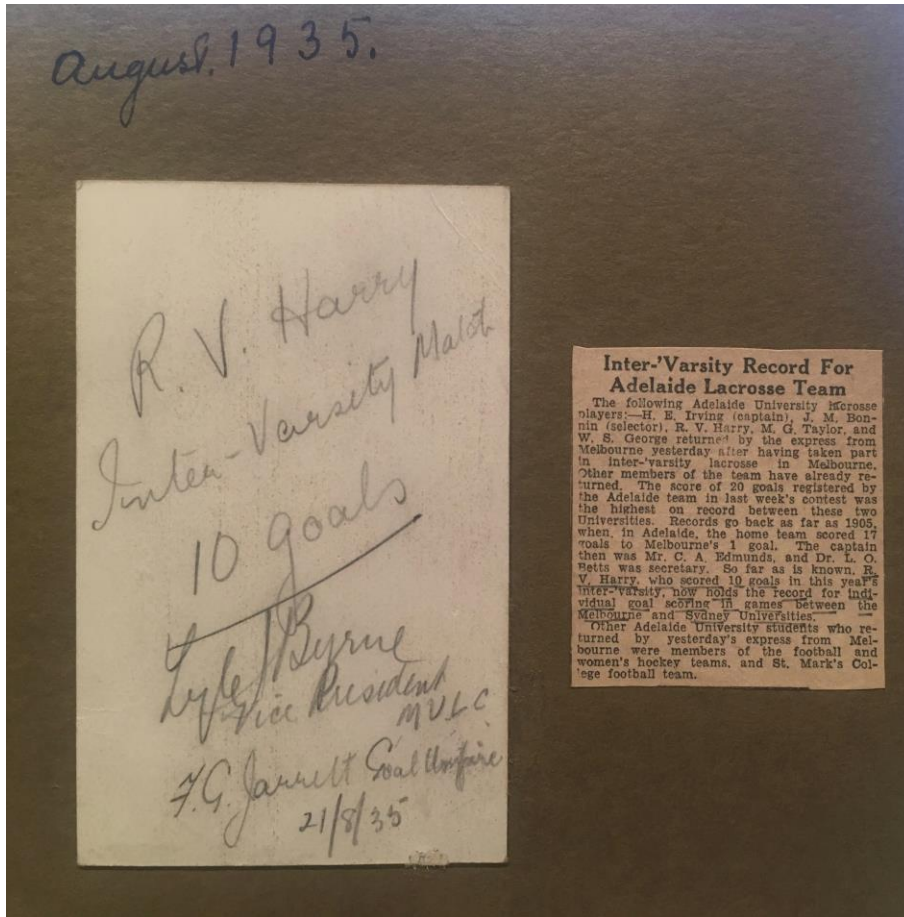


Richard Harry (centre) with lacrosse team mates

He began playing with University in 1933 and quickly became an established player. An accomplished forward, he featured regularly in reports in *The Advertiser* and *The News* on his goal scoring and unorthodox tactical play. He played his first Inter-varsity match against Melbourne University in 1934, and by 1935 was a highly regarded player: *Dick Harry's skill and ferocious aggression as a lacrosse forward let him set new records in inter-university games. After the 1935 match in which he scored ten goals, the "Advertiser" referred to "the brilliant Harry" – an adjective he was never allowed to live down by his friends. (from Law on North Terrace, 1983)*



1935 Intersvarsity against Melbourne (Richard Harry on right)



In recognition of this achievement, an individual record and the highlight of his playing career, he was awarded a University blue. In the following two years, he captained the University A Grade side.

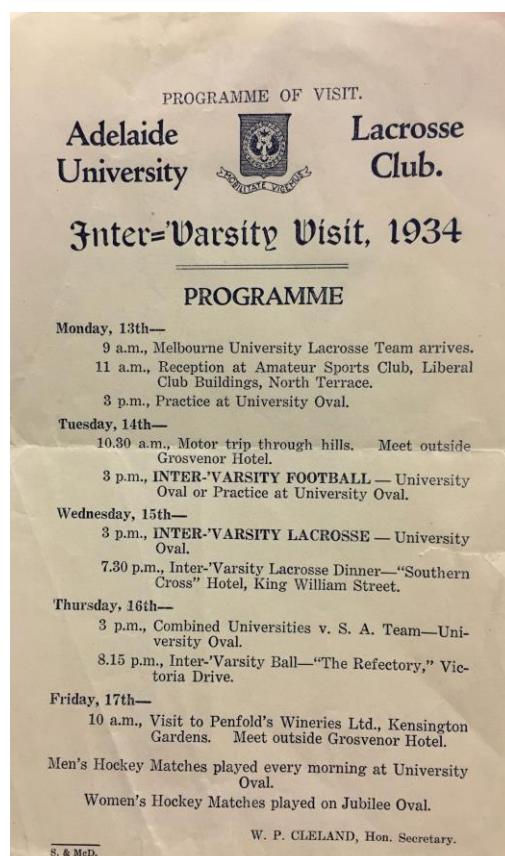


1937 Adelaide University IntersVarsity team
Richard Harry front row centre

His success in the Intervarsity competitions and consistently high goal scoring in the Adelaide A Grade competition attracted the interest of the State selectors. He was included in the 1936 and 1937 squads for interstate matches. The local competitions and interstate lacrosse attracted considerable interest from the Adelaide press. A two column feature article on interstate selections for 1937 finishes: *Harry, with better combined play than he now receives from his team mates in the forward division, should be taken into consideration. He has an uncanny dodge, and often succeeds in surprising the best of backmen. Harry is one of the best "unusual" angle goal shooters in the game. (the Advertiser, July 1937)*

His career extended beyond grade and interstate lacrosse. The Boykett Cup for interfaculty lacrosse was a hard fought competition, generating intense rivalries between traditional opponents. He played for St Peter's Old Collegians in intercollegiate matches against the old enemy, Prince Alfred College. Both sides fielded a number of University players.

While these competitions were significant, it is clear from records in the album that the Inter-varsity tournaments were the highlight, both for the fierce sporting contests and the associated social activity. The 1934 Inter-varsity Program lists a welcome reception at the Amateur Sports Club, a motor trip through the hills starting at the Grosvenor, a Lacrosse Dinner at the Southern Cross, an Inter-Varsity Ball at the Refectory and for those still standing, a visit to Penfolds Wineries on the last day.



Inevitably, these proceedings got out of hand at times. In September 1937, a University official wrote to the Captain, the Honorary Secretary and the Assistant Secretary of the Lacrosse Club inviting them to attend a meeting of the Disciplinary Committee of the University Sports Association. The Committee had been convened to consider their alleged involvement in *“certain misbehaviour on the train travelling to Melbourne whilst members of a touring University Lacrosse team during last vacation....It is also alleged that such misbehaviour was far and above in importance to similar occurrences which may have happened on such trips before.”*

Peter Kelly, author of the chapter on the 1930s era in the Law School Centenary History, writes: *It was not only the cricket teams to which these strange and unfortunate incidents happened. Lacrosse and football had them too. On one occasion a fire was lit in the compartment to clear up the mess; the police were waiting in Melbourne; law students were eminent.”*

The final photo I have found of my father's lacrosse career at University of Adelaide is significant. It shows him being chaired off the Jubilee Oval after Law has won the Boykett Cup against the Engineers.

Lacrosse was one of the main extra-curricular activities for many students in the 1930's. Pictured here in 1937 on the Jubilee Oval (where engineering buildings now stand) is the 1937 Law team in inter-faculty lacrosse. Standing: Cyril Nancarrow, Arnold Lemon, George Barnfield, Dick Harry (on Vic Ryan's shoulders), Duncan Menzies, Peter Kelly, Steve Carman, Jim Boucaut. Kneeling: Bob Ward, Rob Lake (left to right).



This was a moment of celebration, however also perhaps a farewell. Soon after, he left Adelaide to take up a position as Judge's Associate in Melbourne. He continued to play successfully with the MCC Lacrosse Club in first grade for two seasons, which is recorded in the Melbourne newspapers.

Postscript

I wish to add a personal postscript on what became of my father and two of the men in the photo above. These men, Duncan Menzies and Peter Kelly, were a part of both my father and mother's lives in different ways. Their intersecting stories go beyond lacrosse, however they should be told, because they are integral to what came before.

Duncan Menzies



Duncan Campbell Menzies, of Scots heritage, was a brilliant student, though not above hi-jinx. The Law School Centenary history recounts that he drove his car across the University footbridge to celebrate the end of exams. On completing his law degree in 1937 he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to attend Oxford, but instead sailed in early 1940 to the United Kingdom to join the Black Watch. He spent eight months in Tobruk in 1941 at the same time that my father was there. In mid 1942 he was sent to India to prepare for the expected Japanese invasion.

Soon after arriving in India, Menzies had a remarkable random encounter at the Raipur railway canteen with my mother, who had known him in Adelaide through her brother, Michael Brookman. She was living in India with her first husband who was employed in the Indian Civil Service. He gave her news and greetings from her brother, a law contemporary, whom he had recently seen in Egypt. Michael Brookman was killed shortly after at El Alamein.



Duncan Menzies in Baroda

In late 1942, Menzies enlisted with Orde Wingate's Chindits. Before he left for Burma, he stayed with my mother in Baroda over Christmas, leaving a letter and a case with her to be given to his parents if he failed to return. Fighting behind enemy lines, he was captured and executed by the Japanese in April 1943. My mother returned to Australia in 1944 and visited his parents with her mother, who wrote in her memoirs: *Phyll took Duncan Menzies' pitiful trunk of possessions to Mr and Mrs Menzies; they were so grateful for the happy Christmas he had spent in Baroda. Mrs Menzies was a courageous woman, but Mr Menzies was so fretted with grief and frustration at the death of his fine and brilliant son that he soon died – I really believe of a broken heart.*

The family later presented my grandmother with an inscribed copy of *Beyond the Chindwin*, an account by Menzies' Commanding Officer, Major Bernard Fergusson, of the first Burma expedition.

Peter Kelly

Peter Kelly, like Duncan Menzies, was an exceptional student. He was also the Assistant Secretary in the letter from the University official quoted above.



From a strong Roman Catholic family, Kelly left school in the Depression, winning a scholarship to study Law while working in the Public Service. His brother John - father of Paul Kelly who sings about cricket - also excelled at Law School, later establishing Kelly and Co, a leading Adelaide law firm. By contrast, Peter changed direction radically in his final year in 1938, making the startling and seemingly irrevocable decision to forego a legal career and join the Jesuits. He spent over thirty years in the priesthood and became an internationally renowned scholar and teacher. He was appointed Provincial for Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea in 1968. After an overseas study tour in 1973, he experienced a deep crisis of faith. He decided in 1975 to leave the Jesuits and, in his words, "began to look for work at 60".

He remained a close friend of my father and mother, particularly after the early death of his brother John in the late 1960s. In 1978, he published a book about his views on Roman Catholicism, and chose to marry in spite of formidable opposition from the Church in response to his published views and personal conduct. He joined the Adelaide University Law School, and later the Flinders University Law School, teaching Jurisprudence and Roman Law into his mid eighties.



Photo courtesy of Rostrevor College

Peter Kelly died in 2004, aged 91.

Richard Harry

Convinced that war was inevitable, my father joined the Army Reserve in 1939 before enlisting in the Army in Melbourne in May 1940. He became an officer, rising to the rank of Captain.



Richard Harry second from right, Melbourne 1939

He served for 15 months in the Middle East, based in the 8th Anti-aircraft Battery during the siege of Tobruk. After returning to Australia in March 1942, he was deployed in various locations across Australia, including the

Northern Territory. He suffered a nervous breakdown in the final year of the War and he was discharged from the Army in September 1945.



Tobruk 1941

Following rehabilitation in Melbourne, he met my mother, who had not returned with her first husband to India. They married in 1948. Following his appointment to a company secretary position in 1949, they returned to Adelaide, where they raised my two sisters and me.

He died in 1982 aged 68.

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