

TACKLING HISTORY

SHANGHAI RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB HONORS 1930S PLAYER

BY SIMON DRAKEFORD



Bill Rigg (front row, far right) lines up with the SRFC in Hong Kong in 1939

When I started researching the history of the original Shanghai Rugby Football Club (SRFC), I had no idea how long it would take or the treasures I would uncover. One of the most exciting finds was two original 1930s Shanghai rugby playing jerseys, generously donated to the modern SRFC by the original owner's two sons, John and Tony Rigg.

John was born in Shanghai in November 1941, and at the end of this month will be returning to the city to retrace the footsteps of his parents and to donate another archive item to the club: an original match program for the second game in Shanghai's tour to Hong Kong in February 1939.

His father, William 'Bill' Hyslop Brown Rigg, was born in Kirkcudbright, Scotland in 1907 to gentleman farming stock. He suffered badly from hay fever and so left the farm in the early 1920s to join a local bank. In the mid 1920s he moved to London to join the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank and was posted to HK in 1928. He played rugby for Hong Kong against Shanghai in 1933, moving to the latter in 1936.

At this time the rugby team in Shanghai was playing its highest standard of rugby against teams from the British military based in the city and the highly successful Fourth US Marines. Rigg was a regular player in the first team, his appearances culminating in a return visit to Hong Kong in 1939 to play for Shanghai against his old team and the Hong Kong United Services.

Rigg married his wife Felicity in 1939, and John was born two years later. In February 1943, the young parents and their toddler were placed in the Yu Yuen Road (now Yuyuan Lu) internment camp, where they remained until April 1945. They were then transferred to the Yangtzepoo (Yangshupu) site, before their release later in the year.

Bill Rigg continued his HSBC career in Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. He retired to Edinburgh in 1960 and died in 1978 while playing golf at the beautiful Kilspindie Golf Club, overlooking the Firth of Forth in Aberlady. The institution is reputed to be the 35th oldest golf club in the world, established in 1867 – the same year as the first Shanghai Football Club.

John's father was also a keen

and active member of the original Shanghai Scottish, a social group that reformed last year, which will be holding a dinner in honor of John and his father on Friday, April 26. In addition, John will be the guest of honor at the Yellow Sea Cup game between Shanghai and Seoul on Saturday, April 27 at the Club's Waigaoqiao fields, with the SRFC hosting a soiree.

The Yellow Sea Cup, now in its ninth year, was co-founded by myself, old China hand Mark Thomas and long-time Seoul resident Ted Gray in 2005. It is the modern-day equivalent of the original interport games – matches competed by teams from treaty ports in China – which were played by Shanghai Rugby Club between 1907 and 1949. Before the match, I'll be presenting a talk on the history of the interport rugby games between Shanghai and Hankow (present-day Wuhan) from 1921 to 1935.

// Simon Drakeford's presentation on the history of the interport rugby games is taking place April 27, 12pm and is followed by Shanghai vs Seoul at 2pm. Both are free. Shanghai Rugby Football Club, 2700 Zhangyang Bei Lu, by Wuzhou Dadao 上海瑞可碧橄榄球俱乐部, 张杨北路2700号, 近五洲大道. Nearest Metro Wuzhou Dadao on Line 6.

GETTING SHIRTY

Inspired by the playing shirt worn by William 'Bill' Hyslop Brown Rigg during the 1930s, Shanghai Tang is producing a collection of jerseys to commemorate the interport matches, the highlight of the region's sporting calendar in the first half of the 20th century.

Leading the collection is the Vintage Shanghai Rugby Shirt, as seen in the photo of the Shanghai Rugby Football Club taken during their visit to Hong Kong Football Club in 1939 (above), featuring the vintage five-clawed imperial dragon logo of the SRFC.



For each Shanghai rugby shirt sold, Shanghai Tang will also make a donation to the SRFC to help preserve and continue its cherished history. Other shirts in the collection include Hankow 1921, commemorating the first interport matches played after WWI in 1921 between Shanghai and Hankow.

// RMB1,330 from Shanghai Tang boutiques across Shanghai, as well as Shanghai Tang's online store at www.shanghaiatang.com