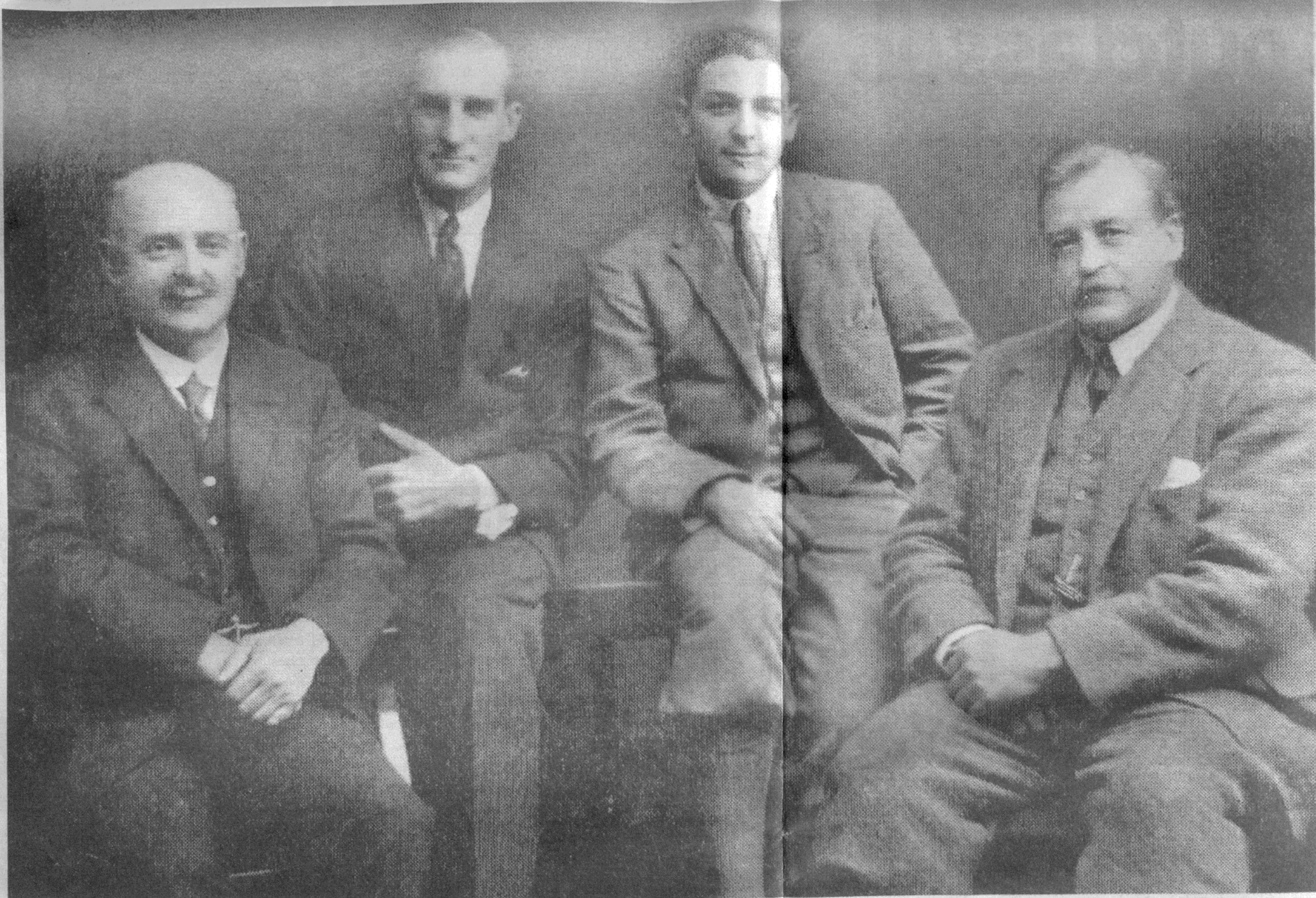


The Herald sweeps Britain to curling gold medal

Doug Gillon explains how a team of Scots have finally been honoured . . . 82 years on



GOLDEN MOMENT, AT LAST: the winning rink of WK Jackson (skip), TB Murray, second, L Jackson, lead, and Robin Welsh, third, above; and the medal, below. Main picture: CH Bann/Royal Caledonian Curling Club

BRITAIN'S official Olympic gold medal tally has risen by one today, thanks to a Herald investigation. The curling competition won in Chamonix, at the very first Winter Olympic Games in 1924, is believed by all Olympic historians, and numerous authorities including the British Olympic Association and Royal Caledonian Curling Club, to have been a demonstration event.

When curling finally appeared on the 1998 Winter Olympic programme, the International Olympic Committee stated: "In 1998 the Winter Olympic Games returned to Japan after 26 years. Snowboarding and curling debuted as official disciplines . . ."

The IOC headquarters in Lausanne now tells us, however, that this is incorrect.

"We consider curling as an official sport in 1924," said a spokesman for the IOC information management department. "It was in demonstration in 1928, but for the 'International Week of Winter Sports' all the winners of the events are considered as Olympics champions."

In 1926 the "Week of Winter Sports" was re-designated the inaugural Winter Olympic Games. That is when it was decided to create a separate distinct cycle for winter sports. Only summer games had been held previously, in which skating and ice hockey were included.

All four players were Scots, selected by the Royal Caledonian Curling Club: father and son Willie and Laurence Jackson, Robin Welsh, and Tom Murray. Each received a gold medal and certificate, but all died without being aware that what they had won was a full Olympic title. The IOC suggest that four other members of the British delegation, all Scots, may also have received gold medals, but

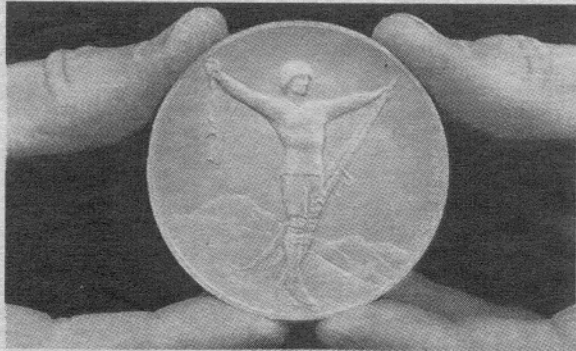
contemporary 1924 RCCC reports show that only the four named played for Britain.

However this UK title is not recorded in any Olympic histories. None of the many respected US and British Olympic authorities mention curling at that time as anything other than a demonstration event. The doyen of Olympic historians, Ian Buchanan, detailed a biography of every British Olympic champion, summer and winter, in every sport contested at every Olympics, including sports now discontinued. It is a benchmark work of prodigious effort and diligence, yet makes no mention of these four, or of curling at all.

The names recorded by the IOC included team leader Colonel Tom Robertson-Aikman, whose family owned Hamilton ice rink, and major DG Astley. The major ended up playing for the Swedes who overcame France in a play-off, finishing runners-up. So the major collected a bona fide Olympic silver, and if the IOC are correct, a gold one as well.

The Herald uncovered the untold curling history by accident, while researching the first Winter Olympics, which opened 82 years ago on Wednesday. The royal club's annual report of that year described how the Scots marched in La Grande Patinoire, the Chamonix outdoor rink, with union flags on their left arms, brooms carried over their right shoulders, rifle style, to chants of "Balais! Balais!" (brooms! brooms!). The Scots won with a total of 80 shots, conceding just 11.

Robin Welsh's son, also Robin, became secretary of the RCCC and of the International Curling Federation, the latter formed in 1966 with the aim of having the sport re-admitted to the Olympic movement. Achieving this goal paved the way for Rhona Martin to win the women's title in Salt Lake City four years ago.



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Robin Welsh Jr became one of curling's most respected historians, and he does record the fact that his father was in the winning rink in Chamonix, but the impact of the achievement was unknown even to him. He died, aged 86, in Edinburgh at the weekend. His son, Peter, who now has the medal, says he and his father, like everyone else, had believed it to have been a demonstration event. "I'll now look for the certificate which went with it," he said.

He said of his father: "I had been looking forward to telling him about the Olympic gold medal, but never had the chance."

The RCCC and BOA were astonished, but delighted at the revelation about the Olympic victory. "I am fascinated, and

amazed that huge authorities on the Olympics have not picked up on this," said the BOA chief executive, Simon Clegg. "I'm very grateful to The Herald. The history books will need to be re-written."

Indeed, this now officially becomes the first Winter Olympic gold ever won by Britain, formerly believed to be in ice hockey, in 1936.

The BOA's website shows the names of six Scots having won demonstration curling gold in 1924 (it omits the Jacksons, who played). The US Curling Association also records that in 1924, curling was a demonstration sport.

Colin Grahamslaw, chief executive of the RCCC, said, "We are now looking to clarify this with the BOA, to ensure that these

curlers get the recognition they deserve."

Robin Welsh Sr was a baillie of the City of Edinburgh. He played at third in Willie Jackson's Chamonix rink in 1924, but he skipped the Scottish team which won the world championship, featuring three men and one woman, the following year.

Until this elevation of the curling team, Britain's previous oldest Winter Olympic gold medallist was regarded as Carl Erhardt, who was 39 years and one day old when he played with the GB ice hockey team which won the 1936 Olympic gold in Garmish, in Germany. Welsh was 55 when he was in the winning rink.

Willie Jackson was slightly younger, at 53. He died in 1955. His son, Laurence, was the dominant Scottish skip in the years immediately after the Second World War.

In contrast to today, when British Olympic victories are spread across pages, ensuring a lifetime of fame for the victor, the win in Chamonix was reported with great restraint by the Glasgow Herald of 1924. The historic triumph merited just one paragraph beneath the headlines: Olympic Winter Sports, Britain Wins Curling.

Perhaps, this morning's revelations do much to restore some balance to an outstanding achievement.

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Death of curling great as father's glory is revealed

ROBIN WELSH, who for 26 years was secretary of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, and inaugural secretary of the International Curling Federation from 1966 to 1984, died on Friday in Edinburgh aged 86.

His name is perhaps the most illustrious in Scottish curling history, for his father, also Robin, was in the rink which won the Olympic curling title in 1924, revealed today as Britain's first Winter Olympic gold. His mother was a member of the rink which won the world title in 1925.

A noted administrator and curling author and historian, Robin Jr received an MBE in 1984 for his services to the sport. He played tennis for Scotland, was a single-figure handicap golfer, and played rugby for Watsonians. He saw wartime service in landing craft and destroyers, being torpedoed and blown up by a mine.

He is survived by two sons, Peter and Hugo, and six grandchildren. His funeral on Friday, at Mortonhall crematorium, Edinburgh, is at noon.