



IVAN LAING, Hawick, caps 2, cap number 50

Ivan laing was born on 18th August 1885 in Hawick. His parents were John Turnbull Laing, a tweed manufacturer, and Anna Thomson Drummond. He was the third of their four sons. Their home Springbank would later become the Haig Maternity Hospital for the town.

The brothers were schooled at home by a governess and then Ivan then went to New College, Eastbourne.

Ivan excelled at many sports. He was a Scotland standard swimmer, mentioned often in the local press winning handicap races. Laing is mentioned as one of 93 members of Hawick Golf Club that had served their country in WW1. In the summer he was a frequent tennis player often partnering fellow hockey player R.H. Dodds. During the winter he was a wing three quarter for Hawick, scoring tries on a regular basis. He was certainly talented enough as a rugby player to play in the Hawick first XV at the same time as his older brother George Laing who was captain in 1909-10 and 1910-11. However, hockey was his main passion. He played hockey from as early as 1904, playing for Hawick men, Teviotdale mixed and later Melrose men's teams. Laing's great claim to fame is that he scored the first ever goal in Olympic history. The tournament was played in London with teams from each of the home nations plus Germany and France.

One of the tallest tales in hockey folklore surrounds how Ivan came to be playing for Scotland that day. It is claimed that Scotland were travelling to London by train but were a man short. Dr Norman Stevenson, the Scotland captain spotted Laing when the train stopped at Hawick and asked if he fancied a game. Allegedly Laing ran home, picked up his kit and jumped on the train. While a great story, Laing was named in the original Scotland squad published on 22nd September 1908. Like all tall stories, there may be some underlying truth in the story. The original 16 man squad seems to have a number of call offs in the month running up to the tournament and it may well be that Stevenson may well have joked when he saw Laing waiting at the station.

Scotland's first game was against Germany, played at the White City Stadium, London on 29th October 1908. Laing scored within five minutes, the first of Scotland's goals in a 4-0 victory. The next day they lost 6-1 to England in the semi-final, who went on to win the tournament. The losing semi finalists, Wales and

Scotland decided not to bother playing a Bronze medal play off and were both awarded medals.

Those were Laing's only caps for Scotland. He made the final trial in January 1909 but was criticised in the press for his poor finishing and didn't make the team. It is perhaps not a coincidence that his failure to get more hockey caps resulted in him devoting more of his time to playing rugby. However by early 1912 he was once again featured in a final trial for the hockey team, but again without further caps.

In June 1915, Laing volunteered for the army, joining the 28th County of London Battalion (The Artists Rifles). This unit was part of the pre war Territorial Force and was very popular with well-to-do young men before the war. By October 1915 Laing had been commissioned and transferred to the Coldstream Guards where his oldest brother Walter was already an officer.

Laing went to France on active service in March 1916. His first major battle was on 15th September 1916 at Ginchy, part of the Battle of the Somme. The Guard's Division took heavy casualties in taking their objectives. On the 17th September the battalion war diary records that the commanding officer Lt Ivan Laing marched the surviving 242 other ranks to Bernafay Wood for a hot meal. The battalion's casualties were over 450 killed, missing or wounded. Lieutenant (acting Captain) Laing was awarded a Military Cross for his action in leading the battalion for 2 days.

Ivan seems to have lived a fairly charmed life, serving with the Coldstream Guards right through the Third Battle of Ypres (also known as Passchendaele) without serious injury.

On the 30th November, during the Battle of Cambrai, a German counter attack captured the village of Gouzeacourt. The Guards Division was quickly mobilised with orders to retake the village. This they successfully did by 1.30pm. The orders were to continue the advance towards Quentin Ridge. It was during this attack that Ivan laing was killed.

Ivan is buried at Metz en Couture Communal Cemetery British Extension.

Sources:

Scotland's People

British Newspaper Archive

Ancestry

Scottish Hockey Records

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Long Long Trail website

Olympedia website