



**James Morrison, Partick Police.**

**Double World Record Holder, and  
“a fit successor to . . . Donald Dinnie”**

On Saturday 15 June 1901, Jim Morrison earned himself the title of World Record Holder for the 16lb Hammer Throw when he defeated the old record by 1ft 6½ins in front of a crowd of 5,000 at the Vale of Leven Highland Games; he threw 120ft 7ins. Thirteen days later at the Drumblair Highland Games he set another World Record, this time for Throwing the 56lb Weight by Ring, 7ins further than the previous record, and in doing so defeated the holder (George Hardy Johnstone) into 2nd place; Morrison’s new World Record was 29ft 8ins. Prior to Morrison’s success Johnstone had also been the World Record holder in the Hammer. During the 1900-1901 seasons Jim Morrison was described as “undoubtedly, Heavy-Weight Champion of Scotland”; indeed he had been awarded the silver belt for the *Championship of Scotland* in 1901. By 1906 he had won over 200 prizes for Caber Tossing alone, and was also a highly successful Hammer thrower and wrestler. His athletic career spanned nineteen years, in fourteen of which he was one of the finest Heavy Athletes in Scotland and, indeed, the world, and in 1905 he was described as “a fit successor to . . . Donald Dinnie.” There can be no greater praise for any heavy athlete nor, indeed, for any athlete in any event, at any time.

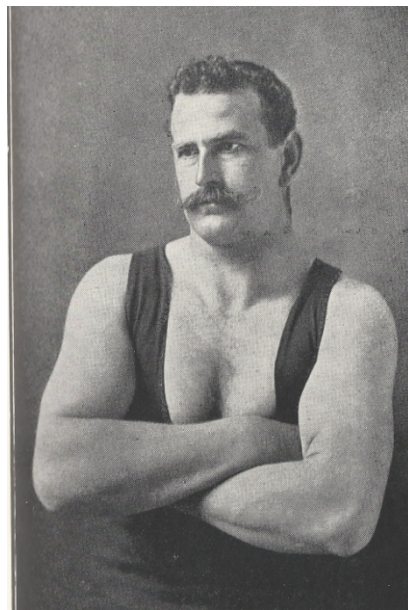
And yet, Jim Morrison’s athletic story is not well known, partly because William McCombie Smith’s *The Athletes and Athletic Sports of Scotland* was written in 1891, before Jim Morrison came on the scene and, even in 1901, when Charles Donaldson wrote *Men of Muscle*, Jim Morrison’s best years still lay ahead of him.

To help understand the athletic life of James Morrison I began by accumulating a list of his results in contemporary newspapers, and combined them with the details of his early years given by Charles Morrison. The task proved far more time-consuming than I had anticipated partly because of the length of his career but also because of the large number of competitions he managed to pack into each year. Because it is based largely on newspaper reports, my list must reflect a certain unreliability common to all newspapers. Different newspaper editors faced different problems, some, usually the local ones, listed all the officials, the subscribers, and the important spectators, as well as all the names of all the winners, runners up, thirds and fourths in every one of scores of events, from races for young boys and girls, competitions for old men, and sack races and even pillow fights, presumably on the grounds that anyone whose name was mentioned was likely to buy a copy. Other editors had a shortage of space, so kept the report of an athletic meeting brief, reported only winners, and not even all of those. Consequently, my catalogue is far from complete; nevertheless, I have found details of 274 Highland Games in which he competed over a 19 year career, in which he competed in 774 individual events - the real number of Games and events is likely, however, to be much higher.

John James Miller wrote in 1906 that James Morrison was known to his intimates as *Jim*, but he entered his competitions as *James*, or *J. Morrison*, and his results were reported that way, with a few calling him *Jas Morrison*; and it was as James Morrison that he became known throughout Scotland, and it was as James Morrison that he became famous, so that is how I will refer to him here.

James Morrison was born on 7th July 1874 on a farm in Drumore, Killearn, Stirlingshire. From infancy he was familiar with the labours of the farm and of the sports that men followed: lifting heavy weights, and throwing them. He learned to throw the hammer and putt the stone, and won prizes as a boy at wrestling.

In October 1894, at the age of 20, he left the farm and went to Glasgow and joined the Dunbartonshire Police Force and was stationed at Clydebank; and it was here that his sporting career began, winning the Cumberland-Style Wrestling at the Clydebank Sports in 1895. He left the police force shortly after, however, and turned to labouring, and worked for a while as a blacksmith, but he seems to have been based in the Milngavie area, just 6 miles north-west of Glasgow city centre. Here, in 1896, James Morrison entered the Hammer Throw in the Milngavie Sports, and although he didn't do very well, indeed, one observer described him as "very ordinary", he did have something about him; maybe it was his build, or maybe, his application, or maybe it was his calmness. In later years, many were to talk of his calmness in competition. He also drew a lot of admiring looks, and one man described him as being "the most handsome man who ever wore a kilt."



A new promising thrower in and around Glasgow was not going to go unnoticed, particularly by William Campbell, the Chief Constable of the Partick Borough Police, and in 1897 James Morrison was recruited as a constable in Partick.

Police forces all over Britain were embracing sport as a way of motivating their men, keeping them fit, inspiring respect and admiration from the public, and as a way of publically showing off their forces. Inter-force competition had become an important part of a force's identity, not least in Glasgow where there was fierce rivalry between the Glasgow City, Govan, and Partick police forces. Policemen were by their nature big men, and in Scotland the sports they favoured were based on

strength, muscle, and size. Each force had its own Sports Day, and there were many inter-force sports.

Tug-of-War was a particular focus for competition; Glasgow, Govan, and Partick all had excellent teams. Partick's tug-of-war team had a mean height of 6ft 1in, a mean weight of 14½ stone, and were on average 26 years old. The tallest was 6ft 2¾ins, and the heaviest, 17st 5lbs, and they wore blue and white vertically striped loose shirts, blue knickers and stockings, which was the same as Partick Thistle's kit up to 1888, when Partick Thistle gave up the blue and white stripes and the blue socks; the Partick Borough Police, however, stuck with them, perhaps as a visible sign that they identified with the people they policed, and knowing that many traditionalists disliked the kit change.

To understand James Morrison's story it is useful to know a little about the various police forces in and around Glasgow in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the 20th; but it is *essential* to know about William Campbell, Chief Constable of the Partick Borough Police Force, for it was Chief Constable Campbell who made James Morrison's athletic life possible, and changed his life.

### **William Campbell.**

William Campbell was born in Cawdor, Nairnshire, 12 miles north-east of Inverness on 1st January 1849, so was only 37 when, as Chief Constable, he recruited James Morrison to the Partick Borough Constabulary. William Campbell had had a rudimentary education, and very little of even that, having left the Free Church School at Nairn when he was only 11, and after that managed only one session at the Inverness Academy. Reluctant to settle into the office job his parents had arranged for him, or in any of the apprenticeships they had hoped for, William Campbell worked for twelve years on various farms around Nairnshire, Moray and Inverness until he married. This was his ideal life - a physical, outdoor life, where one could pit oneself every day against the elements, or against oneself, or against the other workers. This was the world out of which the Highland sports had grown; heaving, lifting, throwing, pulling, would be ritually reproduced in tossing the caber, putting the stone, throwing the 56lb weight, throwing the hammer, and tug-of-war. The work on the farms and in the woods morphed into the sports of the various Highland Games, Sports, and Gatherings that had taken root in so many communities in the Highlands, and were practised from May to September virtually everywhere.

Every boy, youth and able-bodied man competed in his local Games, and then would travel to nearby or neighbouring ones in the weeks before or after it. This was the greatest sporting culture for the Heavy events that the world had ever seen. There were countless Highland Games, Sports, and Gatherings in the Highlands; many small and very local, others larger, and some enormous; and their popularity spread wherever Highlanders went; and for a variety of economic and cultural reasons Highlanders left the Highland in droves and went all over Scotland, and to America and Canada and elsewhere, looking for work and a better future, but also carrying with them their love of their sporting culture. William Campbell was no different; when he left the Highlands he took with him his youthful memories of the annual Nairn Highland Games, and a boyish hero-worship of Kenneth McRae, a local man, and such legendary, awe-inspiring men as Donald Dinnie, James Fleming, and William McCombie-Smith.

What singled William Campbell out when he left the Highlands was his ambition, his willingness to work hard, his single-minded determination and strength of character, and an engaging personality that was able to inspire others; and all these personal qualities were combined with a passion for the Highland sports, a passion that was exceptional even for a Highlander.

In 1873, at the age of 24, William Campbell went more than a hundred miles south, and enrolled in the Forfarshire Constabulary, where he stayed for two years. When he was 26 (1875), he moved across the country and joined the Ayrshire Constabulary, where he was promoted to Sergeant in 1879. Two years later (in 1881), at the age of 32, he secured the post of Office Lieutenant in the Govan Burgh Constabulary, and so moved to Glasgow, and stayed there for seven highly successful years. His success came in part from his love (and expertise) of the various Highland sports and it was the rivalry between the various Glasgow Police Burghs that that gave him his big opportunity. One of his first achievements was to form the *Govan Police Athletic Club*, in which he began to work personally with his fellow policeman-athletes, instilling in them the need for “systematic practice and thorough application”. In these sessions he was said to train as hard as any of the men and to be “quite as capable as most of them”. That was no small claim, for within a few years the athletes of Govan Burgh Constabulary were not only the best in Glasgow but among of the best in Scotland. The list of their successes is enormous and, in 1884 at the Glasgow Police Sports at Cathkin Park, athletes from the Govan Police finished 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the Hammer throw, with all three throwing over 100ft, and the winner throwing 111ft. By this time, the tug-of-war team, organised and personally tutored by Campbell, had become virtually unbeatable. He knew every athlete, and it was said that, even 20 years later, he was able to remember every detail of their performances, even down to the distances of their best practice throws and putts. As an encourager, inspirer, motivator and facilitator William Campbell was unsurpassed but, curiously perhaps, he did not compete, except once. It was said that he was on holiday in West Kilbride in 1884 at the same time as their annual sports, went to watch them and was somehow inveigled into competing in them, winning the hammer throw and coming 2nd in putting the ball; so, William Campbell was a hammer thrower and shot putter.

Although William Campbell was said to be an “unwearying guide, philosopher and friend of the club” [i.e., *Govan Police Athletic Club*], in some people’s eyes this made him too close to the men. After ten years at Govan, he found himself acting superintendant for seven months but, when the appointment had to be ratified to convert it into a permanent post, the committee was evenly split, and he lost the position on the casting vote of the chairman.

Despite his enormous success at Govan, he had to leave and a superintendant’s post (second in command to the Chief Constable) was soon offered him (in 1888) at Broughty Ferry, a burgh of Dundee, where he stayed for three-and-a-half years, until Partick Burgh Constabulary offered him the post of Chief Constable, a post he took up in April 1892. He was 43.

### **William Campbell and the Partick Burgh Constabulary**

Chief Constable William Campbell set out almost at once to make the Partick Force better, athletically, than the Govan force. It would not be easy, the Partick Constabulary was a smaller force, numerically, by a third than the Govan Constabulary and the Govan policeman-athletes had more experience, having been recruited and trained, in the main, by Campbell himself some years earlier. The Partick constables, on the other hand, were younger and perhaps the famed Govan

constables-athletes had already seen their best days? In 1895 the mean age of the Govan constables was 35 whereas the Partick constables were, on average, six years younger, and Chief Constable Campbell's strategy can be clearly seen by the age and height of his latest eight recruits, who, on average, were only 23 and averaged 6ft 2½ins in height, so reinforcing the youth and size of his force.

But he also set about changing the environment in which the athlete-constables would work, and in 1893 Chief Constable Campbell created the *Partick Police Athletic Club*. He also began to lay plans for the construction of a gymnasium, for which he had no money, so he began to put out feelers to see whether he could raise £1,000 by subscription from the people of Partick.



**Chief Constable William Campbell**

There was more to it even than that, however. There seems to have always been talk of unifying the Glasgow Police Forces but, in 1893, only a year after William Campbell became Chief of Police, the talk reached a critical point, with discussions taking place about the unification of the city as a whole, and the Glasgow City Boundaries Committee considered the matter in 1894. Could William Campbell lose his Chief Constable title almost as soon as he had got it? Partick was by far the smallest of the Glasgow burghs and, if they were subsumed into a bigger Glasgow-wide force, they would in effect be swallowed up by it.

The people of the burghs didn't like the idea at all, fearing a loss of identity and believing that in a bigger organisation they would be such junior partners that no-one would ever be fighting their corner. The mood in the Partick Burgh Police, therefore, was that they were fighting for the independence of Partick, fighting for publicity, recognition and status, and to do so they needed to punch above their weight. Perhaps with greater profile, and with the people of Partick behind them, Partick could somehow preserve their independence. In 1896, Chief Constable Campbell changed the shift system of the police which resulted in them working an hour less per shift; that brought all the constables onto his side. And in 1897 when their "well equipped" Gymnasium was finally opened, Chief Constable Campbell was able to announce that it would also be available to "the young men and young ladies" of Partick. Such a gift guaranteed that the people of Partick were now on his side too. The Partick people and their police wanted to keep Partick independent of Glasgow, and feared the anonymity that would result if they didn't, and so every Partick success was seen by the people of Partick as a bugle call telling the world that they were there, independent and proud.

The Partick Police Force and the constables who competed for it, headed by their Chief Constable, were on a mission, every victory in a sporting event had a significance beyond the mere winning of a competition; it was raising the profile of Partick and adding to its significance. But all the Glasgow police forces were engaged in their own versions of this battle; Charles Donaldson (*Men of Muscle*) congratulated all the officials of all three of the Glasgow police forces (Govan, Partick, and the City of Glasgow) for “the inestimable privileges which the men who are inclined to athletics enjoy”, for the constables in all three forces were not merely policemen who enjoyed their sport, they had a distinct edge over everyone else, because of the support and time they were given. Donaldson wrote that no obstacle barred the way of a Govan, Glasgow or Partick policeman, and “the policeman who is an athlete worthy of the name is never denied the liberty to attend any Highland gathering at a reasonable distance.” Certainly, no Partick policeman-athlete ever was.

To have William Campbell as your Chief Constable was an enormous bonus for any athlete-policeman. He knew every athlete, directly oversaw their training, and knew every other athlete and competition on the circuit. James Morrison was personally recruited by William Campbell because he was, big, strong, and a thrower. In his time at Partick, William Campbell also held the posts of Chairman of the Nairnshire Association, and so was a true Highlander in Glasgow, was Chairman of the Chief Constables Club, and so was a force to be reckoned with in police circles, and was President of the Scottish Professional Athletes’ Association; a perfect constellation of influences to support the policeman-athletes in his care. When he recruited James Morrison, he also recruited a man of 6ft 6½ins, making him the tallest policeman in Scotland; there was no doubting Chief Constable William Campbell’s intent; Partick Police were to be the leading force in Scotland, and he recruited the biggest and best athletes he could find, and did everything to support their success.

### **James Morrison joins Partick Police**

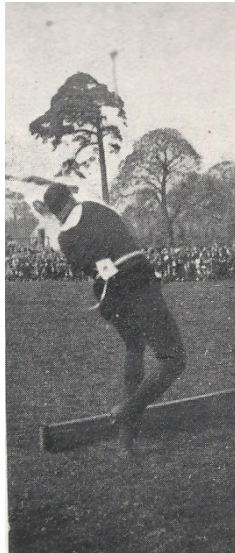
So, under his enthusiastic and influential Chief Constable, James Morrison joined the Partick constabulary at a time they had a growing *Partick Police Athletic Club*, a new state of the art gymnasium, public support, and positive and optimistic constables pleased with their new timetables. Their annual Sports meeting was making its mark too, and attracted such stars as A.R. Downer and Billy Cross, who ran a 120yds match in 1896 (Downer won by a yard in even time). So successful did those sports become that they produced gate receipts five times larger than just a few years earlier. Partick Police were the coming men and they knew it.

It is believed that James Morrison joined the Partick Constabulary in 1897 and this proved to be his first big athletic year, in which he competed in at least eight different Highland Games, specialising in Throwing the Hammer and Tossing the Caber, but curiously he did not compete for Partick Police; he competed for Drymen, a small community about 18 miles north of Glasgow, and 12 miles north of Milngavie. Perhaps he was serving a sort of probation, or needed to serve a period of eligibility, or maybe he couldn’t get in the Partick team! The Partick Police already had James Milne, a Caber specialist who also regularly threw the 16lb hammer over 100ft, and Alexander McNair, a regular 40ft putter. It must have been around this time that James Morrison moved and went to live in Scotstoun; near enough to Partick, but perhaps he thought that living where you work as a policeman was not the best thing to do.

James Morrison first appeared representing the Partick Police in May 1898 at Galston, and so began an extraordinary athletic career that would last till 1913, and would take him all over Scotland earning him the accolade of being one of Scotland’s greatest all round athletes. One of his early

trademarks was that he competed in bright red tights; this was an echo of the traditional Partick Thistle strip which had bright red socks. The club tried to change them in 1887 but the public outcry was so great they reinstated them the next season; by wearing bright red tights James Morrison was identifying with the people of Partick. It would do him no harm on the beat.

Donaldson wrote that James Morrison practised “more than he competed” in 1897, his first year as a policeman, and there is no reason to doubt that; nevertheless, he did go to at least eight Games. Donaldson also reports that one of the spurs that drove him to practice was his hammer-throw



**James Morrison Throwing the 16lb Hammer  
at the *Galston Highland Games* in 1901.  
Presumably, wearing his red tights!**

of 99ft 8ins at Balfron that was “much below . . . his ambition”; what Donaldson fails to tell us, however, is that prior to that performance at Balfron he had thrown 102ft 8 ins at Kirkintilloch, and that five weeks later, he threw 103ft 4ins. So, by the end of the 1897 season (at the age of 24) James Morrison was already a first class hammer thrower, with at least two 100ft+ throws under his belt.

If we take the start of his athletic career to be 1896 when he was 22, it continued for 18 years, ending in August 1913, when he was 39. This is a long athletic career by any standards but, when analysing his results, what stands out is not just the standard he consistently achieved, nor his all-round ability, it is the sheer volume of competitions. Charles Donaldson reported that in 1900 alone, James Morrison

competed 33 times with the hammer, out of that he has 28 firsts and five seconds, while with the caber, out of 22 competitions he has won 16 times, tied once, and was second on five occasions.

I have found details (none complete, sadly) of 22 of them - in 10 there was no caber event, so, if Donaldson is right, James Morrison must have taken part in at least 32 Games that season. If, as Donaldson reports, he won 28 of his hammer competitions, and 16 of his caber competitions, he would have accumulated a significant amount of prize money. But the results show that he also Putt the Ball or Stone (sometimes, both the *Heavy* and the *Light* Ball/Stone in a single Games); indeed, he competed in far more putting events than caber events. My records show that he competed in at

least 26 putting events in 18 Games, and won 10 of them. He also competed in a Throwing the 56lb Weight competition, and a wrestling competition, in which he was 3rd and 2nd respectively. But the actual figure must have been higher.

From Donaldson's reports and an analysis of the contemporary newspaper reports, we can make some informed estimates about the 1900 season. To have competed in as many competitions as Donaldson reports and won as many prizes, we can estimate all the events he competed in that season

Throwing the Hammer	33 events
Tossing the Caber	22
Putting the Stone/Ball	39
Throwing 56lb Weight	1
Wrestling, Cumberland Style	<u>3</u>
	98

We can break that down into finishing positions -

	events	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Throwing the Hammer	33	28	5		
Tossing the Caber	22	17	5		
Putting the Stone/Ball	39	17	8	9	5
Throwing 56lb Weight	1			1	
Wrestling, Cumberland Style	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>			
	98	65	18	10	5

So, James Morrison won nearly 85% of his hammer competitions and two-thirds of *all* his competitions; he was clearly a very good technical hammer thrower, and a good competitor.

At the Kinross highland Games in July the prize structure was as follows - 1st £3; 2nd £2; 3rd £1; 4th 10/-. It was typical of the various Games and Gatherings, and we can use it to estimate James Morrison's winnings for the year, which were as follows -

	events	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Throwing the Hammer	33	£84	£10			£94
Tossing the Caber	22	£51	£10			£61
Putting the Stone/Ball	39	£51	£16	£9	£1.10/-	£77.10/-
Throwing 56lb Weight	1			£1		£ 1
Wrestling, Cumberland Style	<u>3</u>	<u>£9</u>				£ 9
	98	£195	£36	£10	£1.10/-	<u>£242.10/-</u>

In 1896 when he was first recruited, the average salary for a constable in Glasgow Burgh Police Force was £75 12 shillings and 6 pence, and probably rose to £81. 9 shillings in 1900. £81. 9 shillings a year had an equivalent income value in 2015 as £30,690; the income value of £242 10 shillings would be £91,380, so, in 1900, James Morrison's Highland Games prize-money earned him three times more



than his annual police salary, and, of course, won in half the time (i.e., May-September). Incidentally, the one shilling entrance fee would have the purchasing power of less than £5 in 2017. (<https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue>).

By the age of 26, James Morrison was a vary accomplished Highland Games athlete, and a first class Hammer thrower in particular, and was making a very good living indeed from his efforts. 1901, when he was 27, was even better. This was the year of his World Record 120ft 7ins 16lb Hammer Throw in the middle of June, and his 29ft 8ins World Record for Throwing the 56lb by Ring, at the end of June. Also at the end of June, at the Drumblair Highland Games at Fergie, Aberdeenshire, James Morrison was awarded the silver medal for gaining most points in the Heavy Competitions, and was awarded the silver belt for the *Championship of Scotland*, awarded to the best all-round athlete in Scotland.

John James Miller wrote, "During the seasons 1900-1901 he [James Morrison] was undoubtedly Heavy-Weight Champion of Scotland, and the man who holds that honour at any time is not far removed from having a valid claim on the fuller title - champion of the world." John James Miller described him as follows -

He is built on lines elastic enough to be an artist's model. He stands just 6 feet in his stockings, measures 46 inches round the chest, 27 inches round the thigh, wears an 18-inch collar, and weighs a trifle over 16 stones [224lbs], stripped. He is one of the most handsome men who ever donned a kilt.

For those who think in metric units, James Morrison was 1.83m tall, had a 1.17m chest, a 68.58cm thigh, was 45.72cms around the neck, and weighed 101.6kg - not a big man by 21st century standards, but well-built, athletic, strong, and 'elastic', so was clearly built for the job as a Highland Games athlete; and a job it certainly was. For the five months from May to the end of September, James Morrison went from one Highland Games to another, day after day, week after week, year after year. In June 1906 John James Miller wrote that James Morrison had "won over 200 prizes for caber-tossing alone", but what is impressive here is not only the impressive number of prizes he won in a relatively short period of time but what it reveals about the number of Highland Games he must have taken part in. In this period I have been able to discover 147 Highland Games in which he competed, in which he won a Caber prize in 89, far short of Miller's number. To have secured anything like 200 prizes for Tossing the Caber, James Morrison must have competed in a vast number of Highland Games, for the published results show that in well over a third of Games in which he competed, he *didn't* win a Caber prize (i.e., Games in which there was not a Caber competition). On this basis we would have to conclude that he competed in between 205 and 255 Highland Games in a little over 8 seasons! To achieve that, he was almost constantly on the road in the summer, competing. We can see from the results that he often arranged his competitions in blocks; for example, in one year he competed on the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 25th of July in Forfar, Blargowrie, Errol, and at the Abertyne Highland Games, and he travelled from one to the other, not going back to Glasgow or Milngavie every night in between. With only one day's break he also competed at Brechin on the 27th. Earlier in the same month, on 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th, he had competed at the Highland Games in Dunfermline, Kirkaldy, Thornton, Dunning and the Wayside Flower Lodge (with two meetings on the same day on Saturday 20th), and so was away from home for nearly the whole month. Staying locally would have produced costs (food and accommodation) but reduced the wear and tear of travelling. Similarly, it is inconceivable that he returned home

after competing in Lochaber on 27th August and then travelled to Birnam in Perthshire to compete the next day. He, and his fellow athletes, must have had inexpensive hotels, guest-houses or b&bs that they knew and returned to year after year, getting to know the owners and landladies, just as we hear of the music hall acts moving from lodgings to lodgings on their regular circuits. No information has survived about that however.

We should not imagine James Morrison travelling from one Highland Games to another on his own; there was always a small contingent of Partick policeman-athletes who travelled too, not to mention various others. All of this was done with Chief Constable Campbell's blessing; indeed, he was sometimes an official at one or more of the events. Were the athletes excused some of their usual duties in the summer in exchange for a percentage of their winnings? Did he simply give them the time off? Did they work extra time in the winter to free themselves up in the summer? In any event they had a clear advantage over other athletes in as much as they seem to have had all the time they needed from work, whilst still earning a salary in their full-time job and earning substantial extra money as well.

James Morrison's Highland Games career continued undiminished until 1912, though no two years were the same, and he sometimes specialised in one event more than another. For example, in 1901 he took part in a lot of wrestling competitions, and at the end of the Highland Games season he even competed in a wrestling show at the Aberdeen *Tivoli Theatre*. He was billed to wrestle against George M. Ross and when Ross failed to "put down" his opponent in 15 minutes, James Morrison won £10 [equivalent to labour earnings of £3,716 in 2015]; a good night's work. He wrestled G. Lurich, the Græco-Roman Russian Champion, at Ibrox, Glasgow, in 1904, but lost after a hard 15 minute bout, and in 1905 he wrestled three styles (Catch-a-Catch-Can, Cumberland Style, and Græco-Roman Style) against Alik Munro of Govan for £100 at Stranraer; they were all-square after the first two styles, but Munro won the deciding Græco-Roman bout after 15 minutes, even though the referee had to cautioned him for a show of temper. In May 1907 he wrestled against the famous George Hackenschmidt, the Russian Lion, at the *Lyceum Theatre*, in Govan. It was a Catch-as-Catch-can Exhibition in which Hackenschmidt was given ten minutes to throw James Morrison. He failed, and so Morrison won another £10.

James Morrison was a Heavy Athlete, i.e., he was primarily a thrower, and in Scotland that meant Tossing the Caber, Putting the Shot, and Throwing the Hammer. It also meant on occasions Throwing the 28lb Weight, and Throwing the 56lb Weight for distance and for height, as well as wrestling. But it was Throwing the Hammer that really defined him - he entered more Hammer Throwing competitions than anything event, and secured a higher percentage of victories in the Hammer Throw than in any other event.

For those unfamiliar with the Highland Games of this time a few words of introduction may be needed. In the 1790s Captain Barclay's uncle regaled him with stories of the men who lifted heavy stones, and threw them great distances; it was a tradition stretching back many generations, even then. In James Morrison's time, a century or more later, some Highland Games were held on recreation grounds, and even football pitches, but, for most, they were still held on the traditional fields where they had been held for generations. Just fields, but the locals knew every corner of them, how they undulated, how the drainage might be better in one spot rather than another. How even the turf might differ here and there, and the local athletes used these minute pieces of local knowledge when taking on any incomers. When imagining these field we have to forget everything

we know about 20th or 21st century athletics arenas; here there were no smooth throwing circles and carefully measured arcs, no well dug-over sand-filled pits for the long jumpers, no huge mattress-like landing areas for the high jumpers and pole vaulters, no meticulously levelled lanes for the sprinters to skim over. For the throwers, a board was pegged into the ground, behind which the throwers had to stay, and they were allowed a certain distance behind it. After the competition, the board was taken up and the throwing area was just like any other piece of grass again. The great athletes who competed in these famous Games just ran, jumped, threw, and vaulted in a simple grass field. One week before the Games the field was just a field, like any other field, and, one week after, it would be just a field again waiting for its time to come again next year. And yet 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 and even 50,000 would gather there each year to see the sports; they were the highlight of the local year, and the culmination of twelve-months of work by local organisers and committees, raising money and arranging the events and taking the entries, and the thousand other tasks that go with running a successful Games, all the time worrying about the weather. Many, many reports complain of continuous, lashing rain.

If the old, traditional field waited apparently anonymously from one year to the next, so did the implements. The stones that were putt, the hammers that were thrown, stayed there for the next year, for every venue had its own, often unique, implements. This added to the bias in favour of the



**James Morrison at the Rothienorman Highland Gathering in 1912**

local men who knew the local implements, their weight, shape and balance, and they knew that the incomers would not know them as intimately. In a sense, the Highland Games and the events that comprised them were a sort of concept; at all the Games, the men threw, ran, jumped, wrestled, danced, and piped, but no two Games were exactly alike. Take the Shot Putt, which was seldom called that in Scotland; when James Morrison travelled to a Highland Games venue he could be faced with competition called *Putting the Ball*, or *Putting the Stone*. The ball would be made of iron, and could be *Light* or *Heavy*, with the *Light Ball* usually being 16lbs, and the *Heavy Stone*, 22lbs, but not always. The *Light Ball* could be under 14 lbs (as at the *Plains Games*), and the *Heavy Ball* could be as light as 20¼lbs (as at the *Northern Meeting* at Inverness) or as heavy as 25lbs (as at the *Strathallan Games* in 1900), or it could be 24lbs 4¼ozs (as at *Strathallan* in 1903), or 24lbs 12ozs as at *Aboyne* in 1900). But at least they were all spherical; the stones weren't. As with the *Light Ball*, the *Light Stone* would also be 16lbs at most venues but, as its name suggests, it was made of stone, and different stones had different densities and sizes, and even shapes, even if their weight was the

same. At Braemar, the stone was described as the *Braemar All-Comers' Stone*, but no weight was given. Very occasionally, the event was called Putting the Shot, (as at *Pitlochry*) but when that was weighed it was found to be too heavy.

The hammer throw was just as individual, with different competitions having *Light Hammers* and *Heavy Hammers*, *Sledge Hammers*, and just *Hammers* of unknown weight. Knowing the weight of the Stone/Ball at any given Games was no guarantee that the same description applied to the Hammer. For example, at the Aboyne Highland Games the *Heavy Stone* was sometimes reported to be 22lbs, and sometimes 24¾lbs, but the *Heavy Hammer* was 24lbs; the *Light Stone* and *Light Hammer*, however, were both 16lbs. At Dunecht, however, the *Light Hammer* was 17lbs. A Hammer thrower on the Highland games circuit had to be extremely versatile, throwing different weights even on the same day, but over the space of his career, James Morrison threw hammers that weighed under 14lbs, 16lbs, 17lbs, 17lbs 4ozs, 18lbs, 20lbs, 21lbs, 21¾lbs, 22lbs, 24lbs and 24¾lbs. All, however, had solid, wooden shafts, which was increasingly out of step with the amateur sport of athletics who had abandoned them in favour of wire.

After his outstanding 1901 season James Morrison settled into a career of steady excellence, competing in an extraordinary number of Games per year and maintaining a very high standard in virtually all of them, but new major competition had arrived in the shape of A.A. Cameron, from Inverness, who was also spotted by Chief Constable Campbell and was recruited to the Partick force. He was three years younger, and bigger and stronger than James Morrison, but not as quick; but A.A. Cameron was to become one of the greatest Scottish heavy athletes of all time and, when they competed against each other, A.A. Cameron denied James Morrison many 1st places; but they were colleagues and friends, and Morrison was praised for the way he encouraged the younger recruit, and helped him find his feet on the Highland Games circuit.

1903 was a relatively quiet year for James Morrison with his season finishing early, perhaps he was injured, but in 1904 he was back to his usual long, busy season. The picture below was taken at the Aberdeen Highland Games in 1904.



G.H. Johnstone, H. Nicholson, A.A. Cameron, and James Morrison

1905 was another successful year for him, winning the medal for being the most successful competitor at the *Dunecht Picnic and Games* in June - he won three events and was second in four; but James Morrison was as well established as one of Scotland's finest wrestlers as he was for being one of its finest throwers. In wrestling, too, he demonstrated his versatility, wrestling Cumberland & Westmorland Style, Catch-as Catch-Can, Græco-Roman, and a style variously described as Scots, and Scottish, and he even wrestled a style described as *Collar & Elbow*.

In 1906, 1907 and 1908 he continued along much the same lines, competing at the highest level, and consistently so at a very large number of competitions each year, and he is so well established and so widely recognised, almost as a fixture on the Highland Games circuit, that he is drawn into activities that were as much about crowd-pleasing as they were about athletics. For example, at the Cupar Highland Games he was one of the three celebrities who gave their names to tug-of-war teams (his team included wrestlers) - an event that brought fun and laughter to the arena. His name drew crowds, and we can see his name used to advertise a Highland Games event even though he eventually didn't turn up for it. But there was one break with his annual routine on August Bank Holiday Monday in 1908 when he went to London. A major Scottish event was planned for Stamford Bridge, and was billed as the *London Highland Gathering*, "The finest athletic programme ever seen", and "The grandest show ever seen in London"; and it was to feature "J. Morrison, one of the finest all-round athletes Scotland has ever produced". To get the most out of James Morrison the organisers did not let him enter the normal programme of events, but created a special event for him - the *Heavy-Weight Championship of Great Britain*, for which he and Alex Munro would compete, head to head, for a "valuable cup."

To put this into context, the Olympic Games had been held in London from 13-25 July, and so the Prize-Giving ceremony in which medals and diplomas were presented by Queen Alexandra and the Duchess of Westminster were very fresh in everyone's memory. August Bank Holiday Monday was on 3rd August, just nine days after the Queen had presented Pietro Dorando with a special gilded silver cup to recognise his bravery when not winning the Marathon. The *London Highland Gathering* was tied to the coat tails of the Olympic Games, but the Highland Games athletes had not competed in them - they were, of course, professionals, and so not eligible. Alex Munro, however, had competed, and won a bronze medal as part of one of Great Britain's Tug-of-War teams, there were three, and Munro was a member of the *London Metropolitan (K Division) Police Team*, that came in third, behind the *London City Police* who won the gold, and *Liverpool Police* who won silver. All competed as Great Britain, i.e., United Kingdom I, United Kingdom II, and United Kingdom III; The *London Metropolitan (K Division) Police Team* was United Kingdom III. Incidentally, the K Division team wore their normal duty boots but ones that were too shabby to be worn on normal street duty. Alex Munro was also Scottish Wrestling Champion in 1908 so was no mean opponent for James Morrison. James Morrison and Alexander Munro knew each other very well. Munro came originally from Sutherland and was brought up as a blacksmith but was recruited into the Partick police force by Chief Constable Campbell. Alex Munro had itchy feet however, and left the police to go back to blacksmithing, all the time competing in Highland Games competitions. To everyone's horror at Partick, he then joined the Govan Police Force, but his wanderlust led him to London where he joined the Metropolitan Police (K division), which was based in Stepney. So, this so-called *Heavy-Weight Championship of Great Britain* was to be decided by two Highland policemen who knew each other well, and who had competed against each other countless times; and both were at least in part the product of Chief Constable Campbell at Partick.

The *Heavy-Weight Championship of Great Britain* was to be decided over seven events, with the number of victories deciding the championship. It started with *Tossing the Caber*, with Munro winning (one-nil to Munro). Morrison won the *Hammer* (all square after two events). *Putting the 16lb Ball* ended in a tie! (so, still all square after three events). Munro won *Putting the 22lb Ball* (so, Munro led by one event with three events to go). Morrison won the *Cumberland & Westmorland Style Wrestling* (all square with two events to go). Munro, however, won the *Catch-as-Catch-Can Wrestling*, so was one event ahead with one event to go. The final event was a *100 yards* sprint. Neither men were noted for their running speed, but both ran occasionally in special races for the heavy men, which was always a great crowd-pleaser, but neither had any great success; Morrison's only 'success' had been coming 3rd in a sprint race for men over 13-stone at Aberdeen in 1902. In the event, however, James Morrison won the 100 yards sprint by three yards, and so he and Munro finished all square in the Championship, both having won three events and with one event tied. Curiously, however, *The Inverness Courier* reported that James Morrison had won by 3 events to 2 with one tied (i.e. 6 events). They did not include *Putting the 22lb Ball* or *Tossing the Caber*; they also reported it simply as an *All-Round Match*, and failed to mention anything about the *Heavy-Weight Championship of Great Britain*. James Morrison, therefore, seems to have either won, or tied the *Heavy-Weight Championship of Great Britain* in 1908, but it was an altogether odd event. No governing body had sanctioned it, and even the newspapers that reported it seemed confused by it; it seems to have been little more than a publicity stunt to attract a crowd. Nevertheless, it does show the stature that James Morrison had in the sport, and the esteem in which he was held.

As a professional event following on immediately after the great Olympic amateur festival, the *London Highland Gathering* was always going to be provocative. To the hundreds of the athletes from around the world who were still in London, it must also have seemed something of an oddity, and, not surprisingly, the stiff-handled hammers that the Highlanders threw were described as "old-fashioned" by those who had watched the Olympic Games. But the big difference between the Olympic athletes and the Highland Games athletes was that the former were amateurs and the latter were not. It seems odd, therefore, that Alex Munro, an amateur, competed in the *London Highland Gathering* at all, for this was an age when officials did not look the other way on such matters. For example, a match was arranged for the 19th August to give competition to many of the American athletes still in London, and it was to be between Scotland and an Irish-American team, but when the Scottish team was announced, the name of Tom Kirkwood, the Scottish (amateur) Champion in shot-putting, was not included because he had relinquished his amateur status by competing against the professionals in *London Highland Gathering* (he was 2nd - by one inch - in *Putting the 16lb Ball*, and 3rd in *Throwing the 16lb Hammer*.) So how did Alex Munro get away with it? He had competed in the Olympic Games as an amateur tug-of-war competitor, and continued as an amateur in tug-of-war events afterwards - in fact he continued to do so for years, and competed in the 1912 Olympic Games, winning a silver medal. However, Alex Munro had previously competed for years on the Highland Games circuit for Partick Police and for Govan Police, earning good money, and, had the amateur ruling been consistent, he would not have been eligible to compete in the 1908 Olympic Games, and certainly not in those of 1912. Incidentally, the tug-of-war was listed as an event in the *Athletics* programme, just as was *Putting the Weight*, *Throwing the Hammer*, or the *100m.*, so was under the control of the A.A.A. under whose Laws the 1908 Olympic Games were held.

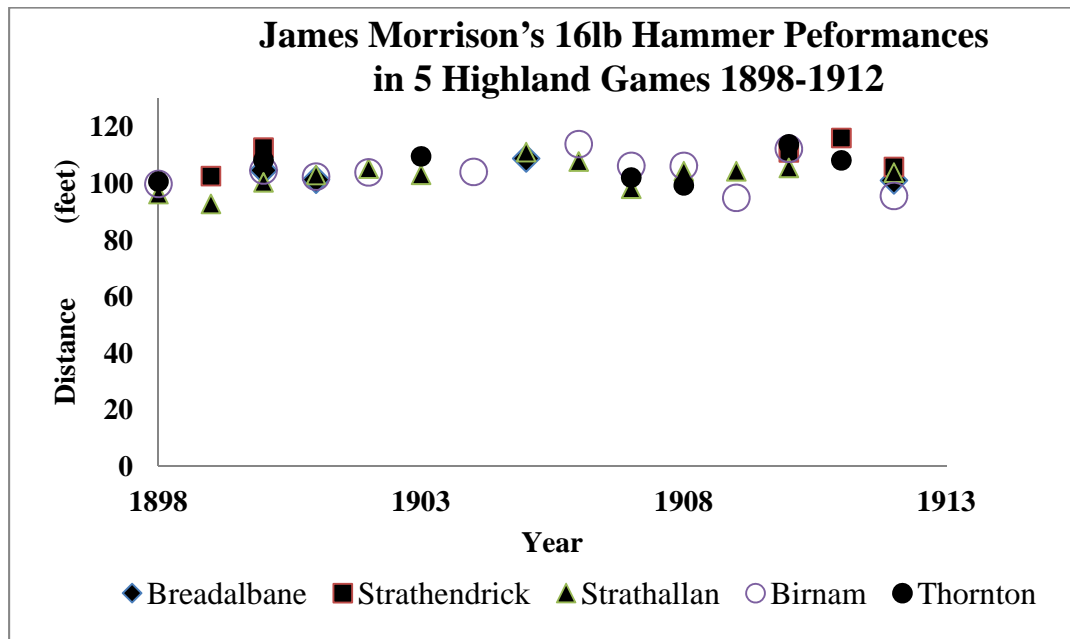
After the *London Highland Gathering* was over, James Morrison quickly returned to Scotland and immersed himself again in the Highland Games circuit, competing in at least three more Games before the end of August - the Crieff Highland Gathering, the Lochaber Highland Gathering, and the Dumfries Highland Gathering.

This was James Morrison's last foray into England, and he had never done it often; but in addition to the *London Highland Gathering*, in 1899 he had competed in the *Leeds Highland Gathering*, held at Headingly; but perhaps his two 3rd places there discouraged him from doing it again. For the next few years following the 1908 season he confined himself to his usual May to September tour of the various Highland Games in Scotland. In 1912, however, his heavy annual programme expanded to include more competitions than ever before.

**Consistency.**

I have mentioned James Morrison's great ability, and his versatility in achieving outstanding results in a variety of events and in many different venues, and I have stressed his durability in competing in an enormous number of competitions each year, but equally impressive was his consistency. This is difficult to be sure about because of the differences in the events and the weights of implements from one venue to another, but by examining his performances in those Games in which he competed throughout his career, at venues where he would have thrown the same implements, we can get some idea of how he maintained his high level of performance over 15 years. Figure 1, below shows his performances in the 16lb Hammer at five different Highland Games which he attended on a total of 41 times between 1898 and 1912.

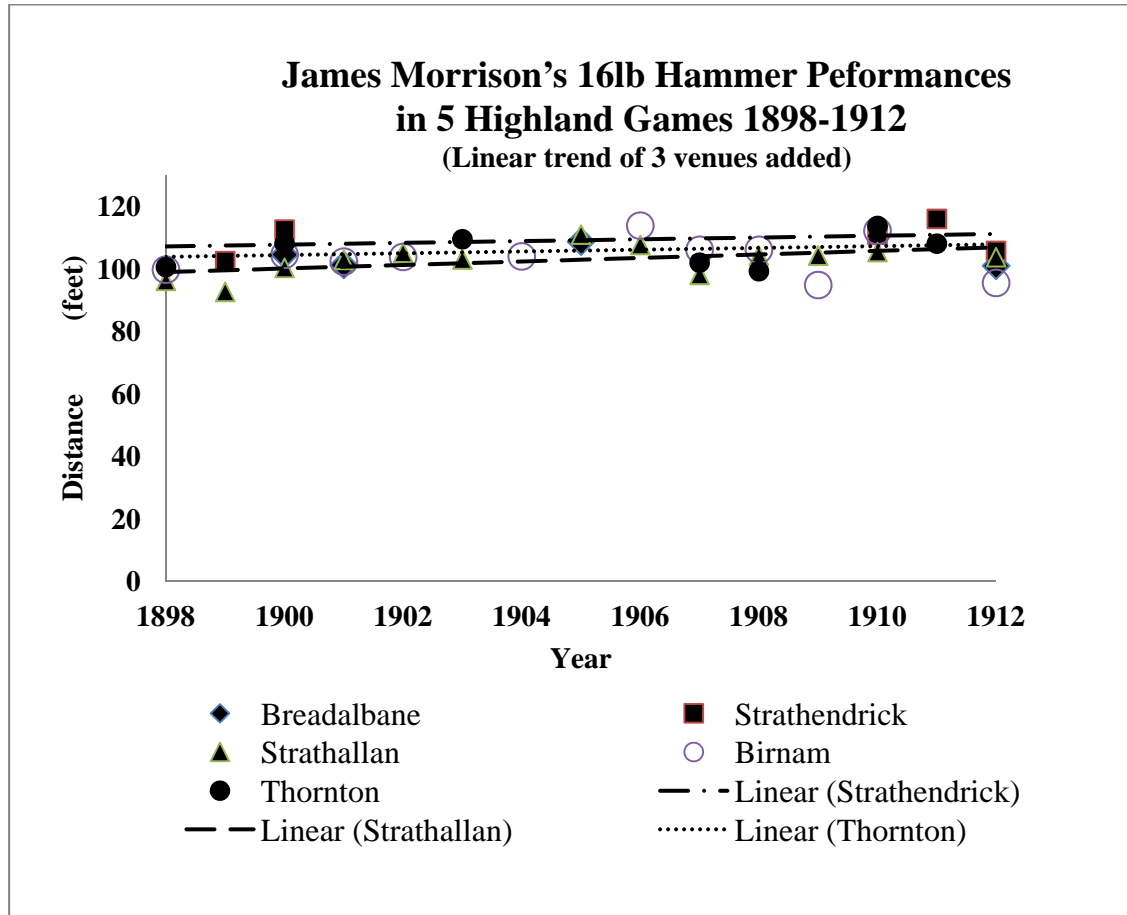
**Figure 1.**



Although this seems to be very consistent and show no obvious decline over the years, it is difficult to interpret. At each venue he would have thrown the same implements each year, so a direct comparison of his performances at individual venues is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that at the Strathallan, Strathendrick, and Thornton Games James Morrison's performances had an upward trend from 1898 to the end of 1912. The other two (Breadalbane and Birnam) showed a slight downward trend, but Birnam's was so slight that it represented a decline of

Figure 2



only 1 foot over 15 years and so is almost as close to horizontal as you can get. The linear downward trend of his performances at Breadalbane represented a larger decline but he was still throwing over 100ft in 1912, and only 3inches below what he had thrown eleven years earlier. The consistence over such a long time is remarkable, and showing no sign of declining raises the question, *why did he stop?*

**The end of his athletic career.**

Athletes usually end their careers because of injury, or age, or, in the amateur age, because they needed to earn a living. In James Morrison's case, we can eliminate all three. In October 1912 James Morrison was 38 years old but, as seen above, his performances were as competitive as ever, and were based on his strength and fitness that were clearly not waning; and on a very sound technique. 1912 had also shown that he could cope with a very high volume of competition, so there seems to be no evidence that age was catching up with him. And, unlike many other sports, the Highland Games were very good at providing competition for older athletes, and for youths and even children; but the older were not merely tolerated at the various Highland Games, they were revered. This was partly because of Donald Dinnie, but not entirely so. In August 1906 for example,



Donald Dinnie threw the 16lb Hammer and Wrestled (Scottish Style) at the *Dundee Police Sports* in events “for men 59 years of age and upwards”. He won both, and threw the Hammer 99ft 9ins, and he was 69 at the time. He also competed at the *Rothienorman Games* in July, and the *Haddo House Gathering* in August, and challenged everyone over 60 to almost any competition they chose at the *Strathpeffer Gathering* and elsewhere; most of which were not taken up, because he scared off the opposition by his reputation, and by the proud boast that he was “champion of over 10,800 contests”. But there were only competitions for veteran athletes at the Highland Games because there were many athletes wanting to compete in them. Age was no impediment on the Highland games circuit.

The list of the Highland Games that I have been able to compile in which James Morrison competed in 1912 is almost certainly incomplete, but it shows that he competed in 71 events in 23 Games, and won 26 of them, coming 2nd in 27. That would have resulted in prize-money of about £149 [£53,000 in equivalent labour earnings in 2015]. It is unlikely that he would have earned more than £90 a year as a policeman, so this would have been an additional and significant income that would have been hard to give up. Indeed, he probably earned between 1½ and 3 times his annual police salary, as an athlete, for 14 years.

The growing amateur sport of athletics set its face against money in sport, convinced that money inevitably brought with it corruption, and undermined of the spirit of sport, but there is no evidence of this in the Highland Games of James Morrison’s day. Athletes competed against each other for years in strenuous but honest competition, with very serious rivalry existing among athletes who were good friend outside the arena. The money that was on offer attracted sporting stars from Canada and the USA, as well as from mainland Europe, but the money does not seem to have been a negative force in any sense. Many athletes earned very good money from these Games, and James Morrison was only one of them, and the Highland Games were a very significant financial force in Scotland at that time, both from the point of view of the communities that put on the Games, and of the athletes who took home the prize-money. The economic impact of the Highland Games in Scotland before the First World War has not been studied in detail but many communities were financially the richer for holding them, as were many athletes. They were also socially and culturally richer.

But, after a full season of competition, James Morrison’s athletic career suddenly stopped in the autumn, and I have the result of only one competition (in August 1913) afterwards. The *Kirkintilloch Herald* reported that he was 3rd in Tossing the Caber at the *Saughton Games* in 1913 but that “James Morrison . . . takes but a passing interest in Highland games nowadays.” Why did James Morrison’s athletic career come to such a sudden end?

The answer is to be found in Glasgow. On Bonfire Night in November 1912, after years of resisting the inevitable, the Partick Police Force was finally annexed to Glasgow Police Force and became “L” Division, Partick, and ninety-three Partick Police Officers became members of the Glasgow Police Force; and, on that day, Chief Constable William Campbell left the force. The life of the Partick policeman-athletes was over and, without their Chief Constable, it would have been impossible to keep up the regime they had followed for so long; and an important chapter in Highland Games history came to an end. It must have been about this time that James Morrison decided to move from Scotstoun and, with his winnings as a policeman-athlete, he bought a bungalow in fashionable

Bearsden, north of Glasgow, not far from where he stayed when he first arrived in the area many years earlier. His descendants still live there.

James Morrison was lucky to have been one of Chief Constable Campbell's athletes, but the Highland Games were also lucky to have had such an athlete grace its arenas. James Morrison brought strength, skill, consistency, and his own brand of calm but friendly competitiveness to hundreds of competitions, and was an example to all who saw him. In 1906 John James Miller wrote

I never did see his demeanour alter or find him act in any way derogatory to his own self-respect or his neighbour's esteem . . . yes, as an athlete and as a man, you can summarise James Morrison in one word - straight.

He was, said Miller, "a man among men". Language has taken many turns since that was written in 1906, but its meaning is still clear. James Morrison was one of the greatest Highland Games athletes, but the respect he gained from his personality and behaviour outshone even his athletic talent in the eyes of those who knew him. James Morrison should be remembered as one of the greatest Highland Games athletes, and one of the best liked.

**Peter Radford**

**December 2017 (revised July 2018)**