



**Monday 16 July 2012**

**THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T RUN ON A SUNDAY:  
SOAS opens exhibition on Eric Liddell**

Unique photographic images of Eric Liddell the famed Olympic athlete and missionary, whose life is chronicled in the 1981 film, *Chariots of Fire* have today been revealed at SOAS, University of London.

Part of the [Archive Awareness Campaign](#)'s celebratory events for the London 2012 Games, the intimate exhibition features more than 50 images and personal documents which chronicle the life of Liddell after the Olympics, where *Chariots of Fire* leaves off.

**SOAS Archives Manager, Susannah Rayner, speaks about the exhibition:**

*"SOAS has held this collection available for scholarly research for almost 40 years. We thought that this year would be the perfect opportunity to open up the collection to a wider audience by putting them on display to the public, given the excitement surrounding the Olympics.*

*Last month we welcomed Eric Liddell's daughter, Patricia, to SOAS to view the archives, and we hope to show Hugh Hudson (Director of Chariots of Fire) as well as some of the stage cast of Chariots of Fire through the gallery also. While many people know Eric Liddell for his athletic success, few people know that he went on to become a missionary in China, something that required immense courage and self-sacrifice in the face of innumerable dangers. This is an important and inspirational part of his life that we are proud to share in this personal exhibition."*

## **Paris Olympics**

Liddell became well known for being the fastest runner in Scotland while at College. Newspapers carried stories of his track feats, and many articles declared his potential as an Olympic winner. Although a member of the British Olympic Team for the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, Liddell, a devout Christian, refused to run in the qualifying heats because they were held on a Sunday. Consequently he was forced to withdraw from his best event, the 100 metres race. Interestingly, Liddell went on to win bronze and gold medals in the 200 and 400 metres events respectively, setting a world record for the 400 metres and causing sensational news headlines. In 1925, at the peak of his athletic career, Liddell chose to join the London Missionary Society and went to serve in Northern China.

## **Missionary life and service in China**

The exhibition focuses on the lesser-known side of Liddell's life, delving into the fascinating story of his life as a missionary after he stepped out of the limelight of Olympic success. Drawing on documents found in the archive of the London Missionary Society, held by SOAS Library, the exhibition looks at Liddell's family background; his birth in China to Scottish missionary parents, his personal motivation for becoming a missionary, his work as a teacher at the Anglo-Chinese College in Tientsin and his eventual imprisonment and premature death in a Japanese internment camp at Weihsien in 1945.

Materials on display include photographs, application papers submitted to the London Missionary Society and Liddell's annual reports and correspondence back to the mission directors in London. As well as reflecting on his work and life in the context of civil war, and the Japanese occupation of China in the lead-up to and during the Second World War, the correspondence includes letters and medical reports relating to his death at Weihsien Camp, and the impact this had on his family, colleagues, and the nation.

## Notes to editors

Dates: **13 July – 22 September 2012**

Venue: **Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, Russell Square, London.**

Opening hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10.30am to 5pm (late opening until 8pm Thursdays).

- A selection of the papers relating to Eric Liddell has been digitised as part of a project to commemorate his achievements in the context of the London 2012 Olympics. For further details, contact Archives & Special Collections staff on [docenquiry@soas.ac.uk](mailto:docenquiry@soas.ac.uk) tel: 020 7898 4180.
- Further information on the London Missionary Society archive and other archival collections held by SOAS Library can be found at [www.soas.ac.uk/library/archives](http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/archives)
- The Eric Liddell papers are displayed with the kind permission of the Council for World Mission.

## About SOAS

- SOAS, University of London, is the world's leading institution for the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East and has more specialist staff (more than 300 academics) concerned with the study of these regions than any university in the world.

## About Archive Awareness Campaign

- The Archive Awareness Campaign (AAC) is spearheaded by the Archives & Records Association (ARA) [www.archives.org.uk](http://www.archives.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives [nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk).
- AAC [www.archiveawareness.com](http://www.archiveawareness.com) is an ongoing celebration of archive treasures across the UK and Ireland. It provides a means for local archives to promote their services through open days, exhibitions, tours, workshops, competitions, performances and many more to help the public discover a piece of their own history.