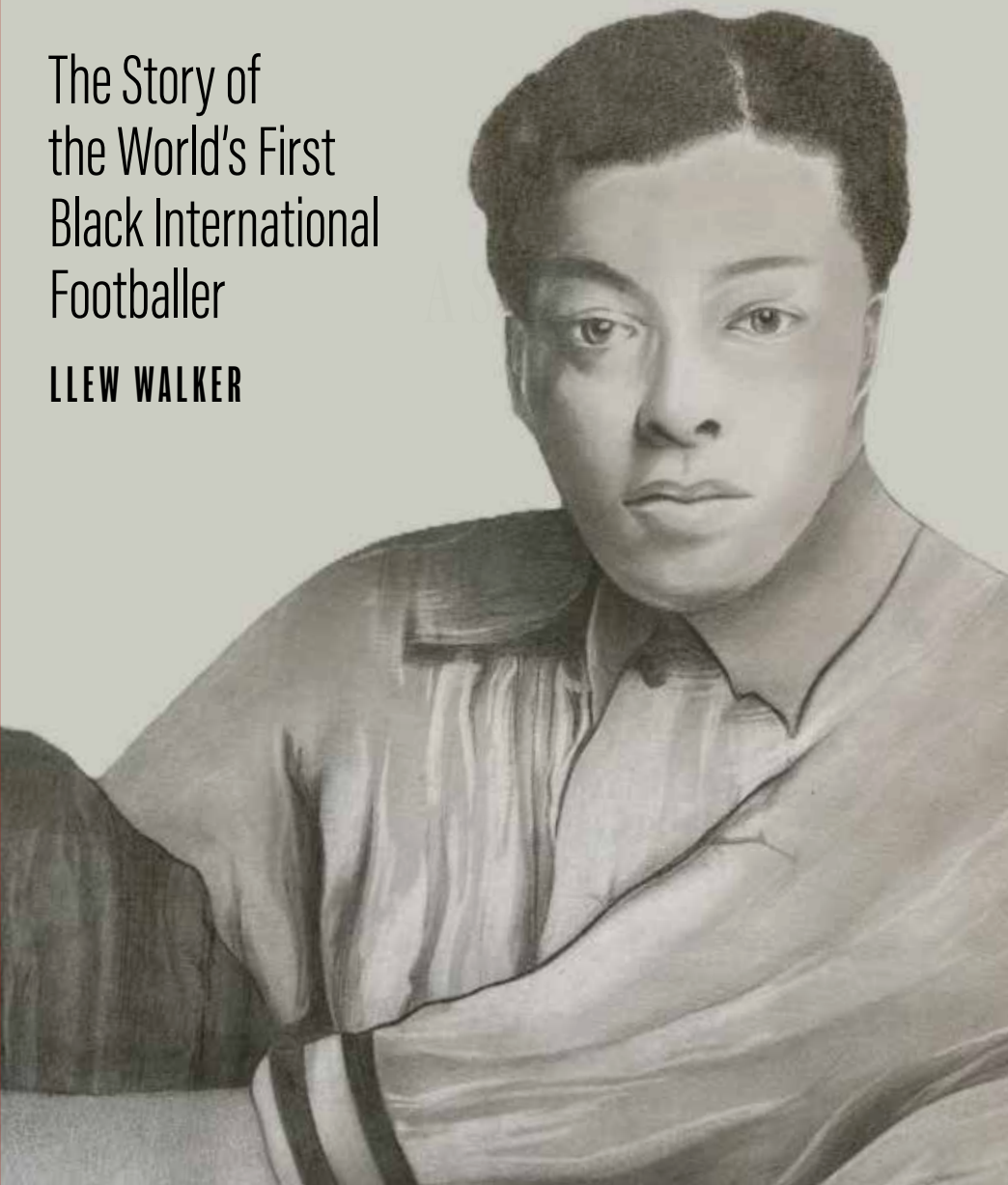


A Stragging Life

ANDREW WATSON

The Story of
the World's First
Black International
Footballer

LLEW WALKER



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A Man of Colour

No heads turned when a dark-skinned, well-dressed young man with an impeccable English accent and the suspicion of wealth, enrolled in the University of Glasgow in 1875. Universities were expected to attract members of Britain's global dominion, colonists with a thirst for universal knowledge. When this man fell in love and married a girl from the local tenements, he was welcomed into the family. When he opened a shop, invested money in a small but ambitious football club, and showed an ability to play, people would remark on his talents. When he joined the city's most prominent and most loved football team and walked out at Hampden, first for Glasgow, then for Queen's Park, and eventually for the national team, heads would turn to admire one of Scotland's most exceptional sportsmen.

A father of two, in business and an international football player, his neighbours would call out greetings in the street and wishes of good fortune in the upcoming match. When he left Glasgow and moved to London, people were sorry to see him go, but they followed his fortunes and misfortunes from afar, proud that a Scot was playing with some of the best football teams in the land. He would be welcomed on his frequent returns to Scotland and once brought with him the best team in English football for the entertainment of his fellow Glaswegians. When he remarried to a shop girl from a local business, people were pleased and wished him lasting

happiness. When he finally moved south for good, he was missed but always remembered as being an excellent footballer, a Scot with an English accent.

The colour of Andrew Watson's skin would not have passed unnoticed in the latter part of 19th-century Glasgow. When people came to watch him play, his mixed heritage would undoubtedly have been mentioned. Even though, during his lifetime, no records exist in the print media of any verbal discrimination, after his death it was no surprise to discover that, beyond the printed word, he had been commonly known as 'Black Watson'.

There is a belief that the absence of racism in connection with Watson was a Scottish cultural manifestation, a characteristic of the difference between England and Scotland. The often-repeated adage of 'no problem here'⁵ has been rolled out on numerous occasions but has long since been discredited.⁶ Some suggest that 'racism' evolved after Watson's time and, before this, all were treated equally. This belief is also nonsense, and even though instances of specific acts of racism do not appear in the Scottish historical record for Andrew Watson, there are plenty of examples to confirm that racism was a disease not belonging solely to the English. Similarly, there are no reports of discrimination connected with Watson in the English historical record either. Still, no one would be naïve enough to advocate that the British were multiculturally sensitive and it is wrong to believe that just because racist terminology had not been used in the Scottish or English media, that Watson did not experience this throughout his life.

5 The often-quoted belief that Scotland was free from racism.

6 Dimeo & Finn (2001).

who practise such "small deceptions."

* * *

A Great Back of the Old Brigade.

"Brentonian" (Middlesex) writes us to the effect that on March 8 Andrew Watson died. He adds the following by way of biography:—

"Andrew Watson, known as 'Black' Watson, born 1856. Played for Queen's Park, Glasgow, about 40 years ago, also Cambridge University, and I believe was a Scottish International. Played occasionally for the Corinthians and Casuals. He was also supposed to have won the High Jumping Championship of Scotland. He went to sea when about 30 years of age, and sailed in liners as an engineer from Liverpool for many years."

The gentleman asks us to verify these facts.

If this be the same "Andy" Watson that we recall the news is interesting. Andrew Watson, who looked like a half-caste, joined Queen's Park from the Parkgrove club on April 6, 1880, and he left for Liverpool on December 1, 1887. This information is in the "History of the Queen's Park Football Club," by Mr. Richard Robinson.

"Andy" Watson played for Scotland against England in 1881-82, and against Wales in 1881. We remember him as a very fine right back, being a rare header, a fine tackler, and a neat kicker. He captained Scotland.

We have no knowledge of his having been at Cambridge, but he did play for the Corinthians, and above all for The Swifts in the days of the Bambridges.

From the information supplied by "Brentonian" it would seem as if he had met the identical Andrew Watson—a most athletic figure of a man, and a grand footballer. We should like to see a back of his class in these days.

* * *

Athletic News — Monday, 4 April 1921

Ironically, it is a Scottish anatomist, zoologist and physician, Robert Knox, whose best-selling book, *The Races of Men*, published in 1850, pioneered a theory in which he proposed the 'science' of identifying racial characteristics and a hierarchy of races. His 'scientific' work sparked much discussion, and its theme would eventually lead to the

premise for 'scientific racism'.⁷ From this, the emergence of eugenics would pollute European society for the next hundred years.

As Victorian society changed, most people had more leisure time, and a large section of the working classes discovered football, while many in the middle classes pursued science and scientific research. 'Science', the study of the material and physical world, became a disciplined search for facts, knowledge and, ultimately, truth. This new discipline would be applied to everything from race and ethnicity to football. The assumption that 'scientific football' was not only intellectually but practically superior hung around the game for many years. Even though the term 'scientific football' was a misnomer, it confirms the Victorian obsession with science.

In general, the British Victorians believed they were superior to all other races, and they turned to science to prove this. They founded a proliferation of scientific institutes and associations that embodied the Victorian thirst for knowledge. But as the British Empire grew, the strange and exotic cultures visited by a series of famous Victorian explorers and adventurers would begin to sow seeds of doubt. The vast 'Dark Continent', for example, was considered mysterious and terrifying, and people hoped that science would provide reassurances against the unknown. Knowledge would help in not only understanding what criminal or evil thoughts were in the minds of these foreign people, but it would ultimately reveal how to rule and control them.

Scientific discussions and publications about race were no longer confined to the halls of learning but had found a new audience in the growing numbers of the educated middle

7 The belief that empirical evidence exists to support or justify racism (racial discrimination), racial inferiority or racial superiority.

class. The downward dissemination of these ideas meant the increasingly literate masses could now also participate in the debate. Instead of providing clear and accessible answers, knowledge only brought more questions and doubts. It was left to the individual to choose the simplest theories that best suited their hopes and fears and, in general, Victorian society settled for what supported their view of themselves, even if this supported racial stereotypes and institutionalised racism.

When the average Victorian read the following description of the white Anglo-Saxon and compared it to the list of traits of numerous other ethnic groups, they would be comforted and reassured of their place in the universe:

‘The Saxon also still remains the Saxon, stolid, and solid, outwardly abrupt but warm-hearted and true, haughty and even over-bearing through an innate sense of superiority, yet at heart sympathetic and always just, hence the ruler of men; seemingly dull or slow, yet preeminent in the realms of philosophy and imagination.’⁸

Ultimately, this ‘Age of Empire’ searched for confirmation that they were the peak of the evolutionary scale, and some scientific studies supported the theory that the Anglo-Saxon was the superior race. If science could confirm this and it was considered respectable and decent to discuss race and ethnicity in a public forum, then it was acceptable for the masses too. Of course, there were dissenters, but the concepts of power, superiority and race filtered into the Victorian consciousness.

It is noticeable that the media contained fewer ethnic terms in the 1870s and 1880s, and the following quotation

8 Lorimer (1988).

is an example of the struggle journalists had with referencing the colour or ethnicity of a player in print. Although the full meaning has been lost, the article appeared in *Athletic News* in May 1880, a month after Watson joined Queen's Park, and appears to reveal how reluctant the reporter is to identify Watson by his ethnicity, without causing offence:

‘A certain Queen's Park full-back, who is a strong believer in the Darwinian theory, and who therefore looks upon man as nothing short of a chrystallised [*sic*] ape, has done more by his faultless kicking these three weeks to prove his unfitness to sit in the Dundas-street sanctuary than all the eloquence of a Tennyson or a Somers, between whom some people think there is only a “leetle”⁹ difference, but with all his analytical genius he could not say whether the chips of wood were bones on Wednesday evening.’¹⁰

This article refers to a Charity Cup replay between Queen's Park and Rangers, which was criticised for the rough play and the injuries sustained by several players. The ‘Dundas-street sanctuary’ refers to the premises of the Scottish FA before it moved to Carlton Place. ‘Somers’ is William Scott Somers, the Queen's Park full-back, who, due to the abundance of quality they had in the backs, caused Queen's Park to experiment with a new formation. This meant

9 Perhaps used in reference to the popularity of poets from America adopting ‘negro dialect’, such as Irvin Russell (1853–1879). ‘Leetle’ means ‘little’, as in the poem, ‘Christmas-Night in the Quarters’.
We labors in de'ya'd, wukin hard an' wukin' true;
Now, shorely yo' won't notus, ef we eats a grape or two,
An' takes a leetle holiday – a leetle restin' spell
Bekase, nex' week, we'll start in fresh, an' labor twicet as well.

10 *Athletic News*, Wednesday, 19 May 1880.

pushing Watson into the midfield, criticised as ‘not being conducive to good play’.¹¹ Although the article appears to refer to Watson, it is clear that the journalist struggles with referring to the colour of his skin or his heritage.

However, even though racist terminology may not have been in frequent use in the media, tolerance of racial stereotypes was evident. Shortly after Watson signed for Queen’s Park in 1880, the Sheffield Zulus arranged a fixture at Hampden for Wednesday, 21 April. Even though the game had been widely advertised, poor weather and lack of interest meant a paltry crowd of only about a hundred witnessed it, the home side ending up resounding winners by 7-0. The Zulus had initially been created to raise money for the relief of widows and orphans of the Anglo-Zulu War of the previous year. However, realising there was money to be made from the team, they dropped the charitable cause and became a touring side, sharing the gate receipts among themselves.

GRAND FOOTBALL MATCH.
 QUEEN’S PARK *versus* SHEFFIELD ZULUS,
 HAMPDEN PARK, MOUNT FLORIDA,
 ON WEDNESDAY, 21ST APRIL.
 Kick-Off at 5-45 P.M. prompt.
 Admission 6d.; Ladies free. To Grand Stand, 6d. each person.

Glasgow Evening Citizen – *Friday, 16 April 1880*

The Zulus had played a series of games in the Midlands and the north of England, attracting large crowds, and, like minstrels, they would black up, carry shields and spears and perform war dances to entertain the crowds. However, this team were not entertainers but were players of a high calibre, and until they played in Scotland, had only been beaten by the FA Cup winners, Blackburn Olympic. One member

¹¹ *Glasgow Evening Post*, Saturday, 15 May 1880.

of the Zulu squad would go on to play for the English national team.¹²

The effect of the Anglo-Zulu War had raised tensions in all parts of the country. Reports appeared in the newspapers of men and women of colour being abused in the streets, and in Scotland a letter appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* from ‘A Man of Colour’:

‘I have the misfortune to be, or rather it has pleased God to create me, a man of colour, and my well-educated wife and daughter are of the same caste as myself. Though I am in a respectable business here my wife and daughter have been subjected to gross insults by crowds of howling men and women, who call them Zulus, & c., even by the very men who ought to protect them – viz., the police – as a young lady in my shop can testify ... my wife and daughter cannot go out either by tramway car or on foot without being subject to outrage and insult.’

Watson may have been subjected to abuse also, as stories in the press from across the country report incidents directed at people with darker-coloured skin and at non-Africans. Some reports suggest Watson played against the Sheffield team and that he was ‘amused’ by the event.¹³ However, it is unlikely, as he had played for the Scottish Canadian team two days before and was due to play for the Glasgow Pilgrims the day after, not to mention the Glasgow Charity Cup two days after that.

12 John Hunter, 1852–1903. Sheffield Wednesday player and FA Cup winner with Blackburn Olympic in 1883.

13 <http://inbedwithmaradona.com/sheffield-2/2015/11/2/sheffield-zulus-victorian-showmen>

Tolerance of this ‘minstrel’ football reflects the times. Heightened by the loss of British lives at the hands of the tribesmen the previous year, the racial parody and its charitable connotations seemed to sanction open hostility towards anyone with darker skin than themselves.

But as the Sheffield Zulus became more popular and no longer a charitable entity, they were charged with professionalism, and the Sheffield FA banned them. The team disbanded in 1882, but clearly racial persecution and jingoism were secondary to the Sheffield FA’s laws on professionalism in football. But ‘Minstrelism’ would remain an acceptable form of entertainment right through to prime-time television in the 1960s.

One of the few references to abuse Watson received appeared in the *Scottish Athletic Journal* 1885:

‘Both on and off the field he is courtesy, and unostentation personified and although of a most powerful build he invariably plays a sterling honest game ... Although on more than one occasion subjected to vulgar insults by splenetic,¹⁴ ill-tempered players, he uniformly preserved that gentlemanly demeanour ... he is the embodiment of rare geniality and kind-heartedness.’

This brief reference to ‘vulgar insults’ presumably would include references to his ethnicity and may not have been the sole preserve of opposition players. However, the article is otherwise wholly complimentary towards Watson, with no reference to ethnicity or colour.

In recent years, the history of black footballers in Scotland has been fertile ground for scholarly research, and with the

14 Used to describe a person who easily becomes angry or annoyed, or their behaviour – Cambridge Dictionary.

rediscovery of players like Robert Walker and Willie Clarke, it becomes obvious that Watson was not the only man of colour to disappear from the record books.

Like Watson, Walker and Clarke owe their existence to Scottish fathers and their business interests in the colonies of the Empire. Robert Gustave Walker (1857–1936) was born in Sierra Leone to a Scottish father and a local woman, but was brought up in Preston Mill, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. He played for Third Lanark between 1875 and 1877 and was the first man of colour to play in a senior cup competition in 1875. He was also the first man of colour to play in a major cup final when Lanark met Queen's Park in the 1877 Scottish Cup. He may also have been the first man of colour to trial for the national team, when in February 1876 he played for Wallace's team against Dickson's team, at the Scottish trials, losing 2-1. He would be invited to trial for the national team twice more. He played for Parkgrove during the 1877/78 season, alongside Watson, but after Parkgrove he does not appear to have played football regularly again. Like Watson, he left Scotland for Liverpool to become a marine engineer, and like Watson, later in life moved with his family to London, to Hammersmith, where he died in 1936.

D.D. Bone mentioned Robert Walker in 1890:

'The half-back line was thoroughly consistent with the rest of the team – smart and quick on the ball. In the attacking row were, with successive changes, a curly-haired son of Africa, named Walker – a misnomer, however, so far as his pace on the extreme right was concerned ...'¹⁵

15 Bone (1890).

The Parkgrove Football Club not only included two men of colour, they included Tommy Marten, a player with Asian ancestry.¹⁶ This makes Parkgrove a unique club as they are almost certainly the first team to play at a high level with such ethnic diversity.

Third Lanark are the only team to have a half caste playing for them; this was Darkey Walker, a familiar and conspicuous figure from 1874 to 1878. Andrew Watson, the famous Queen's Park back, and he were almost of a colour, Andrew being born in Jamaica.

Scottish Referee – *Monday, 8 February 1904*

Before Watson was rediscovered, John Walker (no relation to Robert) was believed to have been the first black football player in Scotland. Labelled with the same racial epithet, John Walker was born in 1876 to a West Indian father and a Scottish mother and played for Leith Primrose in junior league football. He then played as a professional for Leith Athletic, before being transferred for the princely sum of £50 to Hearts in 1898. This made John Walker the first black player to command a transfer fee in the Scottish League. In 1900, he crossed the border as many Scotsmen had done in previous decades and became the first man of colour to play for Lincoln City. Sadly, he died of consumption in 1900 at the age of 22.

Willie Clarke would join the list of black Victorian men of colour to play a high standard of football in Scotland. Like Watson, Clarke's father was from Guyana and mother from Kilmarnock. Clarke was born in Mauchline, Ayr, but moved to Glasgow where he would play at Kelburn, Crown Athletic, Third Lanark, Arthurlie and East Stirlingshire

¹⁶ Thomas William Henry Marten (1857–1911) – born in Surakarta, Java.

(but not in the Scottish League). He was a Scotland junior internationalist in 1897 and was the second man of colour to wear the Scotland shirt at any level. Moving south, he became the first man of colour to play for Bristol Rovers (1900), Aston Villa (1901) and Bradford City (1905). He was the first man of colour to score a goal in the Football League, when Aston Villa beat Everton 3-2 in the FA Cup on Christmas Day 1901.¹⁷

But the list of black Scottish Victorian footballers is short. It may grow as the period is researched further, but it is highly unlikely there will be another discovery of the calibre of player such as Andrew Watson. In a period before Britain celebrated its diversity, these players are all pioneers.

All these black or Asian sportsmen appear to have been judged on their skill rather than their race and were able to compete without any obvious discrimination or adverse comment in the press. This is in stark contrast to, say, attitudes towards the first women footballers, or the sectarianism and racism that became so pervasive in the 20th century.¹⁸

After Watson, it would be over 100 years before the next man of colour played for Scotland, when Nigel Quashie appeared against Estonia in 2004 but, throughout Europe, Watson would be the only man of colour to represent a national team in the Victorian era.

In England, the list of black Victorian footballers is equally as short. Walter Tull was the first black outfield player to play in the English League, and goalkeeper Arthur Wharton was the first black English professional footballer. Tull would later fall in the First World War.

17 Gleave (2020).

18 Andy Mitchell – <https://www.scottishsporthistory.com/sports-history-news-and-blog/scotlands-first-black-footballer-robert-walker-the-curly-haired-son-of-africa>

It would be well into the next century before another man of colour would be associated with a national squad. John Leslie would have been the first to play for England in 1925 but, having been selected to play, he was mysteriously dropped when the International Selection Committee, who picked the squad before a manager was appointed, realised Leslie was a man of colour. Picked to play against Ireland, Leslie remains the first black player to be 'selected' to play for England, even though he does not appear in the records.

It was not until the modern era that Viv Anderson became the first black footballer to play for the senior England national side when he turned out in 1978 against Czechoslovakia, almost 100 years since Watson first pulled on the Scotland shirt and almost 50 years since Eddie Parris pulled on the national shirt for Wales. It was not until 1997 that Jeff Whitley played for the Northern Ireland team against Belgium, then Chris Hughton for the Republic of Ireland against the USA in 1979.

Arguably, Andrew Watson could have played for England, having spent most of his early life there, but the opportunity never arose. Playing for Corinthian and for Surrey County was the closest he would get.

The rediscovery of Andrew Watson is as remarkable as it is unfathomable. How can the captain of a national team be forgotten, especially as the team he captained thumped the English 6-1 at The Oval, one of Scotland's most historic sporting achievements? It is unconvincing to argue that he was deleted from the record books due to his ethnicity when many of the names of Watson's team-mates in that Scottish side and linked to the Scottish contribution to the evolution of the world's beautiful game have also been forgotten.