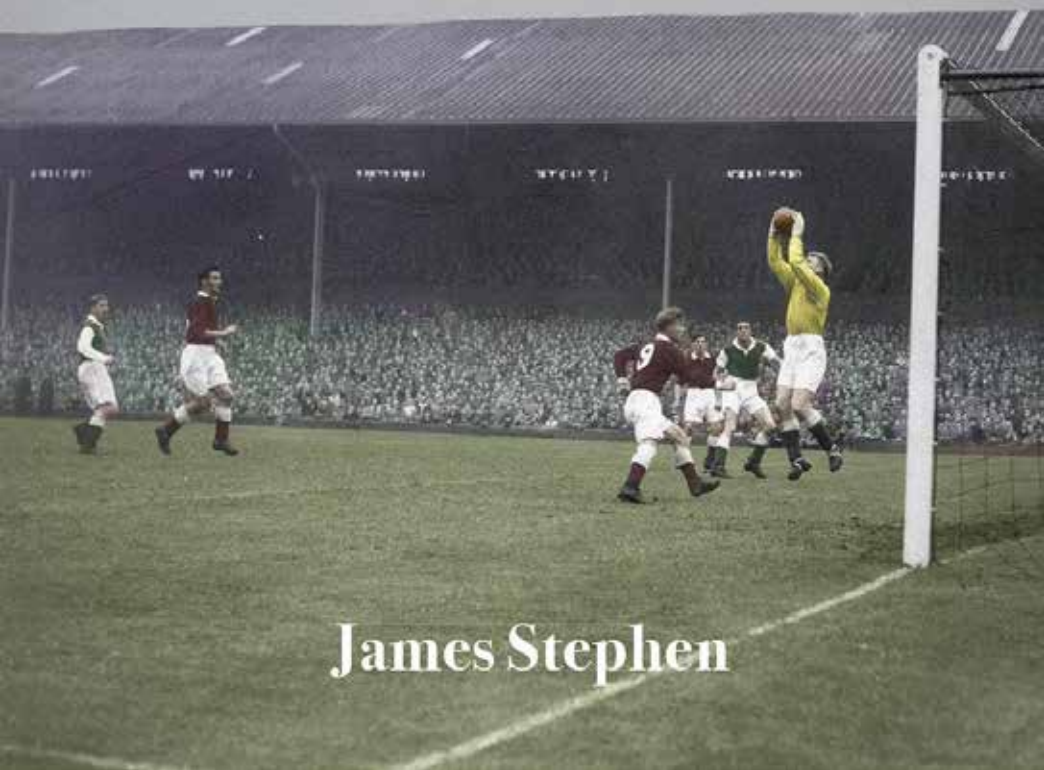


# AULD FOES

**World Football's  
Oldest Rivalry**



**James Stephen**

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

*'A football team represents a way of  
being, a culture.'*

Michel Platini

*'Sport is an unfailing cause of ill-will.'*

George Orwell

ONE DAY at work, I was chatting to a colleague who I had never met before, who had travelled up from London for a meeting. As I often do, I steered the conversation away from work and on to football. I often wonder how much harder it would be to meet and form relationships with other men without the universal language of football; and I admit that a slight disappointment always jumps up within me if the person I am speaking to says they don't follow football (or worse, pretends they do, before making it very apparent that they really don't).

They guy I was speaking to was a real football fan though. He followed Oxford United, not one of English football's more glamorous clubs, and he took the same

interest and delight at moving the conversation on to football as I did. It was during this conversation that he asked me about the Edinburgh Derby, but to my surprise, he asked if the rivalry between Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian was a *proper rivalry*. I was shocked by the question. I was shocked that a football fan such as he did not know that *of course* it was a *proper rivalry*; it was very much a *proper rivalry*.

My offence was not with him; English people rarely know or care about Scottish football, and even those with a cursory knowledge rarely look beyond the Old Firm. This is understandable, and I am guilty of the same. Most of us don't see past the big, famous rivalries in most other football countries. Ultimately, football fans are consumed by the club they support, then by their rivals, and then by the league around them. They may also pay attention to the bigger clubs in their own country or to some of the bigger clubs in other European countries, but that is usually it (unless you grew up in the 1990s, and had the ground-breaking delight of *Gazzetta Football Italia* on a Saturday morning, in which case you probably still maintain a passing interest in the Italian league).

This realisation – that a proper football fan could ask me such a question about the Edinburgh Derby – sent me into a spiral of existential angst. Is this city, and its two biggest clubs, that have played such an enormous and formative role in my life, really so irrelevant to the wider football world? How can it be that something so all-consuming to so many tens of thousands of Edinburghers

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can fly so far under the radar of other fans? How can it be that the second-biggest rivalry in a country so integral to the development of football is so unrecognised?

In a new book, *Divided Cities*, author Kevin Pogorzelski travels the world attending some of the great single-city derbies. The list is familiar: Rome, Old Firm, Rio, Buenos Aires; and there are some others that are slightly more left field: Lisbon, Belgrade, Seville and Genoa. 'How someone defines the finest or their favourite is such a personal vs subjective thing,' Pogorzelski explains. 'We all have different perspectives and features we look for when we categorise our own greatest list, such as importance (deciding a major championship), longevity (long and rich history) or high on controversy. The latter most often stems from much-publicised violence between warring supporter groups.' The Edinburgh Derby comfortably meets two of those three criteria, and the third on occasion. In *The Guardian* newspaper, football journalist Nick Millar wrote that: 'Local rivalries are not quite as simple as mere proximity ... [Nottingham] Forest and Notts County are separated by a river, the clubs' two grounds a few hundred metres apart, but there's little animosity between them.'

'For real animosity to fester,' he goes on, you need 'deep historical differences, feuds, fights, common players and managers, genuine competitiveness. All these things feed great rivalries.'

The Edinburgh Derby has all of these ingredients and more, yet simply put, it exists, as does all Scottish football, in the shadow of the Old Firm, the two biggest,

richest, most powerful, loudest and easiest to offend clubs. They dominate to such an extent that the TV coverage of Scottish football is almost constantly Celtic or Rangers versus somebody else. There is barely even a pretence that anyone else matters, except in relation to the Old Firm narrative. And there are other, less obvious reasons why the Edinburgh Derby is not as well known.

Edinburgh is a very famous and successful city in so many other spheres, that shouting about football is not something it has ever really needed to do and, as we shall see, is not something that Edinburgh was ever really likely to do, given the nature of the city and her people. And so, this chance question, asked during small talk between colleagues on the fringe of a small conference, helped to plant the seed of this book.

\* \* \*

One of the first things I learned is that the Edinburgh Derby is the world's oldest derby match. I have lived in Edinburgh for decades, and yet I did not know that. Nobody seems to know it. And with that long history comes all – or most – of the ingredients of a *proper rivalry*. There is too much history, too much fascinating social, religious and ethnic context, at times hatred, at times downright bizarreness, and frankly too much great football and too many great players for this fixture and this rivalry to remain as the forgotten derby. And then there is the history; so much history.

If Heart of Midlothian v Hibernian existed in another city perhaps it would be different. But Edinburgh is a

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historical, an architectural, a cultural masterpiece in its own right. It attracts attention for many reasons; foreign tourists pack its streets every year to come and attend the world's largest annual arts festival, thousands of young students move here to attend one of its four universities (including one that is consistently ranked among the top universities in the world), and millions of people travel in and out every year to participate in its economy. Edinburgh is so successful at attracting people to live here that around half of the population are not born in the city. Edinburgh is a melting pot of immigrants; from elsewhere in Scotland, from England, from around the world. Football, because of the unique place it occupies in societies, is a great way to get underneath the skin of a city. To understand its subcultures, its politics, even its nasty side. In Edinburgh, it is where you can go and hear the authentic Edinburgh accent, mixed in with local Scots dialect. In a city known for its success, its beauty and its affluence, it's where you can find the traditional working classes, and a predominantly native Edinburgher crowd.

Nothing matters more to a football fan than their own city rivalry. It might not be the biggest, the most high-stakes, the most high-profile, the most monied, the most watched or of the most interest to Far East TV audiences; but that doesn't matter if it is local to you. It is something that the person with a fleeting interest will never be able to understand fully, because how could they? It is one of the places where football, with all of its modern paraphernalia, all of the media hype, and all of the new-found respectability



brought about by slick PR and marketing, still reveals itself in its most raw, uncensored form. It is where fans and players take things too far, it is where atmospheres crackle, and it is where the very soul of a football club is laid bare. It causes grown men to act like toddlers, and provokes emotions that are so intense that it must be impossible for someone alien to football to understand; it must just look ridiculous. It is, in fact, ridiculous.

To people born and raised in Edinburgh, that is what the Edinburgh Derby means. It is the biggest match of almost every season, surpassed only by occasional decisive cup matches. And while the two main Edinburgh clubs have often been run badly, lurched from crisis to crisis, or just limped along in apathetic mediocrity, the rivalry has continued to boil away in the corner, waiting to bubble up every few months, and boil over every once in a while. Edinburghers don't always have a lot to be grateful to the football gods for, but living in such an authentic rivalry is definitely one.

Because while, as we will see, both the Heart of Midlothian Football Club (informally known as Hearts) and the Hibernian Football Club (informally known as Hibs) have generally underachieved, they collectively form the oldest and one of the most historic football rivalries anywhere in world football. For 150 years, these two clubs have had an unbroken rivalry that has stretched to more than 600 matches. And while neither club is among the great names of European football, the rivalry is increasingly unique, and should be cherished as such. In a world of globalisation, or dubious ownership where the wealthy

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clubs increasingly play at a different level, proper, authentic football is becoming harder to find, and genuine intra-city rivalries are not as common as one might think. In Scotland we have the Old Firm in Glasgow, and there is also the Dundee Derby between Dundee FC and Dundee United FC, two clubs that share not only a city but, in what must be a quite unique arrangement in world football, share the same street (their home grounds, Dens Park and Tannadice respectively, are about 100 metres apart). As far as big, traditional intra-city derbies go, that is it in Scotland. Even in England, there are not many traditional two-club city rivalries: Birmingham, Liverpool, Nottingham, Sheffield, Bristol, Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester.

This book will spend some time examining the nature, character and history of Edinburgh. This is not done simply to indulge myself, even though Edinburgh is a subject that I never tire of researching and writing about. It is in fact to show how the city impacts upon her football clubs, how her nature and history and geography helped to shape the rivalry. It will hopefully become clear that Edinburgh is a city that does not need her football clubs, she does not rely on them for fame, or amusement, or profile, or revenue. Edinburgh will never be best known for its football clubs in the way that Glasgow is for the Old Firm, or Newcastle is for Newcastle United. That says as much about the success and vibrancy of the city as it does about the relative obscurity of the clubs, although at times the clubs have made it easy for outsiders to disregard them. As a capital city and a centre of literature, learning, science, finance,

religion, history, culture and festivals, tourism, politics and of other sports – particularly rugby and golf – both Hearts and Hibernian would have to up their level of achievement to something approaching that of FC Barcelona to become Edinburgh’s best-known attraction. But the fact that they come from such a storied and historic city does not diminish them, their achievements and their rivalry. Indeed, I would argue it makes the story more interesting, more compelling, bestowing upon it a character and history that is unique.

It is also an important facet in understanding the indifference with which elements of Edinburgh society have treated their football clubs. Leaving aside for a moment the obvious social class distinction, the fact that corporate Edinburgh, for want of a better name, has largely ignored its two clubs (although this has started to change recently) and has instead ploughed its backing and sponsorship into rugby and the various festivals in Edinburgh is interesting. Edinburgh is a city used to success, and why would you waste your sponsorship millions on the mediocre football clubs when you could instead associate your company name with the world’s largest arts festival, or one of the most iconic and successful annual sports tournaments in world sport, the rugby Six Nations Championship, with its international exposure and huge TV audiences?

In fact, a good argument could be made that rivalry matters more when it is between two clubs who probably will not win trophies; the significance of ‘winning’ the derby matches becomes an even higher priority, in the absence of cups, European runs or league trophies to strive

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for. And so while the size of the club and number of fans has to be included as a factor in the nature of a rivalry, it cannot be *the* factor, otherwise we are giving up yet another aspect of our game to be owned and competed for solely by the big, rich clubs.

The Edinburgh Derby will never be one of the world's biggest, but biggest is not always best. Having been lucky enough to attend El Clásico at the Nou Camp, I can honestly say that the atmosphere was a disappointment, lacking in the aggression and anger that fuels the atmospheres of many great derbies. This is no doubt in part due to the almost complete absence of opposing supporters, but it seemed almost to be a deeper factor, something intrinsic in the fans that is different to the fans at derbies in the UK that I have experienced first-hand. The Edinburgh Derby may not be a patch on Barça v Real Madrid in almost any measure you care to think of, but I can testify that the atmosphere at some Edinburgh Derbies has been better than it was in the Nou Camp that evening – more intense, more aggressive, more explosive, more singing (something that Spanish fans seemed far less inclined to partake in than their Scottish or UK counterparts) and more laced with that X factor that makes an atmosphere what it is: an imprecise combination of anticipation, jeopardy, nerves, intimidation, excitement and, often, hatred.

I write this not as some cack-handed attempt at one-upmanship, but rather to demonstrate that big clubs, with lots of money and lots of fans, absolutely do not have a monopoly on rivalry, on passion and feeling for their club.

Neither Hibernian nor Hearts will ever be the aristocracy of European football: they have enough trouble trying to bother the aristocracy of Scottish football. But that does not mean that they do not have an intense, history-laden rivalry that is rich in baggage and subplots.

There may be positive aspects to rivalries but it would be a stretch to claim that they are a universally positive aspect of football. Few are known for their friendliness, and the most famous are generally those with the most needle, and so if we accept that the vast majority of rivalries are defined by 'needle', then it follows that the nature of any specific rivalry can be truly found in identifying what exactly are the causes of the needle, and indeed there is a whole academic discipline dedicated to the detail and the causes. The aim of this book isn't to go into depth about great matches or the minutiae of individual seasons, but instead to look at the causes of the rivalry; why did it come about that these two clubs became such bitter rivals, and what has sustained it over 150 years?

One problem with looking at it is how to deal with the facts and figures, and as always when dealing with statistics, there are different ways these can be cut. When looking at head-to-heads, I have included all of the local competitions up to the point they stopped being relevant. While these can often be written off as 'non-competitive', that is to reduce the significance with which they were viewed at the time; the local competitions mattered hugely, and while they did start to fall away as the national competitions gained in significance, and the League Cup established itself post-war,

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the East of Scotland Shield remained a significant occasion into the late 70s/early 80s, something that football historian Andy Mitchell confirmed when interviewed for this book. In the early years, the local competitions were effectively what today you would think of as domestic competitions, the bread and butter of a club. The Scottish Cup was more akin to the European Cup. It is also worth remembering that unlike today, the clubs did not face each other four times a season in the league. Looking through the history books, it is amazing how uniform the derby scheduling was in the league season, with the first league match being played around September, the second on New Year's Day.

When reading this, there will be views and opinions, perhaps whole sections or chapters, that partisan supporters of each club will not like. Football fans see only the good in their team's actions, and only conspiracy, plot and evil on those of the other. And where their club has been caught out, even when bang to rights, they defend, they mitigate, they point to others who are worse. That is how football fans are; your club is uniquely virtuous among all others in the world of football. But of course that is nonsense, and it would be strange that, if over the course of 150 years, both clubs had not at various times been both sinned against and sinner. Most of life exists in a shade of grey, not in black and white, and that is certainly true of 150 years of footballing rivalry.

And in football, truth is a rare commodity. Instead, we have competing narratives, myths and truths, and who can say which is right? In every incident, the aggressor will be fuelled by the righteous indignation of some past

precedent, slight, or transgression. In Edinburgh, each side will have its own interpretation of events, and they are often quite different. Some would have been true, some have been distorted by time and inconvenience, and I daresay many have been deliberately lost to the official histories which are responsible for much of myth-building around their clubs. In this book, I will try to present the absolute truths (scores, results, established facts – although even these are not without their challenges), but also the different perspectives. I will present these not because I believe them but because the people who have contributed to this work believe them, and at least some of the supporters believe them. This book will largely exist in shades of grey, as does much of the rivalry I seek to explore and understand.

But this will require a degree of indulgence from the readers, particularly those who are followers of one or other of the teams. There will be things in here that you do not like, and some things that you might not agree with. That's as it should be, and all history, let alone football rivalry history, is contested and disputed. I do not intend this to be a puff piece to make one set of fans feel good or bad; there are umpteen club histories that will give you the rose-tinted view of your club's history from that perspective. And where there are particularly contentious issues, I will do my best to present them as fairly as possible. I won't succeed in this, and I am certain that at various points fans of either club will not like what they read. But I do give the undertaking that this is written in good faith, and with the aim of marking 150 years of one of world football's great rivalries.