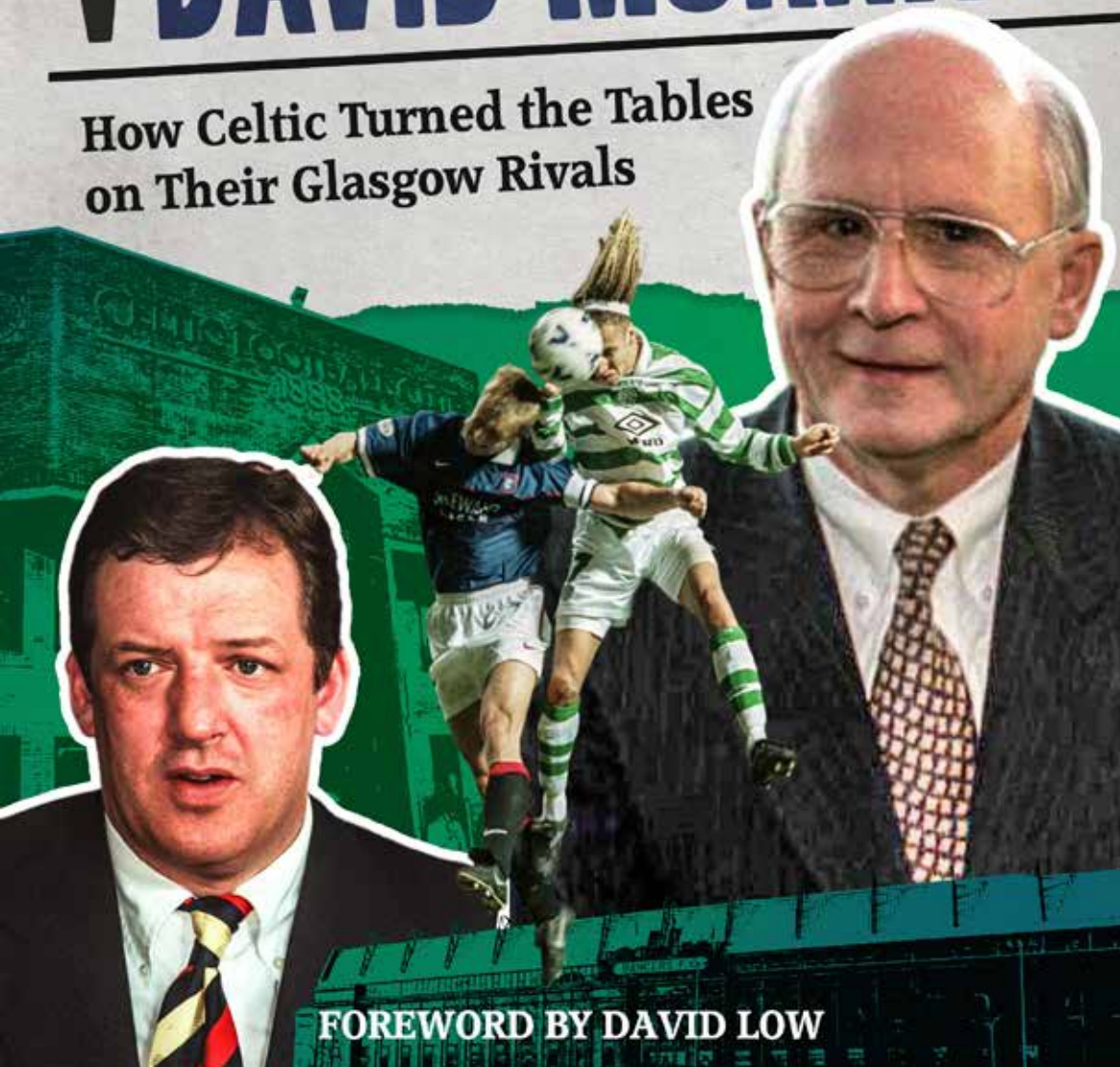
BY STEPHEN O'DONNELL

FERGUS McCANN v DAVID MURRAY

How Celtic Turned the Tables on Their Glasgow Rivals



FOREWORD BY DAVID LOW

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STEPHEN O'DONNELL

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Before the Flood of Money

DURING the 1990s, the seemingly eternal rivalry in Glasgow between the city's two great football teams, Celtic and Rangers, appeared to take on a new, ultra-modern dimension in the shape of the two institutions' recognised and successful owners, Fergus McCann and David Murray. Over the course of the decade, these two businessmen came to be considered among the most well-known public figures in Scotland, due almost entirely to their roles at their respective clubs, and to outside observers, certainly at first glance, it may have seemed as if Murray and McCann had been hewn from the same rock. Both were driven, headstrong, self-made men, ready to trample over anything or anyone who had the misfortune to get in their way, and in coming to prominence when they did, the pair also found themselves favourably positioned to exploit the commercialisation and corporatisation of football that was taking place over the period of their involvement in the game.

Yet the two men could hardly have been more different. Murray, the Rangers chairman, at times appeared to be on a never-ending mission to indulge his ego, an unabashed

showman, who was prepared to take extraordinary risks with his own, and in particular with other people's money, in the unshakeable belief that his plans would always come to fruition in the end. McCann, by contrast, Murray's counterpart at Celtic Park, gave the impression of a relatively low-key figure, who was happy to beaver away behind the scenes at his club while displaying almost no interest in the dubious distractions of the PR game or in manipulating his public profile in any way. His primary concern, it seemed, was with making money, and in March 1994 he invested almost his entire fortune in Celtic in a bid to effectively relaunch the struggling Parkhead outfit over the course of a five-year plan, by the end of which he had more than quadrupled his initial stake in the club. Murray, the 'impresario', as one of his former directors described him, would throw cash around in order to make himself look good, whereas for McCann, a meticulous trained accountant, who was in for virtually all he was worth, every penny was a prisoner.

As a keen follower of Celtic in his youth before he emigrated to Canada in the mid-1960s, McCann had acquired at first hand a thorough knowledge and understanding of the importance of the club to its community of fans. He knew that Celtic, still under the archaic and stubborn control of the three dynastic families who had dominated the Parkhead boardroom since the Victorian age, was a sleeping giant of the global game, which, if awoken, held within it the potential to return to its former glories. By comparison, prior to his association with Rangers, football held little interest for Murray, who seemed to have been more of a rugby buff in his formative years, thanks to his time at the posh Fettes College in Edinburgh, before his father's bankruptcy and other associated family issues saw him relegated to the nearby local Broughton High School. McCann's insight

furnished him with the initial confidence to proceed with his takeover and turnaround of the Parkhead club, which, over the course of his short allotted timescale, he ultimately saw through to a successful conclusion. Conversely, Murray's connection with Rangers eventually extended to almost 23 years, at times with no apparent end in sight, until in 2011, with financial catastrophe looming, he finally bailed out, handing over the reins at Ibrox to a doomed and incompetent successor.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the two rivals, however, lay in the way in which they were treated by an outrageously partisan mainstream media. At one stage, McCann was compared unfavourably with the international *bête noire* of the day, the maligned Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, while many of these same journalists who were perpetually haranguing the Celtic supremo were simultaneously being invited to dine, and almost choking themselves with flattery, on Murray's fine wine and 'succulent lamb', a notorious phrase that eventually came to define everything that was increasingly wrong and improper with sports journalism in Glasgow and the west of Scotland at this time.

Hard as it may seem to consider, but before the revolution in how football clubs were run in the 1990s, when the game was effectively taken over by corporate and media interests, Scottish football had already enjoyed a long and distinguished history. In particular, Celtic and Rangers, the two 'Old Firm' sides, had from the very earliest days of competitive professional football in Scotland established an effective duopoly over the national game, regularly annexing all the available major domestic trophies and marking themselves out as two of the biggest and most renowned clubs in the global game. Even as far back as the turn of the 20th century, this dual power-base in Glasgow had begun to

arouse the suspicion and indignation of rivals and outsiders who, with some justification, began to see the Glasgow clubs as an effective cartel, as much partners as adversaries in the matter of pursuing their own financial best interests. Over the course of the following few decades, however, the religious and ethnic tensions between the clubs, as reflected in the wider society, would tear them asunder, placing the two institutions at opposite ends of an at times ghastly, but always compelling rivalry.

Celtic, for their part, had enjoyed an undeniably glorious history long before the arrival of Fergus McCann in the east end of Glasgow, although sadly for the club's fans, glory and success didn't always go hand in hand for the Parkhead men. The club was founded by a group of prominent Irishmen, most notably Brother Walfrid of the Marist religious order, shortly after Sunday Mass on 6 November 1887 at a meeting in St Mary's Hall in the Calton area of the city. To notify the press about his venture into the popular game of football, Walfrid popped into the offices of the *Scottish Umpire* on Jamaica Street and told them all about his plans and ideas for the proposed new club, with the paper subsequently reporting, 'We learn that the efforts which have lately been made to organise in Glasgow a first-class Catholic football club, have been successfully consummated by the formation of the "Glasgow Celtic Football and Athletic Club," under influential auspices. They have secured a six-acre ground in the east-end, which they mean to put in fine order. We wish the "Celts" all success.'

The team played its first match at the new, purpose-built ground in Parkhead the following May and celebrated a 5-2 win over Rangers, establishing in the process an early friendship with the Ibrox side. Celtic had arrived relatively late on the scene, at a time when professionalism in football had already been

legalised in England and was on the verge of being officially accepted in Scotland too. The old amateur ethos of earlier in the century, under which the ex-public school and university boys had popularised and codified the game, was now being purged away as football swept across the industrial communities of England and Scotland, with ordinary working people flocking to support their local teams in increasingly astonishing numbers and embracing Saturday afternoon football as an enjoyable digression from the toil and routine of the working week.

One of Celtic's founding principles, its *raison d'être* in the early years, was to raise money through the charitable St Vincent de Paul Society for the children of impoverished Irish immigrants in the main Catholic parishes of Glasgow's east end. To fulfil the purpose of its foundation, therefore, Celtic had to be both financially viable and successful on the field straight away, and the club's early movers and shakers went to great lengths to persuade some of the best footballers of the age to join their new enterprise. A key factor in convincing others of their credibility and strength of purpose was the procurement from the West Dunbartonshire village side Renton of half-back James Kelly, a Scotland international and one of the greatest players of his day. Kelly's arrival precipitated an influx of *fin de siècle* footballing talent to Parkhead, including a sizeable contingent from fellow Irish side Hibernian, the Edinburgh club founded in 1875, who were fleeced for as many as six players, an outcome which left the Easter Road men understandably vexed. Meanwhile, other recruits to Celtic's cause arrived from teams as far afield as Everton, the champions of England, who lost Dan Doyle to the Glasgow club in 1891, and Aston Villa, the Double winners, from whom the Parkhead side took three players in 1897.

With so many other Catholic representative teams in Glasgow having already fallen by the wayside, this single-mindedness on the part of Walfrid and his colleagues in their dealings with other clubs reveals how resolute and determined they were to ensure that Celtic, in its early, formative years, didn't wither on the vine in a similar fashion. As author Graham McColl observes in *The Official Biography of Celtic*, 'Celtic became renowned for a rapacious ruthlessness that would have made many a Dickensian factory owner's heart sing. Charity may have been at the club's core but it was set aside when dealing with other clubs.' Kelly himself would be named Celtic's first-ever captain and, after his retirement from the game, his move into the directors' box, following the club's incorporation in 1897, established a dynasty in the Parkhead boardroom that would ultimately only end with McCann.

From very early on, Celtic were identified in the contemporary press as 'the team of Irishmen'; although, initially at least, such a label didn't necessarily imply suspicion or disrespect. Nevertheless, when Celtic and Hibernian moved to the top of the league in 1896, the *Scottish Sport* observed with some alarm, 'The two Irish teams are at the top of the table. Is this not a reflection on Scotland?' Evidence suggests, though, that despite their clear Irish Catholic roots, the early founders of Celtic saw the club as a proposed link between Ireland, the ancestral homeland, and Scotland, the new country of residence, as Dr Matthew L. McDowell points out in his book *A Cultural History of Association Football in Scotland, 1865–1902*: 'From the outset, Celtic looked outwith the Catholic community for inspiration … [The club] was intended as a bridge to Protestant Scotland rather than as an "Irish" organisation, and as such did not restrict themselves to Catholic players.'

This notion of a dual identity within the club represented a clear departure from the policy of Hibernian, which only extended its membership to practising Catholics and whose popularity among the Glasgow Irish community, particularly after their Scottish Cup Final victory over Dumbarton at Crosshills in February 1887, had helped to spark the idea for Celtic's foundation. It has even been suggested that the chosen name for the new club was a reference to the 'Keltic' traditions of both nations, with the Catholics-only suggestion dismissed as parochial and restrictive by the founders of the ambitious Glasgow side. Ultimately, however, the idealistic notion of a pan-'Keltic' club, which linked the communities of Scotland and Ireland, would be undermined in the 1890s by the sporting press's nomination and adoption of Rangers as the club of true Scottish heritage, as the men from Govan emerged as the leading rival to the overnight success story that Celtic had become.

Clearly, however, the efforts of the early Parkhead committee members hadn't been in vain, and within a few short years of the club's foundation there were not many followers of the game in Scotland who could fail to acknowledge their success, as in 1892 Celtic claimed all three major cup competitions, namely the Glasgow Cup, the Glasgow Charity Cup and the Scottish Cup, although they had to settle for second place in the league behind the champions, Dumbarton. Nevertheless, the Parkhead side had now established themselves as one of the greatest teams in the country, and in the new, upgraded Celtic Park, where the club relocated in 1892, they had a splendid, purpose-built ground that was in regular use as the preferred venue for the Scotland versus England international fixture for most of the 1890s.

The establishment of Rangers as a perennial rival to Celtic around the turn of the century slowed the Parkhead club's progress, and by the end of the First World War, as Scottish football and society found itself enveloped in religious bigotry, Celtic's status as the foremost club in the land was challenged and overcome by Bill Struth's regimented and unyielding Rangers sides of the 1920s and 30s. Hampered by external prejudices in the game's governance and in the press, who largely refused to call out Rangers over their anti-Catholicism, it would take until the mid-1960s before Celtic would properly find their feet again. Free from chairman Robert Kelly's tiresome and counterproductive meddling in team affairs, Celtic won the league for the first time in 12 years in 1966 and, under the transformative leadership of new manager Jock Stein, bettered that success the following year with the most coveted prize of all, the European Cup, in a season in which the Parkhead club managed to win every competition they entered.

With Stein in charge, Celtic subsequently went on to lift an unprecedented nine consecutive titles, and in the process re-established themselves as the number-one team in the country. From that position, however, the club entered a slow period of decline, which didn't manifest itself fully until the late 1980s. By early in the following decade, Celtic had become a mere shadow of their former selves, heavily indebted to their bankers and in the midst of a fallow period, which harked back to the pre-Stein era. There was one man, though, who promised to restore the club's ailing fortunes, if only the incumbent board, still dominated by James Kelly's descendants, would allow him … Fergus McCann.

Meanwhile, over on the other side of the city, and predating Celtic by some 16 years, Rangers were founded as far back as

1872 by a group of four teenagers – three from Garelochhead in Argyll and one from Callander in Perthshire – who, like so many of their contemporaries, had migrated towards Glasgow in search of work during the industrial boom of the mid-Victorian period. It was a rocky road for the boys' club at first, with Rangers a nomadic, cash-strapped and controversy-dogged institution in the early years, but by the time of the formation of a Scottish league in 1891, Rangers appeared to have put their earlier troubles behind them and, under the assiduous leadership of secretary-manager William Wilton, had grown into one of the biggest and best-supported clubs in the country. Moving into a new, permanent home on the south side of Glasgow, Ibrox Park, and aided by the sudden appearance of a brash and ambitious new local rival in Celtic, Rangers successfully exploited the era of professionalism and the extraordinary, exponential growth in football's popularity over this period to form a limited liability company in May 1899, just as Celtic had two years earlier. The club's incorporation meant the end of the old committee structure, with posts, such as match secretary and treasurer, elected from the membership lists, to be replaced instead by a board of directors, with the ownership of the club now transferred into the hands of its small shareholders.

Following the club's incorporation, the new Rangers board, led by Baillie James Henderson, was made up largely of prominent citizens, including future chairmen Baillie Joseph Buchanan and Sir John Ure Primrose, an ardent and campaigning opponent of Irish home rule, which for some years now, dating back to Prime Minister William Gladstone's proposed legislation of the 1880s, had been one of the most contentious and sensitive political issues of the day. In time, the number of club administrators at Ibrox was whittled down, and for most of the first half of

the 20th century, the Rangers board consisted of a tight group comprising a chairman and two directors, all unwaged, made up almost exclusively of ex-players, including such long-serving and notable figures as Alan Morton and James Bowie. This informal, pseudo-amateur structure served the club well and brought unprecedented levels of on-field success to Ibrox, as Rangers grew into the biggest and best-supported club in the country during the inter-war period. Things changed in the summer of 1947, however, when Bowie, a capable administrator who had previously served as president of both the SFA and the Scottish League, lost out in a bitter dispute over control of the boardroom and was ousted by the club's all-powerful manager, Bill Struth.

In a largely unreported but nevertheless acrimonious and divisive coup, Bowie had suggested to Struth that he might consider retirement and the acceptance of a place on the club's board in return for relinquishing his position as team manager. Struth at the time was 71 years old, the same age at which his great contemporary, Willie Maley, had been ushered towards the exit door at Celtic Park in 1940 after 52 years' service to the Parkhead club, but the veteran Rangers manager appeared to be in no mood to give way and submit himself to the same indignity. Since his appointment in 1920, Struth had been slowly accumulating shares in Rangers, mostly on the cheap in partnership with club secretary, William Rogers Simpson, and by 1947 the manager was the club's largest individual shareholder, owning a total of 1,097 shares. As a paid employee, however, Struth was forbidden by the club's articles of association from becoming a director, but in Bowie's unwelcome suggestion that he should stand aside and move upstairs, Struth sensed an opportunity.

Over the course of a heated extraordinary general meeting (EGM) and annual general meeting (AGM) held on the night of 12 June 1947, the manager used his overwhelming proxy vote to not only vote down Bowie's own attempt at re-election but also to pass an amendment that allowed both he and Simpson to become directors while remaining paid employees of the club, safe in their respective positions as manager and club secretary, with Simpson eventually going on to take over the vacant chairman's seat at the club. Bowie, on the other hand, strode out of the AGM around midnight having been completely defeated, and despite his lengthy association with the club – not least as a player under Struth in the early 1920s – he was never heard of in connection with Rangers again.

It was a momentous day in the club's history, although as Struth's biographer, David Mason, noted, 'The outcome of the meeting that Bowie had construed as being the most important in the history of Rangers Football Club was reported in half a column in the *Glasgow Herald* … The Bowie camp lamented that the issue was of passive interest to the fans and not one supporter awaited the outcome at the doors to Ibrox.' Similarly, the coverage in *The Scotsman* amounted to just a few lines on page six of the paper, just above an equal-sized column bearing news of a yacht race around Ailsa Craig. The press had offered limited information, and almost no analysis, while the club's supporters seemed entirely nonplussed by the tumultuous off-field events. Bowie had argued passionately at the EGM that the proposed changes would cede control of the club to those with 'financial interests, as against an administration solely concerned with maintaining the [club's] high sporting traditions', but ultimately his pleas had fallen on deaf ears.

The eventual outcome allowed Struth to continue as manager while increasing his stranglehold on power at Ibrox by becoming a fully waged director. However, as an almost unnoticed consequence, control of the club had now passed from those who had a history of previous service with Rangers, or whose shares held a merely passive, emotional value, to investors whose interest in the company might be entirely pecuniary, with directors now likely to have a financial stake in the club or to have bought their way on to the board. One leading club historian later described Struth's boardroom coup as 'the day Rangers became a business', while Mason offered an insight into the far-reaching repercussions of the club's change of direction: 'In many ways, [Bowie's] fears were prophetic of the dangers that would ultimately cause the club such grief in more recent times.'

As a result of Struth's drastic efforts at self-preservation, Rangers shares, and ultimately the control of the club, were now a commodity that could be traded openly, and in 1954 the builder John Lawrence joined the board at Ibrox. Lawrence, famous throughout Scotland for his housebuilding, served as chairman from 1963 until 1973, but his board largely comprised like-minded small businessmen of similar age, who by the early 1970s seemed to be overwhelmed by the club's catastrophic misfortunes. After losing the hegemony of the domestic game to Jock Stein's Celtic, which provoked the panicked and mishandled dismissal of manager Scot Symon in November 1967, Rangers suffered the trauma of the second Ibrox Park disaster, when 66 supporters were fatally injured in a crush on the steps of Ibrox after a 1-1 draw with Celtic on 2 January 1971. The directors, almost all of them well into their dotage by this stage, seemed utterly overtaken by events and, as a group, they were severely criticised at a subsequent private prosecution, in which the wife

of one of the disaster victims was awarded more than £26,000 in damages. In giving his verdict, the civil suit judge castigated the Rangers board for their failure to heed the warnings of several previous crushes on the same Ibrox stairway and found that their inaction and incompetence was a contributing factor in the tragedy.

Nevertheless, perhaps surprisingly in the midst of such woe, the high-water mark of the club's on-field achievements soon followed, when Willie Waddell's cautiously defensive side triumphed in the Cup Winners' Cup, with a 3-2 victory over Dynamo Moscow in the Barcelona final in May 1972. The occasion was marred by events at the end of the game, however, when rioting fans prevented captain John Greig from being properly presented with the trophy, with the cup eventually handed over to the Rangers skipper deep within the bowels of the Camp Nou rather than against the customary backdrop of dignitaries and celebrating fans. As a result of the travelling supporters' conduct on the night, Rangers were eventually banned from European competition for a year, denying the team the opportunity of defending their title.

Most of the sitting Rangers directors would be dead by the end of the decade, including Lawrence, who bequeathed his shareholding to his grandson Lawrence Marlborough in 1977. Marlborough had joined the board in 1973, aged just 30, and eventually sat alongside chairman Rae Simpson, a Kilmarnock surgeon, who had himself inherited his shares from his grandfather James Henderson, the incorporated club's first chairman, and from his father, another former chairman, W. R. Simpson, once Bill Struth's seditious ally. Marlborough's and Simpson's fellow directors included a cast of small business owners – builders, proprietors of haulage firms, taxi companies

and garage dealerships – who had built up their stakes in the club with small purchases over many years following the coup of 1947. These small-time wheelers and dealers also found themselves largely out of their depth when it came to providing the stability and leadership that Rangers required and, amid frequent and prolonged internal disputes, the club endured a painful, drawn-out spell of on-field mediocrity, which, with the notable exception of two memorable Trebles won by Jock Wallace's rumbustious sides of 1976 and 1978, extended over a 20-year period from the mid-1960s through to the mid-1980s.

In November 1985, Marlborough moved to straighten out the club's affairs and put a stop to the financial losses at Ibrox, which were draining money from his parent company, the Lawrence Building Group. Now based in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, where he had relocated after resigning from the Rangers board in 1983, Marlborough appointed David Holmes, managing director of his operation in Falkirk, to the club's board with instructions to be his eyes and ears in Glasgow. Between them, Marlborough and Holmes then put together a plan to gain a controlling interest in the company with the intention of trying to reinvigorate the underachieving institution and making Rangers more financially viable once again. However, it soon became clear that, if their ideas were to come to fruition, there would first have to be blood on the carpet in the Ibrox boardroom.

In the end, Marlborough's bitter and protracted takeover saw three directors ousted, including Rae Simpson, with 53-year-old Holmes, Marlborough's man on the ground, appointed as the club's new chief executive officer on 14 February 1986. The decisive factor in engineering the coup came when an agreement was secured with disgruntled former vice-chairman Jack Gillespie, one of the warring factions in the old set-up,

who agreed to a staggered sale of a significant proportion of his 81,000 shares, sufficient in the end to give Marlborough a 52 per cent stake and outright control of the club. Gillespie was rewarded with a lifetime directorship, although his abiding ambition of one day occupying the chairman's seat at Ibrox would ultimately elude him.

It was another seismic day of seminal and irrevocable change in the way Rangers was governed as an institution. For the first time in its history, the club was now effectively a one party state, wholly beholden to a single majority shareholder and dependent for the sound and capable administration of its affairs on the aptitudes and calibre of one individual. If there were any concerns or reservations being expressed at the time, however, they were soon set aside as, under the incoming regime, Rangers were transformed from a staid, directionless cabal of factional and competing self-interests into a thriving model of speculate-to-accumulate capitalism in Margaret Thatcher's new Britain. The wage structure was dismantled, and the cherished Presbyterian values of thrift and moderation were swept aside; finance was now king, and Rangers would recover their former glories by simply outspending any opponent who dared to put up a challenge against them. Money was borrowed from the bank to pay for expensive new signings and, based on the sound economic principles of supply and demand, ticket prices were immediately ratcheted up to double the level of the previous era. Regardless of the escalating cost, however, supporters came flooding back to the club, with the number of season ticket holders at Ibrox increasing from fewer than 3,000 in 1986 to approximately 30,000 by 1991. In addition, on top of the increased gate receipts, Rangers were one of the first clubs in Britain to identify and exploit the potential revenue

from matchday hospitality, with a new executive lounge soon opened in the main stand, equipped with facilities to cater for 240 corporate guests.

Elsewhere in the stadium, refurbished as an almost fully seated arena after the 1971 disaster, the ordinary fan also couldn't help but notice the smaller, subtler modifications around the club, as the matchday programme was given a glossy makeover, electronic scoreboards were installed behind the goals for the first time and a proper DJ was hired to provide the pre-match entertainment, lending Ibrox Park an unmistakeable sense of modernity and change. Only the less affluent supporter was overlooked in the upgrades that were taking place at the club, it seemed, as all tickets sold on the day of a game were now full price, with no concessionary rates available to non-season ticket holders, making it very difficult for children, students, pensioners and the less well-off to follow Rangers on a regular basis.

Key to the club's resurrection was the appointment of a new manager to replace the discarded Jock Wallace, and the candidate David Holmes and his colleagues eventually identified would prove to be perfectly in tune with the new direction that the club was embarking upon. Graeme Souness was a man who freely admitted that he had no idea what he was letting himself in for when he agreed to become the Ibrox club's new player-manager in March 1986, but with his outspoken adherence to the Thatcherite ideal, he seemed to anticipate and exemplify the changes that were taking place in football and in society at the time. Under their new manager, Rangers outspent every other club, not just in Scotland but in Britain, over the next few years. Thanks to Holmes's readiness to take the club deep into debt, a raft of top-quality English internationals agreed to join the Ibrox side, including, initially, Terry Butcher, the England

captain, and Chris Woods, followed not far down the line by Gary Stevens, Trevor Steven, Mark Walters, Trevor Francis, Ray Wilkins and Mark Hateley.

Scottish football was utterly stunned; the self-seeking, monetarist principles of Thatcherism had been widely rejected north of the border, particularly in the industrial Labour heartlands of west central Scotland, yet here was the country's leading club transforming itself and indeed the Scottish game with a strategy that the Iron Lady herself could have readily prescribed for the ailing Ibrox institution. Two games, played a year apart, against the same opponent, perhaps provided the clearest illustration of the changes that had taken place at Ibrox over the intervening 12 months. In January 1986, just 12,371 fans watched a Rangers team featuring the underwhelming talents of Hugh Burns, Craig Paterson and Bobby Williamson labour to an eventual 4-2 win over Clydebank, the league's perennial strugglers. Almost exactly a year later, an Ibrox side including such luminaries as Souness, Woods, Butcher and new signing Graham Roberts, again faced the hapless Bankies, who had only been reprieved from relegation through league reconstruction, and routed them 5-0 in front of 36,397. Over a three-month stretch between February and April 1986, Rangers won a total of just one league game, eventually finishing the season without a trophy and in a lowly fifth place in the Premier Division. Over the same period the following year, the Ibrox men won ten games out of 12 en route to the title.

The directionless and anachronistic institution of earlier in the decade was now attractive to investors, and by October 1988 the City had already been made aware of the potential availability of Marlborough's shareholding in the club. Because of stock market rules, Marlborough had been obliged to make an offer

for all the remaining shares after his takeover in 1986, and, as a result, he had eventually acquired 66 per cent of the stock. The following month, on 23 November 1988, Marlborough finally sold up, ending his family's 44-year involvement with the Ibrox institution, which led one anonymous ex-player to observe at the time that former chairman John Lawrence, the so-called 'benign bishop' whose name had become associated with Rangers over the many years of his involvement at Ibrox, would be 'spinning in his grave' at the discontinuation of his family's interest in the club. Marlborough, son of Lawrence's daughter Alice, was the anointed successor, after John Lawrence Junior, known as Jack, predeceased his father and brother William showed no interest for the fray, but now the favoured grandson and nominated heir was cashing in the family jewels, receiving £25 per share, roughly double what he had paid less than three years earlier. David Holmes, by then the club chairman, denied that Marlborough had been forced into a sale and that the sustained overspending at Ibrox was contributing to the Lawrence Group's ongoing financial problems, insisting instead that the company was merely 'streamlining' its operation.

The buyer was 37-year-old David Edward Murray, who saw off a late, clandestine move to acquire Rangers by the doomed and subsequently disgraced media baron, Robert Maxwell, to become the new owner of the famous old Ibrox club. Murray, immediately described in the tabloids as a 'metals and property tycoon' and a 'sports car enthusiast', a hobby he apparently retained despite having lost both his legs in a high-speed roll-out while driving home from a rugby match in 1976, was already one of Scotland's best known and mostly highly regarded young businessmen. 'He is, quite simply,' opined Alf Young, economics editor of the broadsheet *Glasgow Herald*, who had

done a bit more digging into Murray's background, 'one of the most aggressively successful deal doers the Scottish corporate scene has ever seen.' Murray paid just over £6m for Rangers, acquiring as part of the transaction Marlborough's 240,713 ordinary shares, which included options on the remaining stock still held by Jack Gillespie, due to be obtained by Marlborough, under the terms of the 1986 takeover, over the next two years.

With the stadium valued at £22m and the player registrations worth an estimated £10m, Young made the obvious point in his piece for *The Herald* when he noted, 'Many will be pondering over a deal where a company can buy a club for substantially less than the estimated value of its players.' But with Murray obliged under stock market rules to make an offer for all the remaining shares, which was forecast to see his stake rise to around 75 per cent of the total holdings, Young accounted for the apparent anomaly in the purchase price by also noting the substantial overdraft that had been taken on by the new owner, estimated at around £9m, and by quoting a leading financial analyst, who observed that while the deal 'looks like a very good bargain … perhaps there will be a lot more to pay out before the matter is finished'.

Murray acquired Rangers through his parent company Murray International Holdings (MIH), which he had grown from a one man and a secretary operation when the firm was set up in Edinburgh's Alva Street in 1974 into a multinational conglomerate of 36 companies with a turnover of £90m and an estimated workforce of 1,200 people, trading in steel, electronics, office systems and equipment, leisure, other metals and, most recently, property, making MIH one of the top three private businesses in Scotland. Also coming in on the deal was manager Graeme Souness, who contributed £600,000 for a 10

per cent 'lifetime' stake in Murray's majority share of the club, adding a directorship to his already joint roles of manager and player, although the former Scotland international midfielder's influence on the field at Ibrox would be limited from this point onwards.

It was Souness, in fact, who originally brought Murray, his friend and fellow Tory ideologue, to the table with Rangers and brokered the agreement with Marlborough, after the industrialist, in May 1988, had failed in his attempted takeover of home town club Ayr United, whose directors had judged Murray to be too hotheaded, and a 'most volatile' and 'very unpredictable' individual. Despite being offered almost four times what their shares were then worth, when they dug down into the detail of his bid, the seven-man board of the Somerset Park club had come to the conclusion that Murray was trying to gain control of the business on the cheap, in effect for a mere £125,000 of his own money. Led by chairman George Smith, a local farmer, and majority shareholder Sandy Loudon, a Girvan accountant, the board subsequently declined his offer, claiming that the prospective purchaser was looking for 'too much, too soon and at too little a price', a rejection that left Murray incandescent.

By November, just six months later, the steel tycoon couldn't resist a sideswipe at those who had earlier spurned his advances: 'Perhaps Ayr United will now realise what I could have done for them. I think they will be inquiring among themselves about what they've missed,' Murray offered immodestly, once his takeover of Rangers was complete. Described as the 'sports deal of the year' – by Murray – the *Daily Record* reported how the new owner, on acquiring Rangers, 'became the most powerful figure in Scottish football with a single flourish of his pen'. It

seemed an odd turn of phrase even at the time; how could the majority shareholder of one of the country's clubs, however big, be regarded as the most important and powerful person in the game? Regardless, it was an accolade that Murray would live up to over the coming years, after he expressed the view that no institution, other than the Church of Scotland, was more important in the country than Rangers.

All this was pretty much par for the course, and the open-arms welcome that Murray received from the media after his purchase of Rangers was largely to be expected. On closer inspection, however, behind the multimillionaire, swashbuckling captain of industry public persona, there was a young man with a very chequered background. In the 1960s, Murray's father, David Ian Murray, known as Ian, had reinvented himself as a flamboyant professional gambler and racehorse owner after failing his exams as a trainee veterinary surgeon and then dropping out of the family coal merchant business. Murray Snr subsequently emerged as something of a local celebrity in Ayr and was so successful and prominent for a period that he became known within the community, ironically, as 'Lord Beresford' in reference to his numerous business interests on the town's swanky Beresford Terrace. After amassing a small fortune on the horses, however, Ian subsequently lost the lot, and when bankruptcy and court action ensued, the result was a two-year prison sentence in 1968, after he was convicted of illegal business transactions and intent to defraud his creditors.

Around the same time, the young David witnessed the break-up of his parents' marriage, which was followed almost immediately by his forced removal from Fettes College in Edinburgh, an upmarket, fee-paying boarding school, and his enrolment instead, due to his family's now considerably reduced

circumstances, at the altogether more affordable Broughton High School just around the corner. It couldn't have been easy – a posh boy from Fettes, from a broken home and with a jailbird dad, being obliged to go down the road and mix in at the local, state-funded secondary. Later in life, Murray loved to recount the story of how his father, after being cleaned out and left effectively penniless by his gambling habit, was paid a substantial sum of money by a Sunday tabloid for the exclusive rights to his life story. Murray Snr immediately staked the entire fee he received from the paper on a horse, which romped home at outrageously long odds.

In addition to the unstable environment of his childhood, Murray then suffered a life-changing trauma just as his fledgling business career was beginning to take off, when he was involved in a near-fatal car accident, smashing his Lotus into a tree at high speed and only waking up in hospital after both his legs had been amputated. At roughly the same time, in September 1975, his father Ian died aged just 50, and the young entrepreneur also had to write off a substantial bad debt, which left him £100,000 out of pocket – not an easy position for a young man with a wife and two baby sons to support.

Nevertheless, now hyper-motivated as a result of these setbacks and with a portfolio of viable businesses to occupy his time and energy, Murray found the economic climate of the 1980s very much to his liking. At the age of 33 he was named 'Young Scottish Businessman of the Year' at the Scottish Business Achievement Awards in 1984, a recognition of his talents, which afforded Murray the opportunity to air his views on what he perceived was going wrong with British industry in the early 1980s. 'There are too many people in business who spend all their time talking about it. Too many maybes,

would-haves and could-dos,' the young entrepreneur complained while berating the upper-crust, old-guard business community in Scotland and Britain, whom he dismissed as 'the four-hour lunchers'. 'As a nation, we're not hungry enough any more. Today it's the Taiwanese and the Mexicans who are hungry, and just look what that's doing to sections of our industry,' Murray lamented. 'In the United States they applaud it, but here the climate's all wrong and the incentives are all wrong.'

The 1980s, generally, was a decade when aspirational, lower-middle-class men such as Murray were rising to prominence, regardless of mediocre levels of academic attainment or whether or not they had the right background or connections, and Murray was entirely typical of the new breed of businessman who was becoming involved in football around the time of his acquisition of Rangers. But even considering the abrupt, no-nonsense manner of well-known figures such as Alan Sugar at Tottenham or Martin Edwards at Manchester United, Murray often appeared to be in a category of his own when it came to the sheer belligerence of his bearing and disposition. Describing himself as 'abrasive, arrogant and full of self-confidence', his management style was characterised by an obvious disdain for boardroom consensus or for laboriously long meetings, which he admitted left him feeling bored. 'The very important yes or no decisions are made by me right here in this office. People can walk in and see me and if I need to I can go and see them,' he explained. It was an approach that appeared to fit with the times, but perhaps augured less well for Murray's ability to navigate the waters of more stormy economic conditions ahead.

At times, though, such was the extent of his haughtiness and self-absorption, that it almost seemed as if there was a screw loose somewhere with Murray, and over the next few years, as

the chairman and his club went crashing recklessly forward, his notorious ego would eventually get the better of him. With the banking community and the media favourably aligned to his cause, Murray's Rangers soon set off in their quest to emulate Celtic's record nine consecutive domestic league titles as well as, most ruinously of all, the Parkhead side's elusive capture of the European Cup in 1967, with ultimately catastrophic consequences for the Ibrox club and for Murray's business empire overall. Unfortunately, however, with all the eulogising and the media profiling that was going on, which would only increase in the magnitude and volume of its obsequiousness as the years went by, nobody appeared to notice until it was too late.