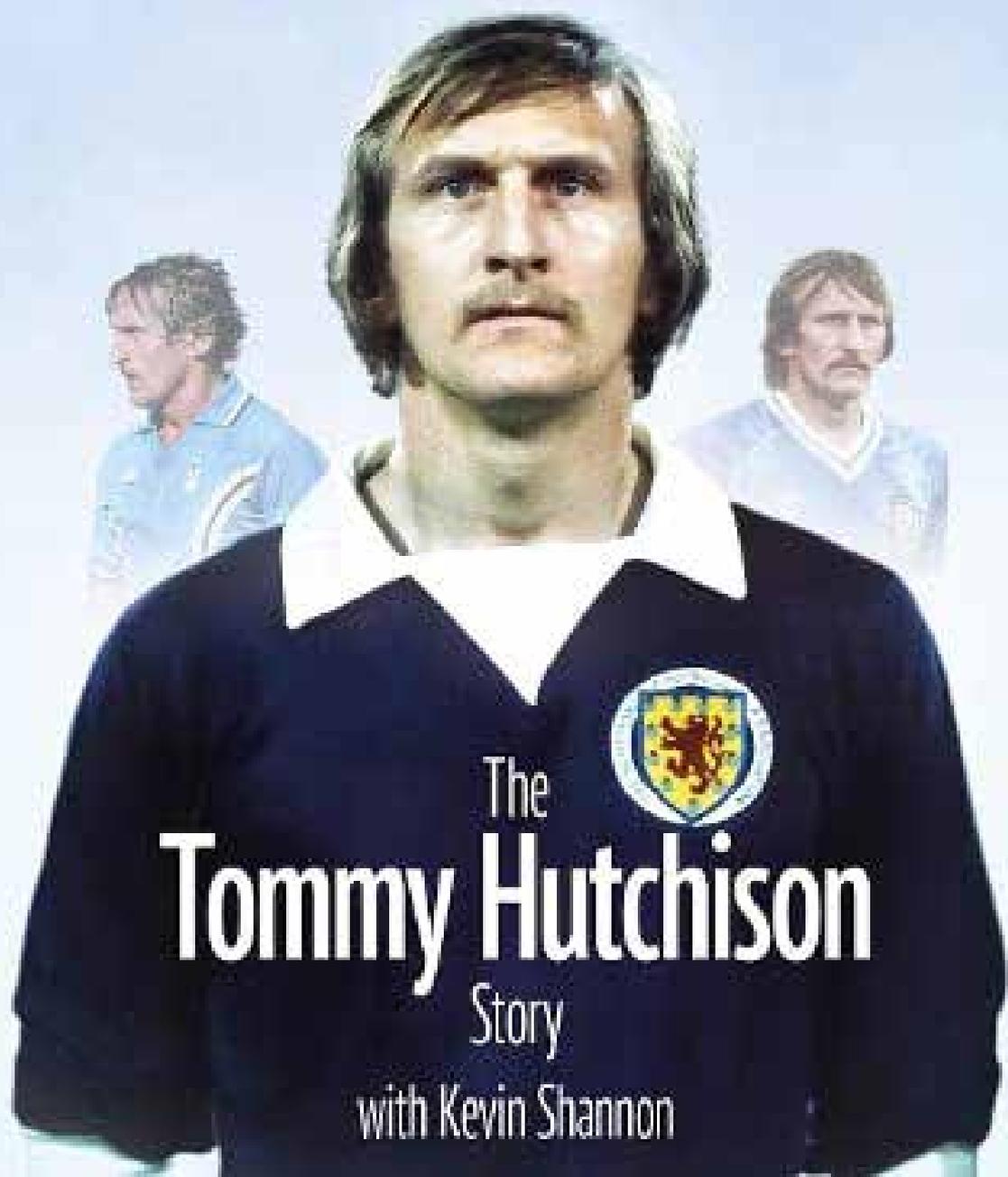


HUTCH

Hard Work and Belief



The
Tommy Hutchison
Story

with Kevin Shannon

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Chapter 1

God's Own Village

IF YOU are telling your life story, it's probably best to clear up any half-truths or misconceptions that may have been written about you. So here is one that I can sort out straight away. If you look me up on the internet or find my name in club histories it will always say: Tommy Hutchison, born Cardenden. This is both a half-truth and a misconception. I was actually born and raised in Dundonald, one of a number of villages that make up the small town of Cardenden. Now, you might think that such a small inaccuracy is hardly worth mentioning. Well, that would be a misjudgement of the pride each person has in their own small part of Cardenden. Indeed, there would be people living in Dundonald, even today, who would only be half joking when they say that anyone passing from Cardenden, under the railway bridge and up the hill into Dundonald should have to show a permit before they are allowed to enter 'God's own village'! To them and to most of its residents, at least when I lived there, Dundonald was a special place.

A stranger coming into the village in the 50s, when I was growing up, would perhaps not have been immediately struck by the thought that this was a village of God's own making. Dundonald, unlike the countryside that surrounded it, wasn't pretty. Looming over the village was a small mountain of black coal spoil that constantly gave off wisps of sulphurous smoke. The headstock, winding gear and railway sidings of the pit yard and the miner's raws (rows of terraced miners' cottages) would confirm the visitor's suspicions that they were in a mining village. Like many mining towns, the beauty of Dundonald was not to be found in its buildings, but in the hearts of the community that lived there.

I had a very happy childhood, largely due to my family; my dad Jock, my mum Liz and my elder sister, also Elizabeth (Lizabeth). My younger sister Ann, 13 years my junior, completed our immediate line-up. I say immediate as my mum, a Robertson before marriage, was from a long line of Dundonald folk, so the village was full of uncles, cousins, second cousins and the like. Perhaps it was a peculiarity of mining villages in Fife, but my mum, like other married women, was known by her maiden name even after her marriage to my dad, so Liz Robertson she was and Liz Robertson she remained to all who knew her.

Mum and Dad started married life in my Grandma Lieb's house on Main Road, Dundonald, and that's where both me, in 1947, and my sister Lizabeth, three years earlier, were born. (It was a good birthplace for a future Manchester City player, although the spelling of the street name could do with a tweak.) Undoubtedly it must have been a squash in a fairly small three-bedroomed house as, along with the four of us, there were my grandma and grandpa Robertson (who died before I got to know him) and several of my mum's brothers. It was probably a relief to everyone when the Hutchisons moved out and into a house of their own, a mid-terraced cottage in one of the miner's raws, less than a hundred yards from my birthplace. This is the first house I can remember.

The way of life we had back then is hugely different to that of today. I think that this is true for many aspects of my childhood. If I had to choose a word that best describes my early and even teenage years, I would choose William Wallace's catchphrase, 'freedom'. Mine, like every other child in Dundonald, was an outdoor childhood. The streets and the greens and the woods and the fields surrounding our village were our playground. The only spoken rule I was given by Mum or Dad was 'Dinnae be setting any fires noo.'

An unspoken rule was to always respect our neighbours and their property. Within these bounds we could do and go more or less where we liked. We would dam up the local burn (stream) called Den Burn and use the resulting pool for swimming, we would climb trees, sometimes for the fun of it, sometimes looking for birds' nests and for the eggs they would contain, we would play all manner of games in the streets, staying out until it was getting dark or our stomachs or our parents told us it was time to go home. It was a glorious time! When I finished playing football for a living, I worked with children in schools for over 20 years. The contrast between their young lives and mine could not have been starker

in the things that I could do and the limitations on them. I wouldn't swap my upbringing for a more modern one. I think we definitely had the best of things.

Despite my happy life, I would have been aware that we were poor from quite an early age. However, it was never something that bothered me; why should it? Everyone else I knew was in the same hand-to-mouth boat as us. It's only in later years after leaving Dundonald that I realised how truly impoverished we were. There was a ten-bob note that floated around our family. On occasions it would be with one or other of my uncles if they were short, quite often it would be back with us, particularly if my dad was off work with one of his frequent bouts of illness. The main thing I suppose is that we never went hungry – there was always something on the table – or without clothes, however well worn or threadbare they might be. Mum, Dad and our wider family made sure we never went without the essentials.

Talking of wider family, it was the Robertsons of Dundonald that we saw the most of, usually on a daily basis. My mother had one sister, Nell, who had married a baker and for a while lived in Cupar, north Fife. She was always a welcome visitor coming back to Dundonald and not only for all the bread and cakes she would bring with her! Much more local were my mum's brothers. I never got to know Dave as he had died before I was born, having been kicked in the testicles in a local football match and developing complications which proved to be fatal. Her brother Richard also had an unfortunate story. Having been crushed by a roof fall in the local pit, he ended up with a broken back, was permanently disabled and unable to work again. Two of my uncles, John and Will, never married and eventually moved in with us after Grandma Lieb died.

My Uncle Flam (his real name was James) had an unusual skill which earned him his nickname. There would be occasional betting schools, groups of youths and men who would gather on the street to gamble around the village, and Flam would hold court in one of these. Two pennies would be tossed, or 'flammed', into the air by flicking them upwards with the thumb, Flam tossing one, his opponent the other. If the coins came down, say two heads, then Flam won both pennies. If it was two tails, his opponent took the cash. One of each side meant that they were flammed again. Now, Flam had got this down to a fine art, getting the penny to land almost every time on the side that he wanted. So good was he at flamming the penny that he very rarely lost, often

making a tidy profit from the school. Such was his reputation that he was never short of opponents who were willing to risk losing money, if only to have a shot at beating a famous (of sorts) local champion!

My dad was a 'blow-in', a non-native of Dundonald who had come from Lochgelly, a village about three miles away. We visited Grandad and Grandma Hutchison on a regular basis but didn't see them every day as we did with the Robertsons. A highlight of a visit to Lochgelly was the chance to enhance my 'look' when playing cowboys and Indians with my friends. Grandad kept chickens down the back of his garden. Every time I went, me and him would collect some of the discarded feathers which I'd bring home, have inserted into a headband by my mum, and worn by me next time I wanted to be Geronimo! I doubt that the leader of the Apache nation ever wore feathers that came from the Scots Dumpy hen, but no one in my gang ever questioned the accuracy of my headband. My grandparents loved going to the pictures and would go almost every night to see a new film in the various local cinemas. This is an indication of how cheap it was to go to watch a film in those days, rather than of the wealth of the Hutchisons!

Birthdays were never really celebrated in our family. No fuss was made. Christmas, however, was an exciting time. I remember when I was younger getting a fort which came with little men dressed in the blue of the US army. They would defend the fort from other little men dressed as Red Indians, some on foot, some on horseback. It was magical! Lizabeth and I would also hang up our socks on Christmas Eve night and in the morning would find them filled with an apple, an orange and a chocolate Santa. The house would be filled all day with family and friends dropping in to say hello and to have a drink.

I remember one year when I was quite little, my Uncle Brickie telling me that if I wasn't good, Santa would fill my sock with hot cinders which would make the chocolate melt. This started me crying, which then meant that my mum gave Brickie a right tongue-lashing.

When I was older my present would inevitably be football related. I would either get a new pair of boots, which would require my dad to hammer home the leather studs using his cobblers last, or a new leather football. These balls, as heavy as a sack of concrete when wet, also came with a detachable bladder whose long nozzle had to be carefully squeezed into the leather casing with the handle of a spoon and then laced up when the ball was inflated. No matter how carefully this was

done, the ball always ended up with a little lump around the laces caused by the nozzle.

Growing up with so much family around me meant that there was never a time when I felt unsafe being out and about. Even if my family hadn't been so extensive, then I don't think it would have made any difference really. Maybe it is just looking back through rose-tinted glasses, but I don't really remember any crime, or anti-social behaviour as we would now call it, in our village. It's a cliché I know, but people in Dundonald never locked their doors. True, this was partly to do with the fact that none of us who lived there had anything worth stealing, but it's also because you would have been taking from one of your own; it just wouldn't happen. If anyone did step out of line at all, matters were usually sorted by the people of the village themselves. There would be very few instances where the police would need to be involved in things.

Many of the sights and smells of 1950s Dundonald are very much in the past and unlikely to be seen again. A familiar scene in those days would be the women of the raws (men and women had much more defined roles in those days), my mum included, taking out the mats that would be spread over the floor of the cottage, hanging them over the washing line, and then giving them their weekly sound beating with a hefty stick or the coal shovel. The shower of dust this caused was evidence that we didn't possess a vacuum cleaner. Once clean, the mats would be returned to the floors of the cottage.

As a toddler I can remember sitting and playing on these mats, much more comfortable than the cold lino floor. My dad was very handy around the house, good at fixing and making things. He obviously saw great potential for the same in me, his only son. We had little money for any of life's luxuries, and there weren't many toys around in our house. My dad improvised and he would give me one of the clugs (pieces of scrap wood he would bring home from work for kindling) and a small hammer and I would happily while away my time bashing the clug with the hammer.

I must have impressed him with my dexterity as he next introduced me to some nails. Now there was a purpose to my hammering as I could turn the clug into some form of woody, naily hedgehog. Can you imagine the outcry today if I had hurt myself, hammered a nail into my finger instead of the clug for example? Back then such activities never caused an eyebrow to be raised. As it happens my early explorations into carpentry

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were ended by my mum the day that she came to take out one of the mats for a beating and found that someone had nailed it to the floor!

The miner's raws themselves are long gone, demolished and consigned to history, replaced with houses that are bigger and more comfortable. As you won't be able to visit the house of my childhood, let me take you back to the 50s to take you on a tour of our cottage in the miners raw. It won't take us long.