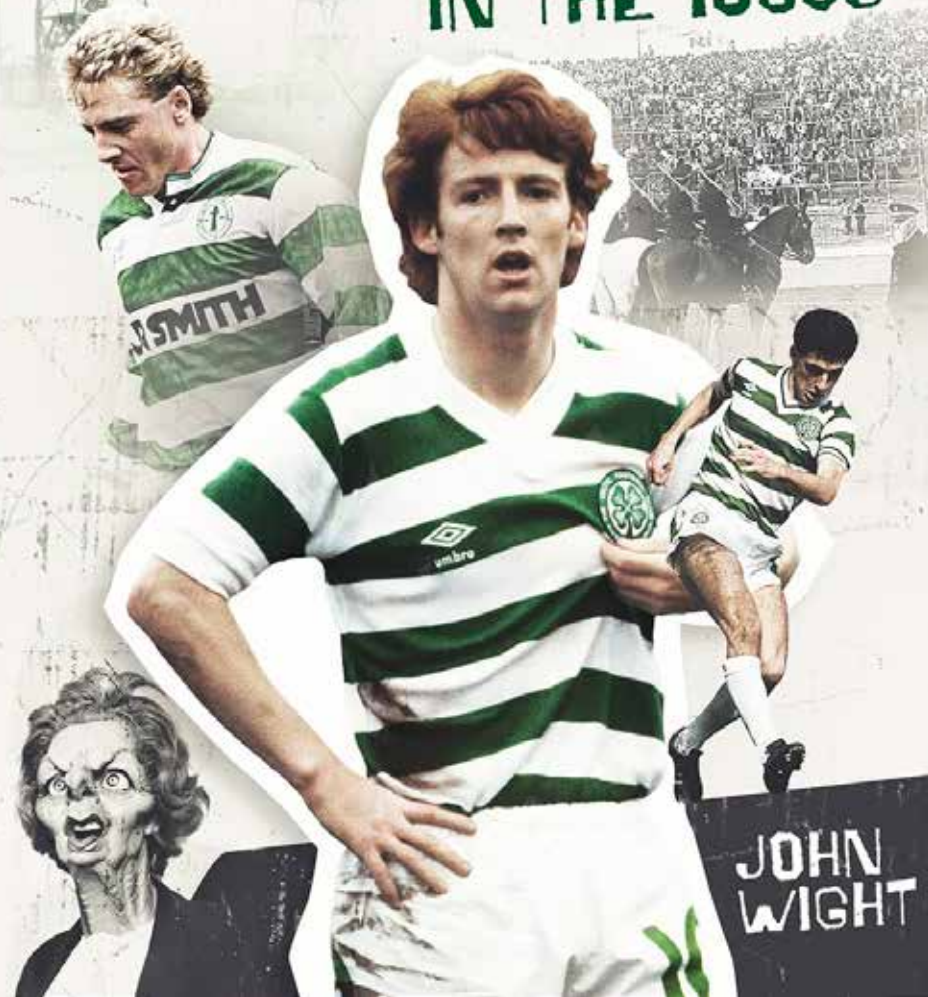


JUNGLE Days

SUPPORTING CELTIC
IN THE 1980S



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CHAPTER ONE

I'M WALKING from the bus and coach park – no, make that floating; aye floating, being carried along by a green, white and gold army towards Hampden Park in the distance. Celtic supporters' buses from all over Scotland – from every city, every town, even village – and also many from Ireland and England, too, have descended as in one huge collection of diesel-engined chariots.

*Oh father why are you so sad on this bright
Easter morn'?*

*When Irishmen are proud and glad of the land
where they were born!*

There are easily ten of them – grown men, walking in lockstep, arms linked – singing. I'm not far behind them, mouth open in awe at the sight, heart pounding at the sound. Yes, I'm thinking, *I'm here! Here among my own!*

*Oh where are the lads who stood with me,
when history was made?*

They're singing – make that belting out – the classic Irish rebel song, 'The Boys of the Old Brigade', and never have my 14-year-old ears heard a sweeter sound. In front of me, way, way in the distance it seems, is Hampden Park. The date is 10 May, the year is 1980, and I'm on my way to watch my beloved Celtic FC take on Rangers in the Scottish Cup Final.

I've arrived from Edinburgh on the Craigmillar Celtic Supporters' bus. I could hardly sleep the night before. My older brother Rab in the bed opposite had arrived home pished around ten, after yet another night on the sauce at the local pub, the Busy Bee. Rab worked on the rigs in the North Sea and would spend almost the entirety of his two weeks at home either pished or half-pished. My old man worked on the rigs as well; he got my brother the job beside him. Unlike Rab, though, he'd spend his two weeks at home shagging every woman in the pub apart from my mum.

The bedroom we shared in our cramped two-bedroom council flat in Saughton Mains on the west side of the capital was stinking like a brewery as usual when he was at home. Yet I couldn't have cared less. I'd managed to bag myself a ticket for the cup final and I was buzzing.

Rab may have been my big brother at home, but as soon as I stepped on to the Craigmillar or the Leith Celtic Supporters' bus, I entered the bosom of another family altogether. There was Harky, who ran the bus, Ronnie, Ian, Malky, Big Tam, wee Wullie – just an abundance of working-class characters for whom Glasgow Celtic Football Club of Glasgow was both sanctuary and saviour.

So here's me, working my way towards Hampden Park in Glasgow. Half the men are already drunk on the cans and bottles of cheap bevvy consumed on the buses that brought them here; the other half are drunk on the occasion. And what an occasion it is. A hot sun is shining down, the passion for the cause unbounded, and the hatred for the Huns next level.

This 'next level hate' is when I see the Rangers supporters' bus up ahead. The driver has clearly taken a wrong turn and ended up at the Celtic end of the stadium. By the time I get close enough to see, not a window on the bus is still intact. Bottles and beer cans are flying at it from all directions. The Huns on the bus are trying to fight back, but they've got nae chance. Gerrin tae thum!

*Soldiers are we, whose lives are pledged to
Ireland,
Some have come from a land beyond the wave
– God bless them
Sworn to be free...*

The teams for the 1980 Scottish Cup Final are as follows:

CELTIC: Peter Latchford, Alan Sneddon, Danny McGrain, Roy Aitken, Mike Conroy, Murdo MacLeod, Davie Provan, Johnny Doyle, George McCluskey, Tommy Burns, Frank McGarvey. SUBS: Vic Davidson, Bobby Lennox.

RANGERS: Peter McCloy, Sandy Jardine, Ally Dawson, Tom Forsyth, Colin Jackson, Gregor Stevens, Davie Cooper, Bobby Russell, Derek Johnstone, Gordon Smith, John MacDonald. SUBS: Tommy McLean, Alex Miller.

On paper, both teams are more or less evenly matched all over the park, which means that an intriguing encounter is in store. Celtic's spine of Latchford, Aitken, Conroy, Doyle and McCluskey is arguably weaker – though only just – to the Rangers counterpart of McCloy, Forsyth, Jackson, Russell and Johnstone. Where they have Cooper as a change player, we have Burns, though for different reasons. Tommy Burns is capable on his day of threading the needle when it comes to killer passes, while Davie Cooper is capable of almost anything.

Big Roy Aitken is the beating heart of this Celtic team. He epitomises what it means to go into battle

wearing the hoops, and he takes no prisoners. But then neither does big Tam Forsyth (Jaws). In fact, Forsyth was a defender who believed that breaking legs was almost as important as breaking sweat on a football pitch.

Entering Hampden with my precious ticket, I climb the steps to the top and am met by the sweet sight of a seething mass of Celtic fans all the way from the top of the then uncovered Celtic End, all the way down to the bottom. It's a sea of green, white and gold and I join it with adrenalin coursing right through me. Around my neck is a green, white and gold scarf, and in my hand the green, white and gold Union Jack flag I bought for £2.50 from a guy with bright yellow teeth from a stall outside Celtic Park (Parkhead) before the last home game of the 1979/80 season, against Partick Thistle.

Across the other side of Hampden is another sea: this a hostile one of Union Jacks and Red Hand of Ulster flags. Bastards! The Huns are in full voice, but then so are we.

*Hail Hail, the Celts are here,
What the hell do we care,
What the hell do we care,
Hail Hail, the Celts are here,
What the hell do we care now!*

I finally make it through the madding crowd to down near the front of the Celtic End. I find myself standing beside two guys dressed in bright green suits, complete

with bright green top hats on their heads. They're both drinking cheap Pomagne straight from the bottle and the two of them are swaying back and forth, along with everybody else.

*For it's a grand old team to play for,
For it's a grand old team to see,
And if you know the history!*

The last time Celtic met Rangers in the Scottish Cup Final was in 1977. I watched the match along with my dad and brother at home, live on our old black-and-white TV. On a rainswept day, Celtic won the match 1-0 after Andy Lynch netted a second-half penalty. Now, three years on, I'm not watching it at home, I'm here, actually in the stadium, as out they come, the teams.

The roar that erupts around the stadium in response to them walking on to the pitch is the loudest I've ever heard. My young eyes immediately fasten on to the bright red hair of Tommy Burns. Tommy Burns the midfield maestro, Celtic through and through, my absolute hero. Back at home his poster sits above my bed.

The match itself is a tight affair. Neither side dominates and few chances are made. Both defences are tight, falling deep to deny the opposition space. Davie Provan, with his iconic white socks at his ankles as the game goes on, has an epic tussle against Ally Dawson, Rangers' left-back, on the right wing. Celtic-

mad Johnny Doyle, playing an inside-left role, spends 90 minutes engaged in a personal battle against Rangers the institution rather than Rangers the team.

Celtic's best player over the course is Danny McGrain. Starting at left-back, he spends as much time in Rangers' half on the left wing as he does in his own half, defending. McGrain is way ahead of his time. The power, speed, the transition from defence to attack; in Danny McGrain, Celtic has its very own 21st-century-style full-back transported back to the 1980s in a time machine.

All in all, the nil-nil scoreline at full time about sums things up. The game hasn't lived up to the occasion, with both sides more scared to lose than they are determined to win.

The goal, when it finally comes, belongs in the category of a fluke. A Davie Provan Celtic corner is defended by an Ally Dawson header. Alan Sneddon sends the ball back into the Rangers box, whereupon Tam Forsyth meets it with a bullish header out. The ball now meets McGrain's right foot, which volleys it back in the direction of the Rangers goal. George McCluskey's left foot, as the ball passes, redirects its line of travel and the result is it ending up beyond Peter McCloy and in the net.

Goal! Ya beauty! Ya fucking beauty! The Celtic End at Hampden erupts. 'Yasss! We've scored! We've fucking scored!'

At the final whistle the pitch invasion seems the most natural thing in the world. Perimeter fence, what perimeter fence? Before I know it, I'm on the pitch, waving my green, white and gold Union Jack. Then, like a herd of buffalo, the Celtic army in front of me is suddenly in retreat. Then it advances again. Before I know what's happening, a big policeman has me by the scruff of the neck. 'Ya wee bastard, ye. Move!'

I scramble back over the fence into the safety of the Celtic End. Time to find the bus and get out of here. As I run-walk back towards the car park, he approaches me, a big man with alcohol on his breath. 'Ho, wee man, tet that Union Jack tae fuck.' But it's green, white and gold, I tell him. 'I don't give a fuck what colour it is. It's a Union Jack. Get it tae fuck!'

I do as instructed and throw it in the nearest bin.