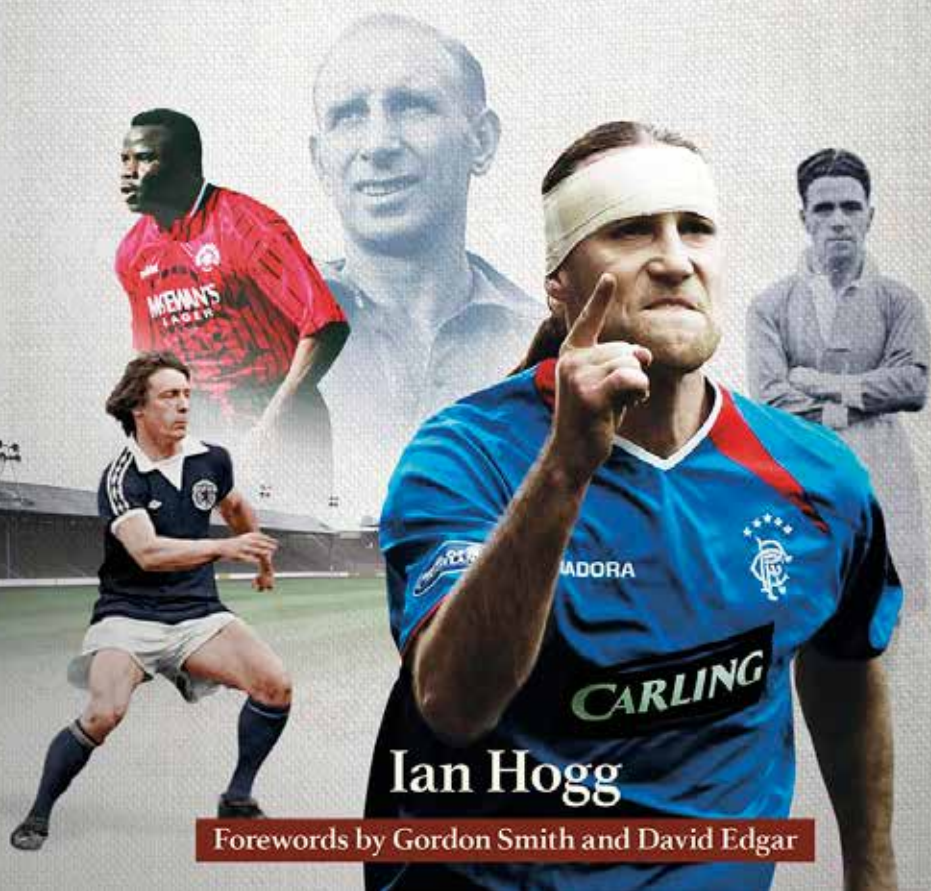


OUR RANGERS HEROES

Incredible Stories of
Forgotten Rangers Heroes
from Across the Ages



Ian Hogg

Forewords by Gordon Smith and David Edgar

OUR RANGERS HEROES

Incredible Stories of
Forgotten Rangers Heroes
from Across the Ages

Ian Hogg

Forewords by Gordon Smith and David Edgar



Contents

Introduction.	9
Foreword by Gordon Smith.	16
Foreword by David Edgar	19
1. The War Hero and the African Trailblazers	21
2. The Old Lady of Turin and Her Two Rangers Lovers	31
3. The Caskie Affair – Innocence in Political Crossfire	50
4. Un Défenseur Physiquement Au-delà de ses Années!	64
5. Bill Struth’s Best Ever Signing	83
6. The Swedish Scotsman.	106
7. The Great Little Dane and the Danish Resistance.	131
8. The Bandaged Mechanic.	145
9. The Pioneering Politician	168
10. Sliding Doors in 1967	181
11. A Footballer, an Officer and a Gentleman	206
12. The Ukrainian Son of Oleksandr	223
13. The Unsung Hero	258
14. A Tale of Two Federations	287
15. Call Me Willie	310
16. The Standard Bearer	344

Chapter 1

The War Hero and the African Trailblazers

‘The names of Mansour and Latif may not echo so resoundingly through the annals of footballing history. But they were pathfinders and admirable ambassadors for Arab sportsmen. And that is a hard act to follow.’

Anna Pukas⁴

REMEMBER I said in my introduction that I love Rangers’ history? The journey that led to the idea of this book started in the summer of 2018. After two weeks of non-stop roller-coaster riding in Orlando, I was unwinding on Florida’s Pass-a-Grille Beach as the children played. I was researching historical World Cup squads for a *Heart and Hand* podcast with the theme of the finest 11 players who have played for Rangers and been to a World Cup, much to my long-suffering wife’s annoyance!

As logic would dictate, I began examining squads from the inception of the World Cup in 1930 onwards and stumbled across what was surely an error. A Scotsman had managed a 1934 World Cup side yet Scotland were nowhere in sight, and

⁴ ‘The Egyptian football players who paved the way for Mo Salah’ by Anna Pukas, *Arab News*, 17 June 2018

as I disappeared down the rabbit hole to find he had played for Rangers, I was hooked.

James McCrae only represented Rangers three times in 1916 and I can hear everyone ask, 'Why the hell did you choose to start your book with some guy who played less than a handful of times during the Great War?' Yet the answer is simple. The different strands of history that weave into one another to tell the wider story of the club captivate me. James McCrae, an Ibrox player in 1916, became the first Ranger (whether past or present) to take part in the World Cup. Pause for a moment and say that out loud, there was a Scotsman in charge of Egypt in 1934!

Who was James McCrae?

James Clark Fulton McCrae was born in Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, on 2 September 1894. Young James had been playing for Port Glasgow Rangers – a club with no official connections that I could find to Rangers – in his teenage years when the opportunity arose in 1912 to sign for Clyde aged almost 18 years old.

Throughout the early years at Clyde he played sporadically for the first team, finally becoming a regular in the 1914/15 season, and played against Rangers for one of only two times in his career on 9 January 1915 at Ibrox Park, helping Clyde to a famous 2-1 win in front of around 8,000 supporters. He played the half-back position, equivalent to a modern central midfield role, and certainly not an easy shift, having to face the Rangers midfield three and five forwards in the 2-3-5 formation. We will come later to the second time he faced Rangers, around 12 years later.

Around the same time, McCrae joined the Grenadier Guards after the start of the Great War, with the guards' regiments increasing to five in number. He left Clyde as a result, although they would continue to retain his registration.

It was commonplace during the Great War for players to guest for a variety of clubs, with the UK government keen both to have an outlet for the public with the aim of

maintaining morale and to keep life normal, if this was at all possible, and therefore they wanted football to continue despite some countries suspending competition due to the volume of players signing up to fight. Between 1915 and 1919 competitive football was suspended in England and in its place regional league competitions were set up. League football did continue in Scotland; however, the Scottish Cup was suspended for five years.

Across 1915 and 1916, McCrae guested for Clyde, Rangers and West Ham United while on duty with the Grenadier Guards, before heading off to war in mainland Europe and northern Africa. The Grenadier Guards have a long football history, playing in the London League in the early 20th century, and had battalion teams playing in regional leagues regularly, with the better players encouraged to guest for professional teams across the country whenever the battalions were back in Britain to maintain spirits of both the battalions and public alike.

McCrae's three matches for Rangers were in the latter half of the 1915/16 wartime Scottish Division One season.

On 10 April 1916, Rangers defeated Dundee 3-2 in front of around 5,000 supporters at Ibrox Park. Frank Branscombe and James Lister scored first-half goals to put Rangers 2-0 ahead at the interval. David Brown scored just after half-time for Dundee, but Tommy Cairns increased Rangers' lead again. Brown completed the scoring but to no avail as the rain continued to come down and early darkness fell, leading the referee to call for time, and it was a winning start for McCrae. Interestingly, in the press of 11 April, both the *Dundee Courier* and the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* noted Rangers' number seven as 'Newman' (or 'new man'), while the *Daily Record* had him as 'McCrae (Clyde)'.

Ten days later, Rangers drew 2-2 with Dumbarton at Ibrox in front of a crowd of 3,000. William Ritchie opened the scoring for Dumbarton on the half hour before Branscombe and Scott Duncan scored quickly for Rangers in the second half. With four minutes left, Patrick O'Neill equalised for

the Sons, yet McCrae should have scored to secure victory for Rangers. According to the *Daily Record* of the following day,⁵ 'Rangers were top dogs in the second half, in which M'Crae messed the chance of a lifetime. How he managed to do it I do not know!'

McCrae's final appearance came at the end of the month, on Saturday, 29 April 1916, starting in a 0-0 draw between Rangers and Aberdeen at Pittodrie. Those three appearances, unfortunately, would not help Rangers to the wartime title as they finished second, 11 points behind Celtic. McCrae then guested for West Ham before heading back off to mainland Europe and the front line in France in 1916 where he was involved in several heavy battles that resulted in serious losses for the Grenadier Guards. He fought at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, at Cambrai in late 1917 and at the second Battle of the Somme (or the Battle of Arras) in August and September 1918, then spent the latter years of the Great War in both Egypt and Turkey, a time that undoubtedly helped shape his future career.

* * *

Although McCrae's playing career with Rangers was short, perhaps the shortest we will cover in telling the stories of players, with only three appearances, after the war he went on to fulfil a decent playing career, predominantly in England.

In 1919 he was signed for West Ham by legendary manager Syd King, having guested for the Londoners 22 times. With King having a close affiliation with the British military, it was a natural fit. In the 16 months from August 1919 to November 1920 McCrae appeared 54 times for West Ham in the old Second Division, finishing seventh in 1919/20, and playing four times in the FA Cup, scoring three goals. McCrae joined Bury, also in the Second Division, in late 1920. His stay at Gigg Lane lasted for almost three

⁵ 'Eager Dumbarton' by Waverley, *Daily Record*, 21 April 1916

years and he made 84 appearances, scoring ten goals for the Shakers, moving on two years prior to Bury being promoted to the First Division in 1925.

In the summer of 1923 he moved to Wigan Borough for a season. Wigan Borough were only four years old and were the fifth attempt at a professional football team in the town. McCrae played 34 times and scored six goals before departing for pastures new, and Wigan Borough themselves would last for only seven more years before being dissolved in 1931. By June 1924 he signed for New Brighton, another new club founded in 1921 and based in Merseyside. It was a frustrating and injury-hit season with only six appearances. McCrae was 30 years old and this was the war-torn early 20th century; as a Great War veteran, it was predictable that his football career was being hampered by injury and threatened to come to an end.

However, in July 1925, McCrae finally made it to the top division in England and signed for a side newly promoted to the First Division after a few years of financial strife. He signed for the second-biggest club he would play for – Manchester United. Thirteen games later, United finished a respectable ninth in their first season back in the top flight. Aged 32, season 1926/27 saw yet another transfer, this time to Watford, with only two appearances and a short loan spell back to Glasgow with Third Lanark before one final move brought the curtain down on his playing career in 1927/28 as his football career completed the circle to play one last season at Shawfield for Clyde before retirement.

The move saw McCrae play against his brother David for the first time professionally, when Clyde faced St Mirren, and he finally faced Rangers for the second and final time, 12 years after his first appearance at Ibrox Park, in the first round of the Glasgow Cup on 26 September 1927 in front of 23,000 people. It was not a happy ending, on the wrong end of a 7-0 drubbing with the legendary Bob McPhail scoring alongside six from Jimmy Fleming.

Blazing a Trail to Egypt

Aged almost 34, James McCrae retired from playing and emigrated to Egypt to embrace an opportunity in coaching, having enjoyed his time there with the Grenadier Guards and undoubtedly made a lot of connections. He coached across numerous clubs and then in a variety of roles with the Egyptian national side, which was still very much in its early development, before taking charge as manager early in 1934.

Egypt topped their qualifying section for the 1934 World Cup – a group of three African and Asian sides. They defeated the Mandatory Palestine national team (a forerunner to Israel), 7-1 in Cairo and then 4-1 in Tel Aviv. The other entrant in the group, Turkey (considered an Asian side), withdrew and it meant, incredibly, that McCrae had guided Egypt to their first World Cup in 1934 and the first World Cup for any Rangers player.

Football in Egypt was still in its infancy. The club game had only begun in the 20th century and the first Egyptian national side was constituted in 1920, the first African team created to compete in the Summer Olympics in Belgium. It was no surprise therefore, that McCrae had a fairly inexperienced pool of players to select from and his squad had won only 22 caps between them. The trip from Egypt to Italy took four days on a ship called the *Helwan* and the Egyptian party travelled in the hope they could cause a shock. However, the 1934 World Cup was a straight knockout competition which stacked the odds against Egypt given the sides in the competition. They played just once, against Hungary in Naples on 27 May 1934 in front of 9,000 people, the Europeans running out 4-2 winners. A potential shock had been in the making with Al Masry striker Abdulrahman Fawzi scoring twice in only his third international to make it 2-2 before half-time. However, the Hungarians would prevail, scoring twice in the second half, and Egypt's World Cup was over.

During my initial research in 2018, I found that two of McCrae's Egypt squad from that World Cup moved to Scotland over the next two years – including a forward who

signed for Rangers in 1935. James McCrae never forgot Rangers, and recommended two players to the Ibrox club in 1935 and 1936 to follow in the footsteps of the first Egyptians in play in the United Kingdom, Hussein Hegazi in 1911 with Dulwich Hamlet and Tewfik Abdullah in 1920 with Derby County and Cowdenbeath.

The first suggestion was Egyptian and El-Mokhtalat Club right-winger Mohamed Latif, who played in both qualification matches, scoring twice in Cairo and once in Tel Aviv to help Egypt become the first African team to qualify for the World Cup. He also played against Hungary in Naples alongside goalscorer Abdulrahman Fawzi.

Latif hailed from the city of Beni Suef, south of Cairo, and was renowned as one of the best footballers in Egypt at the time. McCrae provided a personal recommendation to Rangers' manager Bill Struth in the summer of 1935, who signed the pacy forward for the start of the 1935/36 season and following seven goals for Rangers' reserves in the Alliance League, Latif made his only competitive appearance on 14 September 1935 in a 1-1 draw against Hibs in the league at Easter Road, ominously the same day that Hitler addressed 54,000 people at a mass rally in Nuremberg, announcing laws against non-whites. The *Sunday Post*⁶ painted a picture of hard work, but trying too hard, 'Latif, the Egyptian lad who was making his debut in the League team, certainly knows the inside game. Some of his touches were regal. But he tried to do too much, and did not accomplish enough.'

However, he struggled to settle in his new surroundings; one can only imagine what moving from the high 30°C heat of north-east Egypt to 1930s Glasgow was like for him. Latif played just one more time for Rangers in a benefit match against Falkirk at Brockville in April 1936 before returning to El-Mokhtalat, who are today known as Zamalek.

He wore the number seven shirt as Egypt lost to Austria at the Berlin Olympics in 1936 and played for El-Mokhtalat

6 'Rangers Go Through the Mill', *Sunday Post*, 15 April 1935

Club until his retirement in 1945, winning the league championship on four occasions and the Egyptian Cup three times, before continuing his life in football through coaching and as an international standard referee. Latterly, Latif was instrumental in the creation of the Confederation of African Football (or CAF) in 1957 – the African equivalent of UEFA – and he embarked on yet another successful stage of his career as a football commentator, achieving fame not only in Egypt but throughout the Arab world as ‘the sheikh of commentators’, the head of TV sports at Egyptian TV and was a regular at World Cups. He was the Arab version of Archie Macpherson, Arthur Montford or John Motson and the voice of football for a generation, credited with helping to develop the country’s love of the game.

Latif passed away in Cairo in 1990 aged 80 and while his name may be little more than a footnote in Rangers’ history, the influence of this African footballing pioneer on football’s global stage was far greater than many more famous figures.

* * *

The second recommendation to Rangers took an altogether different path to Scottish football. Goalkeeper Mustafa Kamel Mansour enrolled, with McCrae’s help, at Jordanhill College to study physical education and teaching in 1936, aged 21 years old. As with Mr Latif, Rangers were alerted and recommendation provided to Bill Struth, who wanted to sign the former Al-Ahly man. However, Mansour had already made connections in the Glasgow footballing fraternity and had pledged to play as an amateur with Queen’s Park. Rangers offered him a signing-on fee of £5,000, but admirably he was a man of his word and committed himself to Queen’s as he explained to Amr Shaheen,⁷ ‘I was offered £5,000 to turn professional, which was a record at the time. But I did not want to play for money.’

⁷ ‘1934: The Flying Egyptian’ by Amr Shaheen, BBC Sport Online, Cairo, 3 May 2002

A popular member of the 72nd Glasgow Scouts, Mansour played 49 times for Queen's Park from 1937 to 1939 and six times against Rangers, including in his team's victory over the Gers in the semi-final of the Glasgow Cup in September 1938. Queen's had led at the interval, but early in the second half Mansour was injured and Rangers equalised. However, he was determined to continue and the match went into extra time. Willie Buchanan scored to make it 3-2 to Queen's Park, but four minutes from the end Rangers were awarded a penalty. Alex Venters stepped up and the injured goalkeeper saved both the spot kick and the rebound to secure his place in Queen's Park folklore. The press hailed Mansour, the *Dundee Courier*⁸ telling the tale, 'The penalty went whizzing in, the keeper reached it and sent the ball rebounding to the Ranger. Another effort, better even than the first and a second save. That was the most thrilling moment of a thrill-packed two hours.'

He returned to Egypt in the summer of 1939 and after the Second World War he managed Al Ahly, became the secretary general in the Confederation of African Football from 1958 to 1961, and finally rose to the ranks of cabinet minister in the Egyptian government. Mansour died in his native Cairo in July 2002, aged 87.

Final Years and Conclusion

James McCrae disappeared off the grid after 1941 for around five years and reappeared in Iceland in 1946 aged 51, as the manager of Fram Reykjavík. Up to that point they had been one of the most successful sides in Icelandic football, and he spent three seasons there, winning the championship in 1946 and 1947 to secure his only top-flight medals.

Aged 53 in 1948 and having lived outside of the UK for 18 years, McCrae decided to return home and moved back to Paisley where he lived out his years until his death aged 80 in September 1974. One can only imagine the contrast he would witness between Cairo, Istanbul, Reykjavík and Paisley.

⁸ 'Mansour Hero in Fiery Finish', *Dundee Courier*, 22 September 1938

James McCrae and Mohamed Latif, in real terms, both only touch Rangers' history for a matter of weeks. However, in terms of value, here is the story of the first African national side to play at the World Cup with an ex-Rangers player and Scotsman as their manager, along with a future Ranger in the forward line who would become the first African player to play for the club. They were trailblazers both for modern-day African players and also in terms of the development of the game across the whole of the continent.

They may not have played many times for Rangers, but subsequent history shows a surprising uniqueness to their value and the story of our club. It was truly my pleasure and a privilege to investigate their journeys.