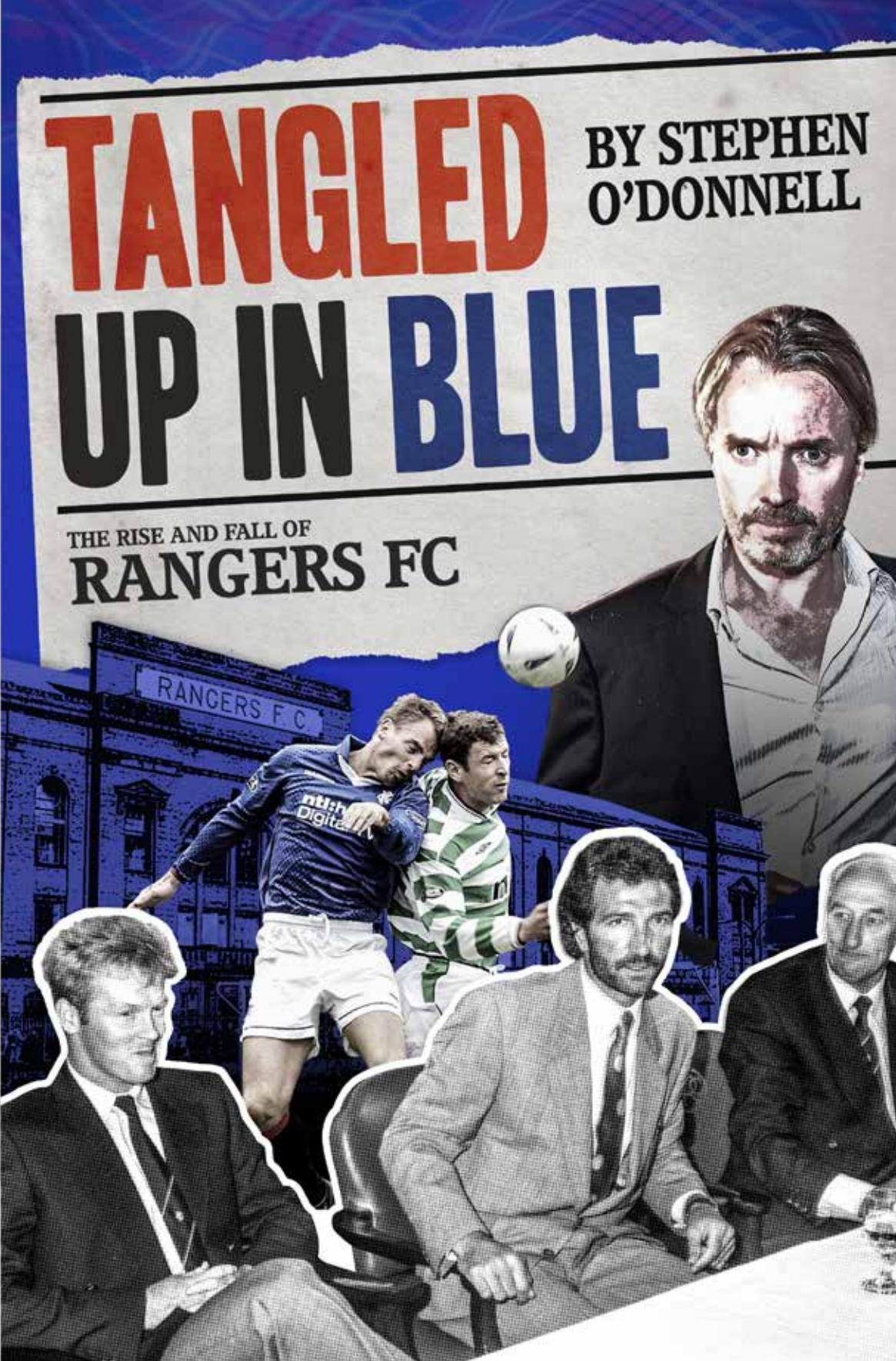
TANGLED UP IN BLUE

BY STEPHEN O'DONNELL

THE RISE AND FALL OF
RANGERS FC



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THE GLASGOW STRANGERS

THIS is not a fairy story. Of the four teenagers who founded Rangers Football Club, following meetings and conversations in what is now Kelvingrove Park in the west end of Glasgow in March 1872, one was drowned, another declared insane, yet another was an accused fraudster, a bigamist and a 'certified imbecile', who lived out his days in a poorhouse, while the fourth was comparatively lucky – he died a lonely old man.

These boys, described with characteristic bombast by Bill Struth, the club's severe, authoritarian manager from 1920 until 1954, as 'The Gallant Pioneers', were looking to add the game of association football to their list of other vigorous pastimes, such as rowing, athletics and, since these lads were from the Gaelic stronghold of Argyll, shinty.

In many ways Peter Campbell, William McBeath and brothers Moses and Peter McNeil were just an ordinary group of young friends, recently arrived into the city of Glasgow from the area around the Gare Loch, an inlet in the Firth of Clyde, 30 miles up the coast from their adopted home. Living mostly in crammed households, with elder siblings rather than parents, they were from unexceptional, lower-middle-class backgrounds and held ordinary, white collar occupations. But, fired up with what youth imparts, they were also upwardly mobile and ambitious and, perhaps having had their eyes opened by the nearby ostentatious

wealth of the leafy west end districts in the second city of what was then a flourishing British Empire, they had lofty ideas about their prospects and of making a name for themselves.

As an organised sport, football had burst out of the English public school system, following the codification of the game's laws in 1863, and taken the country by storm. Thrilling and uplifting, yet also earthy and rugged, the game was quickly adopted by the harassed working population, who, through a shared sense of identity and belonging, took to supporting their local teams over the course of the next few decades in increasingly remarkable numbers.

Inspired by the exploits of some of the other early Scottish sides such as Third Lanark and Vale of Leven, who were founded in the same year, and the dedicated amateurs of nearby Queen's Park, the Gare Loch boys showed tremendous dedication to their new pursuit, practising six nights a week and playing their games at Flesher's Haugh on the open spaces of Glasgow Green in the east end of the city. Often they would book their playing area hours in advance, with one of their group, usually Peter McNeil, given the task of guarding the field and planting the goal sticks in the morning, so that nobody would have moved on to their patch by the afternoon.

Like many of the other great urban centres of Britain, Glasgow had expanded exponentially over the course of the Industrial Revolution, as the rustic, agrarian lifestyles of the previous century based on the annual cycle of the harvest were replaced by a relentless, factory-orientated routine, unaffected by climate or season. Glasgow Green was built on land set aside by the enlightened city fathers, who wished to provide residents with some space for recreation, an idea which would be embraced even more fully by the working population following the introduction of half-day Saturdays in the second half of the 19th century. By law, all factory activity on a Saturday now had to end by 2pm, allowing skilled workers to enjoy an extended period away from the factory floor for the first time. Tagged on to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the idea of the weekend was born, and across Britain Saturday afternoon became the designated slot for watching and playing the popular new game of football.

Although the boys were probably still calling their new team 'Argyll' at the time, Rangers' first recorded match, with a side cobbled together

from a collection of the friends, siblings and fellow clansmen of the teenagers, was a goalless draw against a team from the town of Callander in Perthshire, played in May 1872. Fifteen-year-old William McBeath, the only founder member not from the area around the Gare Loch, was in fact competing against his home town and probably helped to organise the fixture by securing the opposition for his club's inaugural match. Perhaps for that reason, young McBeath played out of his skin, was voted man of the match, and had to lie up in bed for a week following the bruising encounter in order to recover from his exertions.

Described as a 'terrible' spectacle by William Dunlop, an early Rangers player, future president and, later, club historian, the match would have borne only a passing resemblance to the familiar modern game, with most of the team not even properly stripped and playing in their day to day clothes. The only players to wear 'kit' were Harry McNeil, elder brother of Moses and Peter, and his mate, Willie McKinnon, both of whom were regulars with Queen's Park at the time, along with two other experienced players borrowed from a team called Eastern. Harry McNeil would go on to win ten caps for Scotland between 1874 and 1881. However, it seems unlikely that he would have been able to successfully introduce his amateur club's pioneering passing game to this team of novices.

Despite the tentative start, the young men persisted and it wasn't long before their club was up and running, with office bearers elected and training sessions formally organised. The enthusiastic youngsters even managed to secure the patronage of the future 9th Duke of Argyll for their new enterprise, Queen Victoria's son-in-law, the Marquis of Lorne, although the local aristocrat for the region of their familial homes left Britain in 1878 to become Governor General of Canada and never managed to attend any of their matches. They called their new team Rangers, as likely as not because they liked how it sounded, but it has also been suggested, perhaps rather implausibly, that the name might be a form of rhyming slang, as all these young men were still relative strangers to their adopted city at the time.

But the Rangers name is listed as belonging to a rugby club from Swindon in Charles Alcock's *English Football Annual* of 1870. Alcock was a founder member of the FA, and a veteran of the seminal 1863 meetings at the Freemasons' tavern in Lincoln Inn Fields in London, where the

common set of rules for the game of football had been thrashed out and formally codified. He was also an important figure in establishing the first international fixture between Scotland and England, played at Hamilton Crescent in the Partick area of Glasgow in November 1872, just a few months on from Rangers' foundation. Moses McNeil, true sports fan that he was, had a copy of Alcock's annual and it was he who proposed the Rangers name, which was accepted unanimously. In 1877, the Rangers team were photographed, following their appearance against Vale of Leven in the Scottish Cup Final, in the same livery and colours as the Swindon club.

Rangers were not invited to take part in the Scottish Cup in its inaugural year of 1873/74, but having secured membership of the SFA in time for the following season, the club played its first competitive match in the new governing body's flagship competition in October 1874 and secured a 2-0 victory over Oxford, a team not from the English shires or the famous university, but from the east end of Glasgow. A year on from their formation, a childhood friend and contemporary of the founders, 16-year-old Tom Vallance, another aspiring young Victorian gentleman, had joined the club. Also from Garelochhead, he would go on to be one of the most significant figures in the club's early history, as captain and later president. A sturdy defender, Vallance was joined in the team against Oxford by Campbell and McBeath as well as by the McNeil brothers: Peter, who captained the side, Moses and their elder brother William. Dumbarton, one of the leading lights of Scottish Victorian football, would see Rangers off in the following round but an important first step had been taken.

Rangers had the advantage over the provincial sides of an enormous catchment area of prospective members and supporters, and their youthful energy and swashbuckling style of play quickly earned them a sizeable following. They were a nomadic club in the early years, and unlike teams such as Pollokshields Athletic, Govan and Partick Thistle, they were not tied to any particular area of the city, which, along with their continuing success, helped broaden their appeal as the years went by.

There was of course no league structure in place in these early days, so challenge matches against suitable opponents had to be organised by the committees and match secretaries of individual clubs. Queen's

Park initially offered to send their second team, known as the Strollers, to take on Rangers, not wanting to deliver a potentially demoralising defeat on the youthful new side, but the Rangers committee declined this proposal, and with the club winning 12 and drawing two of the 15 other matches which were arranged in season 1874/75, they were keen to gauge where they stood in the hierarchy of Scottish football by facing the very best that the country had to offer. Queen's eventually sent in their crack troops, and defeated Rangers by the comparatively narrow margin of 2-0 in November 1875.

By this time, Rangers had outgrown park football and the club soon moved to its first permanent home in the Burnbank enclosure, to the south of Kelvinbridge in the west end of the city, where their first game was a creditable 1-1 draw against the great Vale of Leven side, although the team from Alexandria in West Dunbartonshire played the entire match with only ten men. Still essentially a youth team centred on three families from Garelochhead, there were the three McNeil brothers, Moses, Peter and Willie (Harry was still playing for Queen's Park), Tom and his brother Alex Vallance, Peter Campbell, who was joined by his brothers James and John, alongside 18-year-old club president William McBeath.

Despite Burnbank being the most convenient location in terms of proximity to the founders' homes, the club only stayed in the West End for a year, moving south of the River Clyde to a ground at Kinning Park in time for the start of the 1876/77 season, after a cricket club called Clydesdale were unable to pay the rent and moved off the land. The new park, not far from the present Ibrox Stadium on a site which nowadays has the M8 motorway running through it, was opened on 2 September with a 2-1 defeat of old rivals Vale of Leven in front of 1,500 spectators. Rangers had added as many as half a dozen new players to their roster by this stage, including several from Sandyford, their former neighbours from the west end, who had recently disbanded, and the club seemed to be growing to maturity.

The same two teams, Rangers and Vale of Leven, then met again in the Scottish Cup Final, Rangers' first, which was played over three closely contested and controversial games in March and April 1877. By the time the Alexandrians eventually prevailed, winning 3-2 at the old Hampden Park in the second replay, Rangers' reputation and popularity

had increased considerably at a point when growing numbers of people from across the communities of Britain, but especially in the great urban centres of Scotland and England, were catching the football bug. Vale would go on to retain the cup over the following two seasons, knocking out Rangers on each occasion, while the Kinning Park men would have to wait another 15 years before finally getting their hands on the famous old trophy.

It's around this time, however, that the four young founders, the so-called Gallant Pioneers, begin to drop out of the club's recorded history and their association with the team which they helped to establish begins to dissipate. Only recently has the full extent of their varied fortunes come to light, revealing the painful, unhappy story of what happened to the boys in later life. Moses McNeil was perhaps the least unfortunate of the four. He lived to the ripe old age of 82, making him easily the longest-surviving founder member of the club. A talented winger, Moses left Rangers briefly to join elder brother Harry at Queen's Park in October 1875 and, in his first game, helped his new team to a famous 5-0 win over the great English side Wanderers, captained by Charles Alcock, in front of 11,000 people at Hampden. He returned to Rangers though just four months later, where he continued to play until 1882, far beyond any of the other pioneers. In addition, he made two international appearances for Scotland, becoming Rangers' first capped player when he was selected to face Wales in 1876, and four years later he lined up against England at Hampden, in a game which finished 5-4 to the Scots.

After football, Moses was employed as a commercial traveller for a firm of hosiers in Glasgow, then as a brush and oils salesman for a paint company. In later life, he moved back to Argyll where his links with the club he founded remained tenuous; in 1898, he attended a 21st anniversary reunion dinner of the famous 1877 Scottish Cup Final with Vale of Leven, organised by restaurateur and former team-mate Tom Vallance, but he didn't manage to attend Vallance's funeral in 1935 and he declined several invitations to Rangers reunions, including the 50th anniversary dinner in April 1923. Childless and unmarried, Moses lived out his last years with his sister Isabella at their secluded home in the village of Rosneath on the Gare Loch.

After losing his place in the team he helped to found, Moses's brother Peter McNeil took up an administrative role at Rangers, serving as

honorary match secretary from 1876, and he later became treasurer of the SFA as well, a job not without its challenges in the 1870s and 1880s. But he resigned from both positions in 1883, for reasons which were stated in the *Scottish Athletic Journal* as the 'pressure of business', in reference to his efforts to maintain a sports outfitters shop, which he owned and operated along with his brother Harry in Glasgow city centre.

The real reason for his departure from the football scene, however, seems to have had more to do with the declining condition of his mental health, although the full extent of his developing illness is unclear at this stage. But it says much for the regard in which he was held that, despite the appalling stigma often associated with such conditions in the Victorian age, his colleagues appear to have covered up his state of mind, offering sympathy and appreciation, and it was suggested that a testimonial should be organised for his benefit, although this never took place. Sadly the 'pressure of business' took its toll on Peter and his increasingly impoverished family. His outfitters shop had disappeared from the high street by 1896 and bankruptcy ensued, apparently after a quarrel or disagreement with his elder brother and business partner Harry. With his family now eligible for poverty relief payments from their local parish, it seems that financial failure was too heavy a burden to bear, and by the turn of the century Peter was considered a danger to himself and others. He was sectioned and admitted to an asylum in Paisley, where he died in March 1901 after suffering what his medical records describe as a 'growing mental paralysis for three years'.

The youngest member of the group, Peter Campbell, had just turned 15 when he helped to found Rangers Football Club in the spring of 1872. Born on 6 March 1857, his father was a steamboat captain and later something of an entrepreneur in the expanding steamship industry and the burgeoning field of tourism and local excursions on the Firth of Clyde. His mother was also from a family of reasonable means and the handsome sandstone villa of young Peter's childhood can still be seen today in Garelochhead, not far from the present site of the Faslane Naval Base.

Despite being from a more affluent background than his fellow pioneers, young Peter was put to work as an apprentice, then a journeyman, on the yards between 1872 and 1879 in a shipbuilding industry at it zenith on the Clyde. Along with his brothers James and

John, he played for Rangers in their very earliest years and his talents saw him earn two caps for Scotland, both against Wales, with Peter scoring twice on his debut at Hampden in 1878 in a convincing 9-0 victory, and then once more the following year in a 3-0 win in Wrexham.

A forward known for his pace and unselfish passing, Peter played his last match for Rangers in September 1879, a 5-1 defeat to Queen's Park in the Scottish Cup, before retiring from football following a brief spell at Blackburn Rovers. He then decided, perhaps following the family tradition, to take up the challenge of pursuing a career at sea and Campbell was appointed chief engineer on a steamer, the *St Columba*, which put to sea in January 1883 from the port of Penarth in South Wales, bound for the Indian colonies. However, a short time into its journey, the vessel was tragically lost in poor weather off the west coast of France. It wasn't until a month later that wreckage from the *St Columba* was washed up along the shore of the Bay of Biscay, confirming the loss of all on board. Peter Campbell was 25 years old when he died.

William McBeath was the only one of the Rangers founders not from the area around the Gare Loch in Argyll. Perhaps in recognition of his organisational skills, rather than his footballing prowess, McBeath was elected Rangers' first president in time for the 1874 season. However, his association with the club ended as early as 1876, after he was replaced in the team by George Gillespie, and his name fails to appear in any records thereafter. By 1884, he had completely dropped off the club's radar, when, at their half-yearly meeting in April, he was invited to dinner and presented with a gold badge by Tom Vallance in honour of his role in the club's foundation.

William's work as a commercial traveller had taken him away from Glasgow, where he apparently prospered in Bristol, but by 1897 he had lost his job, his relationship with his wife had broken down and his family had split up. He accepted a position as a commissioning agent, selling advertising space in a holiday newspaper but, along with his employer, he was charged with obtaining money under false pretences, a crime for which his boss was convicted and sentenced to 21 months of hard labour. Happily William, by now 40 years old and known as William McBeth, was acquitted of all charges. Later, he moved to Bradford and remarried, risking the wrath of the law once more by falsely claiming that he was a widower.

Perhaps to escape the charge of bigamy, he moved with his new bride to Lincoln, but the couple did not fare well. William spent time in prison, and was subsequently relocated to a poorhouse, from where his wife made numerous attempts to try and discharge him. She was unsuccessful and William frequently had to be escorted back to the residence by police officers acting as social workers. Like the amusing, but ultimately tragic half-man, Mr Dick, in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, McBeath's mental health seems to have irrevocably deteriorated and he was officially listed as a 'certified imbecile', an unforgiving diagnosis, although in modern medical parlance his condition may have been recognised as an advanced state of Alzheimer's disease. He died in the poorhouse infirmary in July 1917, aged 61, and was given a pauper's burial.

For William McBeath and Peter McNeil in particular, it might not be too facile to suggest that we can perhaps see an early, extreme example of the often devastating impact on the lives of young players who fail to make the grade as footballers. It must have been especially difficult in their cases, because they were founder members of a club which became hugely successful, once they were overlooked in favour of others. They had been put aside by their peers at Rangers and although they were both given administrative roles when they dropped out of the team, they missed out on all the glory, as over the course of their adult lives the game of football grew more popular than they could ever have foreseen. Coupled with failure in their personal and professional lives, they were sadly unable to recover from such a series of blows to their Victorian sense of self-esteem, with ultimately tragic consequences.

Rangers, meanwhile, the club which, back in the day, these star-crossed young boys had dreamt up and established, were continuing to grow on and off the field, although it seems that the club had a haughty, bad-tempered element associated with them, even from the earliest days. The young team had started to gain a bad reputation for themselves for persistently protesting results and decisions which had gone against them and there was growing indignation and criticism at the way their affairs were being conducted.

There had been controversy on the field as far back as 1875/76 during a second round Scottish Cup meeting with Glasgow rivals Third Lanark. Rangers won the initial game 1-0 at Cathkin Park, but they had apparently taken the kick-off at the start of both halves, a clear breach of

the rules, so a replay was ordered which Rangers lost. Suitably miffed, this time it was Rangers' turn to complain to the SFA, on the grounds that Thirds' goalkeeper had not been properly stripped for the match and, wearing his everyday clothes, he couldn't be clearly distinguished from the other players. Rangers also claimed that Thirds' winning goal should have been disallowed for handball, a dubious appeal given that the referee's decision was final in these matters, and that the game had ended early after spectators encroached on to the field. Their protest was thrown out and Thirds progressed to the next round at Rangers' expense.

The following season saw the infamous, twice-replayed Scottish Cup Final of 1877, which pitched Rangers against a Vale of Leven side who, in an earlier round, had inflicted a first ever domestic defeat on Queen's Park in the ten years of the formative Hampden club's existence. After a 1-1 draw between the two finalists in the first game at Hamilton Crescent, the subsequent replay attracted a sizeable crowd, which estimates put at between 8,000 and 15,000, in all probability a British record at the time. Again the game finished tied at 1-1, but during the agreed period of extra time confusion reigned after Rangers claimed that, following a shot from Dunlop, the ball had passed between the goalposts and rebounded out again off a spectator. The Rangers players insisted that a legitimate goal should have been awarded, but the referee, after consulting his two umpires, who seemed to be divided on the matter, disagreed. The protests went on so long that a section of the huge crowd became restless and invaded the field and, amid chaotic scenes, the game had to be abandoned early when the Hamilton Crescent pitch could not be cleared. Vale of Leven subsequently won a second replay, 3-2 at the old Hampden Park, and took the cup.

An even more serious incident occurred two years later, again in the Scottish Cup Final and again featuring the same two teams, Rangers and Vale of Leven, on Saturday, 19 April 1879. Having defeated Queen's Park for the first time in torrential rain in the semi-final, Rangers were leading the final 1-0 when a second 'goal', a header from Struthers, was disallowed for offside. With Rangers holding on late in the game, and seemingly on the verge of collecting their first piece of silverware, Vale equalised when converted goalkeeper George Gillespie misjudged an angled shot from Ferguson at the near post. Almost as soon as the game

had finished, Rangers let it be known that they were lodging an appeal, claiming that the earlier, disallowed goal should have stood. Quite rightly, the SFA again dismissed the protest on the grounds that the referee's decision is final and cannot later be overturned by any means.

Led by captain Tom Vallance, Rangers snootily refused to turn up for the replay, preferring a day out at Ayr races instead, and Vale were awarded the cup by default. Some measure of revenge was gained when Rangers defeated the same opponents 2-1 in the final of the Glasgow Charity Cup at Hampden later the same year, a notable achievement as the club collected its first ever trophy, but there was bad blood in that fixture as well, and several of the players were exchanging blows by the end.

Despite their growing popularity at the turnstiles, it's not hard to see how the still young club was starting to rub some people up the wrong way, as these protests became a feature of Rangers' fixtures over the course of the next few years. The game's administrators were appalled by their behaviour, as were certain newspapers and other sporting publications, with the *Scottish Athletic Journal* (*SAJ*) claiming that nobody outside of Kinning Park liked the club, and accusing them of bad sportsmanship, lack of humour and mean-spiritedness. In addition, the club's followers were starting to gain a bad reputation for their loutish and foul-mouthed behaviour and Kinning Park was considered one of the most notorious grounds in Scotland for unruly conduct among spectators.

If Rangers' popularity had risen in the 1870s among a relatively small but select group, who admired their youthful energy and captivating style of play, it was a different story by the mid-1880s as football's popularity continued to grow exponentially and the demographic make-up of the game's followers began to change. In September 1882, Rangers were drawn to play Queen's Park in the second round of the Scottish Cup at Hampden, a team that the *SAJ*, in April of the same year, had taken to task for their exclusivity and elitism: 'Social distinction in the matter of admitting members must be purged away,' the journal warned Queen's. 'It is true the men who upheld the name of the club so gloriously in days gone past had a class connection of a kind, but then they were of the few who played the game. Now everyone plays, and the commonest artisan has the same chance of becoming a great player as the youth who can command a certain social position.'

Despite being the home side, it was noted that Queen's had to endure stony silence when their three goals were scored, whereas Rangers' two strikes were greeted with enthusiastic cheering. By the time the sides met again three years later, again at Hampden in September 1885, the reputation of Rangers' followers had plummeted so low that the residents of Mount Florida were reluctant to let them anywhere near their respectable part of town.

Rangers' fans seemed to be at the opposite end of the social spectrum from the upper-crust Queen's Parkers, and they displayed their by now customary vulgarity during another bad-tempered 3-2 defeat for their team. The *Scottish Athletic Journal* called on Rangers to put their house in order, describing the atmosphere at Hampden as 'a perfect pandemonium'. In November 1888, former player John McCartney summed up the general mood when he observed that, 'the following of Rangers is the worst in Scotland', after he was heckled by the home crowd at the old Ibrox while playing for Cowlairs.

It wasn't just the fans, however, as ten years on from the club's foundation, Rangers' players by now were also acquiring a reputation for drunken and boorish behaviour. Most were not deemed to be gentlemen, according to the standards of the day, and many were often seen to be the worse for wear at club functions. In November 1883, following a Charity Cup match against Queen's Park, a rather sumptuous spread was set up in a nearby pub, the Athole Arms, for the players and officials of the two teams. Queen's, however, refused to attend the post-match bash, maintaining that it was an unnecessary expense for a fundraising game, so the Rangers camp, undaunted, tucked into the repast alone. In 1885, the club tried their hand at the FA Cup, the competition being open to all British teams at the time, although the cost of travel and accommodation meant that few Scottish sides chose to participate.

This changed, however, when the competition was regionalised and twice Queen's Park reached the final, in 1884 and 1885, losing on both occasions to Blackburn Rovers. Rangers were drawn against a Lancashire team called Rawtenstall, but the Glasgow club's participation in the competition got off to a false start when they refused to meet the Lancastrians, on the grounds that their team contained professional players. For their refusal to fulfil the fixture, Rangers were hit with a financial penalty of ten shillings, meaning that to this day the club

retains the dubious honour of being the only Scottish side ever to be fined by the English FA.

Undaunted, Rangers tried again the following year when they were drawn to face Everton at their Anfield ground in Liverpool. Despite turning up late and causing the kick-off to be delayed by 15 minutes after being thrown out of their hotel for excessive drunken behaviour the night before, Rangers managed a 1-0 win with a goal from Charlie Heggie. The Glasgow club made further progress in the competition after successive home victories in the following rounds and were eventually drawn against Aston Villa in the semi-final. In a game played in front of 10,000 spectators in Crewe, Villa ran out 3-1 winners, thanks in no small part to a poor performance by the Rangers goalkeeper Willie Chalmers, who had overindulged himself at lunch on the day of the game. The *Scottish Umpire* reported, 'The weak points of the Rangers were in deficient combination and dash of the forwards, rather weak defence and downright poor goalkeeping.'

It would be the last game played by a Scottish team in the FA Cup, as at the end of the season, the SFA, fearing a dilution of its influence, banned its members from participation in any cup competition other than those organised under its own auspices.

Meanwhile, there was also trouble brewing behind the scenes at the Kinning Park club. On 11 November 1882, the team's match against St Bernard's in Edinburgh had to be cancelled at the last minute when club president Archie Harkness died suddenly from typhoid, aged 26. The untimely passing of Harkness had the unfortunate effect on Rangers of allowing the unscrupulous honorary secretary John Mackay to dominate the club and its business. Many clubs faced in-house difficulties around this time as the pressure to professionalise, in an increasingly competitive environment, clashed with the ideal of the amateur, Corinthian spirit, which was stridently cherished by some.

Professionalism was more or less allowed in England from the mid-1880s, but the amateur game held on in Scotland until the establishment of league football at the start of the following decade. Some clubs did not survive the transition, while others, such as Celtic, continued only after internal bloodletting. Famously, Queen's Park stood aloof from the societal changes in the game, even after the establishment of league football in Scotland, and they continue as an amateur club to this day,

long after their counterparts in England, the military and the alumni teams from the boarding schools and universities who dominated football south of the border in the early years, have been consigned to the history books.

At Rangers, however, the in-fighting was particularly bitter, amid serious financial problems and chaotic maladministration. The tragic Harkness had been replaced as club president by the builder George Goudie, who immediately lent the struggling institution £30 in order to stay afloat. The early pioneers had long since departed the scene and even Tom Vallance had moved to India in February 1882, although he returned a year later after contracting a debilitating illness which effectively ended his playing career at the age of 26. As well as playing for Rangers for ten years and winning seven caps for Scotland, Vallance, handsome and imposing at 6ft 2in tall, also excelled at rowing and was an accomplished athlete. Like many Rangers players at that time, he was a member of the Clydesdale Harriers Athletics Club, who were associated with Rangers through their respective membership lists and their joint use of the playing fields at Kinning Park.

A socialite who liked to move in influential circles, Vallance diversified into the restaurant business and later became president of the restaurateurs' and hotelkeepers' association. Clearly something of a Renaissance Man, he was also a self-taught artist and his paintings were later exhibited at the Royal Glasgow Institute. On his return from India, Vallance assumed the role of the club's president in May 1883, with Goudie stepping down to vice-president, and immediately promised that the three major cups would all be won by Rangers in the new season. It turned out to be mere bravado however, and when Rangers were duly knocked out of the three competitions and no trophies were forthcoming, the *Scottish Athletic Journal* mischievously promised to provide Rangers with three tea cups instead.

Vallance's return failed to provide Rangers with the stability they required, as the scheming John Mackay assumed the role of match secretary following Peter McNeil's departure, increasing his stranglehold on power at the club as Rangers' tribulations continued. In 1883, the club agreed to play against Dumbarton in a benefit game, following the capsize of the steamer *Daphne* at its launch on the Clyde, which had resulted in the loss of 146 lives, to this day still the greatest disaster

ever witnessed in the Glasgow shipbuilding industry. Dumbarton were shocked when the Rangers officials, despite the game being played at Kinning Park, drew their expenses from the relief fund, and after Rangers subsequently received criticism in the local press for their mean-spiritedness, Mackay fired off an angry response to the *SAJ*, complaining of a 'spiteful and baseless attack' against the club and effectively stating that it was okay for big clubs like Dumbarton to play for nothing, but Rangers couldn't afford it.

On several occasions during Mackay's troubled reign at the club, Rangers were also accused of fielding ineligible or professional players and, on at least one occasion, came close to having their membership of the SFA terminated as a result. In October 1884, the team faced Third Lanark in the Scottish Cup and selected former player Sam Thomson for the tie, a Scotland international forward who had previously joined Preston North End and was therefore no longer a registered member of the Kinning Park club. Thirds protested but the controversy could not be cleared up and, with the original game finishing 1-1, the replay went ahead the following week. Again the match finished in a draw and again Rangers had fielded a professional player, Archie Steel of Bolton Wanderers, although the matter was not investigated and, under the rules of the day, both clubs progressed to the next stage.

Perhaps inevitably, Rangers and Third Lanark were immediately drawn to face one another in the following round and once again the Kinning Park men were living dangerously. Mackay was suspected of doctoring documents, following the appearance of a T. Cook for Rangers, which Thirds were convinced represented another instance of Rangers fielding an ineligible player. The club had signed Tommy Cook in July, but it took until October before the player was properly registered with the SFA, although Rangers did have a J. Cook on their books at the time, who would have been authorised to play in the tie. The match card from the day subsequently turned up with the 'T' altered to look like a 'J', with Mackay implicated in the unauthorised amendment.

Not for the last time in their history, Rangers seemed to be flouting the rules and getting away with it, as a proven case of forged documentation would surely have seen the club expelled from the cup, and possibly even suspended from the SFA. The *SAJ*, outraged at the apparent injustice following Rangers' 3-0 win over their disgruntled

opponents, described the affair as 'one of the biggest scandals that ever disgraced the annals of football', with the journal's editor apparently so vexed by the whole commotion that he was moved to suggest, 'I am certain the football world will agree with me that it is far better the Rangers should die than a noble pastime be dragged in the mire.'

Nevertheless, Rangers progressed to the next round where their opponents, Arbroath, defeated the Kinning Park men 4-3 at Gayfield. After the loss, Rangers complained that the pitch was too narrow, describing it, in a terse telegram sent back to Glasgow, as a mere 'back green'. Experienced protestors by now, club officials took a measuring tape out to the field to see if they could prove their case and when the pitch was found to be 11 inches short of the required width the inevitable appeal went in and a replay was ordered by the SFA, which Rangers won 8-1. The club then received a bye through to the quarter-final, but four days following their subsequent 5-3 defeat at the hands of eventual winners Renton, the *Scottish Athletic Journal* wryly observed, 'So far there has been no protest from Rangers.'

Even by the following year, the *SAJ* still hadn't let the matter drop when it stated in September 1885, 'Rangers last season protested their way from round to round and created in doing so a scandal which shocked the whole football world'. By the time Rangers moved to their new ground at Ibrox in 1887, however, the *SAJ* had clearly admitted to itself that it was fighting a losing battle in its campaign against the wayward club. Apparently realising that it was flowing against the tide in terms of Rangers' growing popularity, it replaced the chorus of disapproval with 'adoring approbation', as a rival publication, the *Scottish Umpire*, which had recently been established by, among others, John Mackay, noted with a degree of contempt. Rangers had effectively seen off their critics in the press, and within a year the *Scottish Athletic Journal* and the *Scottish Umpire* had merged to form the twice-weekly *Scottish Sport*, which would describe Rangers in the 1890s as 'Scotia's darling club'.

The days of youthful innocence at Rangers were well and truly over. President Tom Vallance, the only remaining link with the club's founders, was clearly exasperated at the direction the organisation was taking, and at some of John Mackay's antics in particular. Late in 1883, under Mackay's influence, the Rangers players refused to

sanction the appointment of Vallance to umpire a game between their club and Dumbarton, just a few months after the incident over the *Daphne* disaster fundraising match, which had caused considerable bad blood between the two sides. Referees at the time were assisted by two umpires, one chosen from each team, but Mackay had persuaded his players that Vallance's honesty would undermine their efforts on the field, and was insisting instead that he should be nominated to stand referee himself. The club president immediately resigned in protest and was only persuaded to return after an apology was issued on behalf of the squad. Mackay himself continued to umpire, but was so incapable of impartial officiating that he would often provoke partisan interventions from his opposite number, the opponents' nominated man, with the result that games involving Rangers would frequently descend into bad-tempered chaos.

In October 1885, the *SAJ* had offered the view that, 'The social decadence of the Rangers may be dated from the day Mr Peter McNeil resigned the match secretaryship and J.W. Mackay took it up.' Perhaps as a result of such accusations, the tendency among the club's modern historians, in typical Rangers fashion, has been to scapegoat Mackay for these and other indiscretions and for the general condition of the club during this troubled period. It is a tactic which has often been repeated since, to blame an individual for his erroneous ways rather than contemplate the uncomfortable idea of a wider malaise at the club.

There was at this time a cultural failing at the heart of the institution, which allowed an individual of the calibre of Mackay to become such an influential administrator, a person who would not have been allowed anywhere near rival contemporary clubs such as Dumbarton, Renton, with its 'brotherhood of equality and fraternity' ethos, or Queen's Park, needless to say. Overall the impression is of a club borne out of the passion and youthful enthusiasm of a group of teenagers, but despite lofty Victorian notions about the civilising effect of manly, competitive sport, suffering from a lack of cohesive and moral leadership. With the departure of the youthful pioneers and the dwindling influence of Vallance, there was no older, father figure on the scene to nurture the club into maturity, to show concern for its future wellbeing, once it grew into something big, successful and ultimately unwieldy. The club had

lost its way and grubby, boorish and uncharitable behaviour was the order of the day at Rangers.

The club's internal problems coincided with a terrible run of form on the field for the Rangers team. During a poor spell between 1881 and 1883, Rangers lost 16 of 29 matches, including five defeats in a row at one point, and the club was quarrelling with some of its best players, most notably George Gillespie and forward Charlie Heggie, a player who had the distinction of scoring four goals for Scotland on his international debut but never appearing for his country again, with both men eventually leaving the club. To make matters worse, by 1887 Rangers' lease on their Kinning Park ground had expired and the club was evicted. Still under the presidential stewardship of Tom Vallance, Rangers moved to the first Ibrox Park, built on derelict land at the Copland Road end of Paisley Road, a relatively remote area of Glasgow at the time.

Situated 100 or so yards to the north-east of the present stadium, the press helpfully printed maps and illustrations in order to help supporters find their way to the new location, which quickly sold out. An abortive attempt to relocate the club to the Strathbungo and Pollokshields area of the city had failed when local residents, wary of Rangers fans' poor reputation by this time, vetoed the idea and Vallance was concerned that the notoriety of their supporters would follow Rangers to their new home. The president tried to assuage such fears at a banquet for invited guests on the eve of the club's first match at Ibrox, when he announced, 'I have known very respectable people come to our matches and not renewing their visits but that has all gone and I am sanguine that in our new sphere we will be able to attract to our matches thousands of respectable spectators.'

Ibrox Park had opened in a blaze of publicity, but things didn't get off to a great start for the team at their new home. In a game played to mark the ground's inauguration, there were disturbances among spectators as well as a hefty defeat, as Rangers suffered an inauspicious 8-1 loss to Preston North End, the great Lancastrian side who would go on to win the first two titles of the newly established Football League in 1889 and 1890. By the closing stages, some of the capacity crowd of 20,000 spilled over on to the pitch, causing the game to be abandoned five minutes from full-time and following the match, at a reception dinner,

the Preston chairman and manager, Billy Sudell, urged the Glasgow press to remind the Rangers fans about their manners, after the fixture came to an unruly and premature end.

Later the same year, a meeting was held at St Mary's Hall in the Calton area of Glasgow which would lead to the foundation of Celtic Football Club. If Rangers arrived early on the football scene, a young infant having to learn and grow gradually as the game evolved, Celtic by contrast were a team born late, like a foal, that had to spring up from the ground in an instant and start running around almost immediately, with its limbs in full working order, competing with its peers and rivals. The first meeting between Rangers and the new team from the east end of town took place in May 1888, as Celtic made their debut on the stage of Scottish football, and a 5-2 victory for the nascent club was followed by a convivial night's entertainment back at St Mary's Hall. The future success of both teams was toasted and initially there was great friendship and camaraderie between the two clubs; two of the Celtic players, brothers Tom and Willie Maley, were founding members of the Clydesdale Harriers Athletics Club, who functioned out of Kinning Park, and they knew many of the Rangers contingent well.

Celtic were founded by Brother Walfrid, a senior figure in the Catholic Marist religious order and the headmaster of St Andrew's school in the city centre, with the help of prominent members of the local Irish community, chiefly Doctor John Conway and the well-known and respected builder John Glass. Walfrid, Conway and Glass had been bouncing ideas around for some time about ways to help the children of the impoverished Irish immigrants in Glasgow's east end. There had been a sizeable Irish community in the Glasgow area for much of the 19th century; in 1840, it was estimated that the Irish, including many itinerant workers, made up around a quarter of the city's population and this only increased later in the decade with the disaster of 'An Gorta Mor', the Great Famine, caused by the blight on the potato crop, which led to the exodus from Ireland of over one million people. The Irish were generally unskilled and prepared to take on almost any form of employment and it was their labour on which much of the growth and industrialisation of Glasgow in the 19th century had been built. But despite the poverty and deprivation of so many, there were also prominent citizens, such as Conway and Glass,

as well as the clergy, who were venerated in the Catholic community for their vocation.

The chief idea behind the new club's foundation was to raise funds in order to provide the needy children of the city's east end with 'penny meals' through the St Vincent de Paul Society, which was attached to the Sacred Heart mission in the four main Catholic parishes within the archdiocese of Glasgow. Many in the community had been badly affected by the collapse of the City of Glasgow bank a decade earlier, which had precipitated an economic slump with hundreds of labourers, from all backgrounds, being put out of work, including at the nearby Parkhead Forge ironworks which was forced into temporary closure. The Welfare State was still more than half a century away and there was no concept at the time of civil intervention on behalf of those who found themselves on the soft underbelly of society, but Walfrid and his colleagues were acutely aware of the plight of the less fortunate among their fellow countrymen and they had been active for some time in efforts to try and mitigate their circumstances.

In February 1887, the Scottish Cup was won in Glasgow by the Edinburgh side Hibernian, an exclusively Irish, Catholic team whose application to join the SFA in the 1870s had originally been refused, with their membership fee returned along with a terse letter explaining that the SFA was for 'Scotchmen, not Irishmen'. Walfrid, Conway and Glass witnessed the celebrations among the Irish in Glasgow at the success of the Edinburgh side, and before long steps were undertaken to establish a team which could similarly represent Glasgow's own community of Irishmen. Early in the new year, not long after the inaugural meeting at St Mary's Hall in November, the founders began soliciting for labour from a largely volunteer workforce to build a stadium for the proposed new club. The response was overwhelming, and by May Celtic were ready to take their first steps. Unlike their friends and neighbours Rangers, who had endured lengthy, nomadic years of development, often struggling to break even and wondering on occasion if they would have a ground to play on, Celtic simply had no time for such tribulations.

In order to accomplish their immediate goal of raising money for the needy, Celtic had to be fully functioning from the start and the club became an overnight success story, able to take players from other teams seemingly at will in order to get themselves off the ground, and a

huge, almost instantaneous cultural phenomenon. In their first season, Celtic reached the Scottish Cup Final, before losing to Third Lanark, and by the second year of their existence, they were attracting crowds of 25,000 to their home in Parkhead. Celtic too had their blood on the carpet moment, caused by internal disagreements in the early days between the charitable arm of the club and the business faction, who saw professionalism as the inevitable way forward for football.

In the end, the pragmatists prevailed, just as professionalism had, as the argument was reflected in the wider game, and the Celtic Football and Athletic Company was incorporated in 1897. The idealists were swimming against the tide, as the game continued to grow in popularity, but the club retains a charitable tradition to this day, and the initiative and zeal of its modern-day supporters towards organising events and raising money for worthwhile causes remains impressive.

Despite the close early ties between the two Glasgow clubs and the spirit of sporting solidarity in evidence at St Mary's Hall in May 1888, the sudden appearance of a serious nearby rival seems to have had a galvanising effect on those associated with Rangers, with the Ibrox club's income quadrupling between 1889 and 1894. Over the course of the coming decades, the two clubs would find themselves locked in a seemingly endless *tête-à-tête*, each vying for supremacy over the other while leaving rivals floundering in their wake, as the Glasgow duopoly inevitably began to dominate the game in Scotland. Football, once the game of the patrician classes, now witnessed its most intense rivalry between Rangers, the grubbiest of the grubby, and Celtic, the poorest of the poor.

But with Rangers there would be a darker motivation, and it wasn't long before the club's whole identity and *raison d'être* would become intricately linked with their neighbours from the east end of the city. If Celtic were formed to support and represent an immigrant community, Rangers would go on to become the reactionary club, the sporting arm of a wider social movement to keep the Irish population in the west of Scotland firmly in its place, as the Ibrox club gradually assumed the mantle of the team to stop the Catholics.