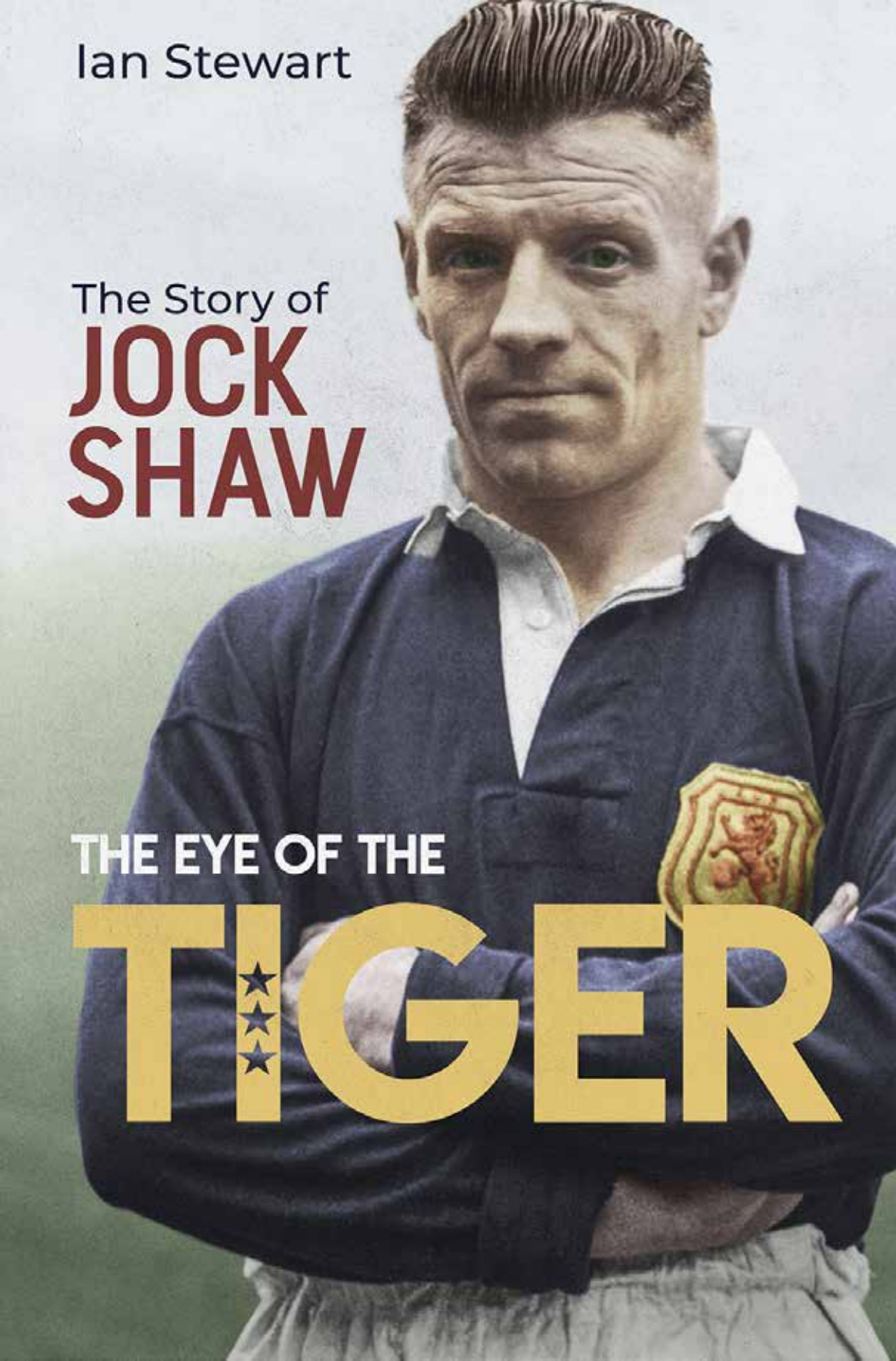
Ian Stewart

The Story of JOCK SHAW



THE EYE OF THE TIGER

THE EYE OF THE TIGER

The Story of JOCK SHAW

Ian Stewart

pitch

Contents

Eye of the Tiger – The Life and Times of Rangers' First Treble-Winning Captain, Jock Shaw

THIS IS the story of one of the most legendary figures in Rangers' long history, someone who epitomised what it meant to be a true Ranger. It could be argued he was a man carved in the image of his manager Bill Struth.

This is not just the story of a football player but an insight into life in the industrial central belt of Scotland, straddling two world wars and without the riches today's footballers enjoy.

John (Jock) Shaw was born in Annathill on 29 November 1912.

Jock was a no-nonsense full-back whose fierce uncompromising tackling earned him the nickname 'Tiger' from the club supporters. He joined from Airdrie in 1938 for £2,000, having started his senior career there five years previously, after signing from junior club Benburb.

He was a key figure in the Ibrox defence in the immediate post-war years. That defence was dubbed the 'Iron Curtain' because it was seen as being as unyielding as the barrier which divided Europe at this time. When he signed for Rangers, it started a remarkable association with the club which lasted over 40 years and saw him serve as team captain, third-team coach and groundsman. Tiger also captained Scotland and he and his brother David filled the full-back roles in the Victory International win over England in 1946.

This is the story of a man absolutely dedicated to his trade in general and Rangers in particular: a very humble man, despite his achievements, and one who was held in the highest esteem by the football fraternity and the local community where he stayed in Glenboig, North Lanarkshire.

The book will describe his career from the humble beginnings, turning out for Annathill Guild, to treble-winning Rangers' captain and captain of his country three times against England.

It will also look at his role in the community and his Glenboig village shop. I have spoken at length with surviving family to give me an insight into the man, not just as a professional sportsman but as a husband, father and papa.

It says much for the esteem in which he is held that he was one of the first inductees into the Rangers Hall of Fame after over 600 games for the club.

When he passed away in June 2000, Ally McCoist, despite being busy abroad on European Championship TV duty, returned for the day to Scotland to attend the funeral and pay his respects to someone he held in the highest regard.

The following words were printed on the back of his funeral service: 'If the captain is the man he should be, the example he sets can be of priceless value. Rangers are fortunate in having had John (Jock) Shaw, the type of leader who fulfils the essentials – never-say-die, fair to all (opponents and team-mates alike), quietly proud in victory and no bitterness in defeat.'

A fitting epitaph to a true member of Rangers Royalty.

Birth

ON FRIDAY, 29 November 1912 at 11.50 am, John Shaw arrived into the world – the first child of David and Alice Shaw. Four years later the family was increased by the addition of brother David, on 5 May 1916, then later by another brother, Charlie.

There was nothing of particular significance which happened on the day of John's birth, but this year was the year the *Titantic* sank and the Pulitzer Prize was introduced.

Rangers sat atop the Scottish League, which they would eventually win by four points from Celtic, though the following day they would succumb 0-2 to Falkirk at Brockville.

John, henceforth to be referred to as Jock, was born into the mining community of Annathill and the adjacent Bedlay Colliery, a harsh and tough life, and his father David was a miner.

Annathill early years

Annathill is a small village on the banks of the Mollins Burn, a tributary of the Luggie Water. Annathill was primarily famous for coal, as it was home to Bedlay Colliery. The majority of miners from Bedlay Colliery came from Annathill and there were three 'Miners' Rows' of houses along with various shops, a butcher's and a pub, which were all built around the same time Bedlay Colliery's shafts were sunk by William Baird and Company in 1905. With its neighbouring coke ovens, Bedlay was established to produce high-quality coking coal for nearby Gartsherrie Iron Works. The colliery

employed over 1,000 workers as recently as 1969, and produced around 250,000 tons of coal annually.

The Shaws lived in one of the houses located on what was referred to as Miners' Row Annathill. There were three rows of houses built by Bairds to house the mine employees and they were collectively known as Annathill Terrace, with the addendum, front, middle or back to distinguish the location.

The houses were generally comprised of two rooms (a living room and back room), a scullery and a cupboard with a sink and running water sited in the living room, so conditions were very cramped. There were eight larger houses located on the back row which had three apartments, indoor toilets and front and back doors.

Annathill is now scarcely recognisable from the village it was when Bedlay was at its peak. Then there was a bowling green, recreation ground, grocer's, post office, chip shop, two Co-ops, a confectioner and a cobbler. In addition, for recreation there was a social club and football pitch. It was clear this was a thriving community, albeit one totally dependent on the pit.

As I have said, Jock's father David was a miner, married to Alice (nee Wellwood). David was one of eight siblings – three sisters, Alice, Maggie and Jeannie, and four brothers, Jock, Rab, Will and Charlie.

All the men were accomplished footballers and all five of the boys turned out for a junior team founded in the village.

The sports periodical of the time, *The Scottish Referee*, reported in its 14 July 1911 edition, 'Bedlay Juniors, a new club in the Glenboig district, are looking forward to a successful season. They have secured D. Shaw (Croy Celtic), M. Sloan (Rutherglen Glencairn), and other class players, and with a good pavilion and the ground nicely set off with barricade etc., the juniors should do well in their first season. I have to thank Mr John Crawley, the secretary of Bedlay Juniors, whose address is 36 Annathill Terrace, Glenboig, for a copy of the club's membership card.'

There did seem to be a degree of nepotism at play right enough as a team photo of the time included only three surnames: Shaw, McGowan and Marshall. Ten of those were Shaw and McGowan, who were cousins.

The First World War brought devastation and heartbreak to countless families across the country. The Shaw family sadly were no different. On 2 November 1917 the *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser* reported the death of Jock's Uncle Jim as follows:

Deep sympathy is felt for Mr Shaw and his family in the loss of two sons in a little over two years.

> Bedlay soldier Mr J. Shaw, 129 Annathill Terrace, has received the news of the death of his son, Pte James Shaw, Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, who was killed by rifle fire at an advance on the morning of October 31. In conveying the sad news Lieut. Hunter expressed the deep sympathy of B Company, with whom Pte Shaw was popular, being so cheerful and a willing soldier. Pte Shaw was well known in junior football circles, being one of five brothers who have played with Juniors. Previous to enlisting in February, 1915, Pte Shaw was a miner in Messrs Win. Baird & Co.'s Bedlay Colliery. The sympathy of the inhabitants of Annathill is with Mr Shaw and family in the loss of two sons in two years – Q.M. Sergeant J. Brodie, in a letter to Mr Shaw, states: 'As all the officers of the company were casualties, thought it my duty to write. Your son was very popular with both officers and men of his company, who held him in high esteem, was such a cheerful and willing lad, who could be depended on doing his duty, no matter how dangerous. He will be missed very much; know he will be missed more at home. I have to offer you my own deepest sympathy, hoping the knowledge that he died doing his duty may help to lighten the blow. Your son met his death while advancing towards the German

> trenches, and was shot by rifle fire. He suffered no pain, being instantly killed.'

While the news would have been heartbreaking, at least there would have been some comfort in the kind words articulated by the army.

After the Great War, life returned to something approaching normality and on 31 July 1920 there was the spectacle of the Bedlay, Annathill and District Highland Games which took place at Carrick Park, Glenboig. There were also plans underway to form a brass band in Annathill, and there was a plea for this not just to be a pipe dream but turned into a reality.

Life down the pit for Davie (senior) and his surviving brothers was difficult and soon his sons would follow him underground. Ewan Gibbs penned a comprehensive review of mining in his paper *Coal Country – The Meaning and Memory of De-industrialisation in Post War Scotland* from which he kindly approved publication of the following extracts, to give a bit of a sense of the dangers and also some personal testimonies about Bedlay specifically and some of the employment practices, which I found fascinating.

> Coal mining has always been a dangerous enterprise and from the mid-1800s, as technology allowed miners to dig deeper, the dangers increased. Terrible tragedies such as a collapsed pumping engine at New Hartley Colliery, Northumberland in 1862, in which 204 men and boys died, trapped underground, and the explosion at Blantyre in 1877, which claimed 207 lives, highlighted not only the dreadful loss of life but the inadequate provisions for rescuing survivors.
>
> The Coal Mines Act 1911 was a major step forward in mines safety, consolidating previous legislation to create a clearer framework of regulation. The Act made mines rescue stations compulsory, and dictated that no colliery could be more than 15 miles away from one.

The importance of having a rescue team nearby had been brought home by an explosion in Somerset in 1908 which killed ten men and boys. Because there was no mines rescue team, workers at the pit spent ten days searching for survivors.

At the time of the Coal Mines Act the Lanarkshire Coal Field was the most important in Scotland, accounting for more than half of the country's production. The industry reached its peak level of production in 1913. At that time 146,000 people (2,000 of them women) in Scotland worked in coal mining. This was how extensive and vital to the economy mining was. The Lanarkshire Coalmasters Association opened Coatbridge Mines Rescue Station in 1915.

The Mines Rescue Station was called to deal with many terrible incidents during its lifetime and those mentioned below are just a few of them.

The first call-out after Coatbridge Mines Rescue Station opened in 1915 was at Bedlay Colliery. A roof fall had blocked a vital ventilation tunnel with the result that four men were overcome by carbon monoxide, and became unconscious. The rescuers drove from Coatbridge with breathing apparatus and were able to rescue three of the men alive.

In the National Coal Board (NCB) era, Coatbridge was the main rescue station for the Scottish Area which also included stations at Cowdenbeath, Kilmarnock and Heriot-Watt, Edinburgh. These were manned by part-time staff.

The Coatbridge brigade consisted of three teams of seven men and an instructor, plus a full-time superintendent. Aside from their own equipment the brigade also serviced extinguishers and safety equipment from area mines.

The full-time rescue men lived in the station and their families received free passes to the Regal cinema just along the street. Training was hard, with the men wearing full

> breathing apparatus in a replica mine working, which was housed inside the building. The brigade also trained Scotland's fire brigades in the use of breathing apparatus. At the back of the building there were garages for the brigade's rescue vehicles and an aviary which housed canaries for testing the air in the mine.

The alarm bells were ringing toward the end of the 1960s when the future of Bedlay became shrouded in doubt.

> Then in September 1969, H. J. Henson of the Board of Trade Office for Scotland wrote to the department of industry expressing concern at the 'seriously aggravated' male unemployment that he expected to develop in Kilsyth, North Lanarkshire, over the following months. Henson detailed the expected closure of Cardowan Colliery, with the immediate redundancy of 1,200 men, due to the pit being put onto 'jeopardy' status regarding its financial losses. The adjacent Bedlay Colliery, which employed Kilsyth men too, was also expected to close due to a gas problem. There were only limited employment opportunities in the area. Henson noted that just less than half, 80 of 180, available local jobs were classified as 'male' and most of the local advance factories were oriented towards 'women's work'.
>
> Deep coal mining ceased in the northern core during the early 1980s. The striking differences in the responses to the closure of Bedlay in 1982, and Cardowan in 1983 were due to the broad adherence to the moral economy at Bedlay and a clear transgression of its customs by the NCB at Cardowan.
>
> Bedlay was the last moral economy closure in Scotland, with all those that followed being marked by managerial hostility to union consultation and workforce opposition.

> The colliery had traditions of collaboration between managers and anti-communist trade unionists. Cardowan contrasted with Bedlay.
>
> It was a large cosmopolitan colliery and was a stronghold of politicised left-wing trade unionism. Descriptions of these distinct ideological alignments were present in the oral history interviews. For instance, Pat Egan, an NUM youth delegate at Bedlay, recalled, 'Cardowan was always quite a militant pit. Bedlay wisnae, and Bedlay was run by *pause*, Cardowan's mainly a communist pit and Bedlay a lot a Catholic group, the Knights of St Columba, all these kindae organisations. It wis probably Knights of St Columba. They used tae say if you wanted overtime at Bedlay go for a pint at the Knights on Saturday night or a Friday night and you'd ask "how much is that?" Most ae the management were all in the Knights of St Columba or the Masonic Lodge … Union and management wis pretty much what would be termed right wing noo. Cardowan was always left wing.'
>
> These distinctions were not the fundamental cause of the differing responses to closure. It was the difference in the treatment of closure by the NCB, through their relative adherence to the moral economy at Bedlay, and clear breach of it at Cardowan, which was fundamental in determining the stance taken by the NUM and within the communities affected.

For those unfamiliar with the term 'moral economy', this relates to economic decisions made which have cognisance of both the moral and material impacts of any decisions.

> In the case of Bedlay, the closure was less controversial as it took place on geological rather than economic grounds. Extensive consultation and discussions with all unions were

> spread over several months, while a joint examination of all possible areas of reserves took place with the involvement of the union's mining engineers. Closure was agreed due to 'insurmountable geological issues'.

Attention was then directed to employment practices and the continued significance of sectarianism during the latter half of the 20th century.

> [Dr Elinor] Kelly defined sectarianism as 'a social setting in which systematic discrimination affects the life chances of a religious group, and within which religious affiliation stands for much more than theological belief.' [Kelly is Honorary Research Fellow in race and ethnicity at the University of Glasgow and this refers to her work published in 2005: 'Sectarianism, Bigotry and Ethnicity – The Gulf in Understanding'.]
>
> This is an appropriate basis on which to construct an analysis in the context of the Scottish coalfields. Sectarian trends were especially concentrated in Lanarkshire where different Irish ethnic backgrounds, Catholic and Ulster–Protestant, intersected with residence, work patterns, and political affiliations.
>
> Sectarian practices figure significantly within the oral testimonies collected for this study, especially as they relate to the private industry. Jessie Clark recalled that in the South Lanarkshire mining village of Douglas Water, her father, a blacklisted trade unionist, felt 'the members of the Masonic Lodge were the ones that always got the work, you know. And that was a fact of life in the village that I lived in.'
>
> Jessie's father had rejected such a path, breaking with his father's affiliation in favour of socialist politics through the Independent Labour party, but sectarian connections

retained some bearing on colliery employment into the nationalised period.

Pat Egan's memories of the influential role played by a Catholic fraternity, the Knights of St Columba, at Bedlay Colliery, are demonstrative of the pit's social embedding through strong links between workers and management. These practices were informed by a defensive and divisive mentality, which protected access to premium employment and promotion for those of a particular ethnic background and religious–political affiliation. Pat's contentions about Bedlay are corroborated by the memories of John Hamilton who was originally from Lesmahagow in South Lanarkshire.

John had worked alongside his father at Ponfeigh Colliery, adjacent to Lesmahagow, but took up employment at Bedlay during the early 1980s. His recollections also confirm that sectarian affiliations were embedded in other collieries. Before Bedlay closed, John transferred to Polkemmet in West Lothian. In contrast to Bedlay, it had a Protestant loyalist character.

'I'm of the Protestant religion. I worked at the Bedlay and it was, the majority was Catholic religion. Big time. So you couldnae even talk aboot Glasgow Rangers when you were doon the pit. You'd just to watch what you were saying when you were saying it! So, when that closed, I got transferred to Polkemmet. And in Polkemmet they've got pictures o' the Queen in every corner you can think ae … But you were accepted nae matter where you came fae, didnae matter to who you were working wi'. No. That was okay, as long as you were daein your job and aw that. There was never any trouble.'

John's eagerness to stress that sectarianism did not contribute towards serious divisions in the workforce is

> indicative of elements of composure, especially in which Bedlay was a colliery invested with community and familial significance.

(Here is a link to the full report, which does make fascinating reading covering both the social and economic impact of the pit closures. *Coal Country: The Meaning and Memory of De-industrialization in Post-war Scotland* by Ewan Gibbs (https://humanities-digital-library.org/index.php/hdl/catalog/book/)

On 11 December 1981, Bedlay Colliery was closed by the then Conservative government and was left abandoned until 1982 when it was filled in (or 'capped') and the complex demolished. Material from the bings, or slagheaps, was used as bottoming for the M80 construction. Post-closure, in the 1990s, the land on which Bedlay Colliery sat (owned by the National Coal Board) underwent an operation to restore the ground to what it looked like before the colliery was sunk.

When Jock was 14 he left school and life down the pit commenced for him with all the perils and dangers that involved. By this time, with some coaching from his Uncle Willie, he had started to show some real ability as a footballer, and was consistently playing a starring role for the local Boys' Brigade team – Annathill Guild – and others were starting to sit up and take notice.