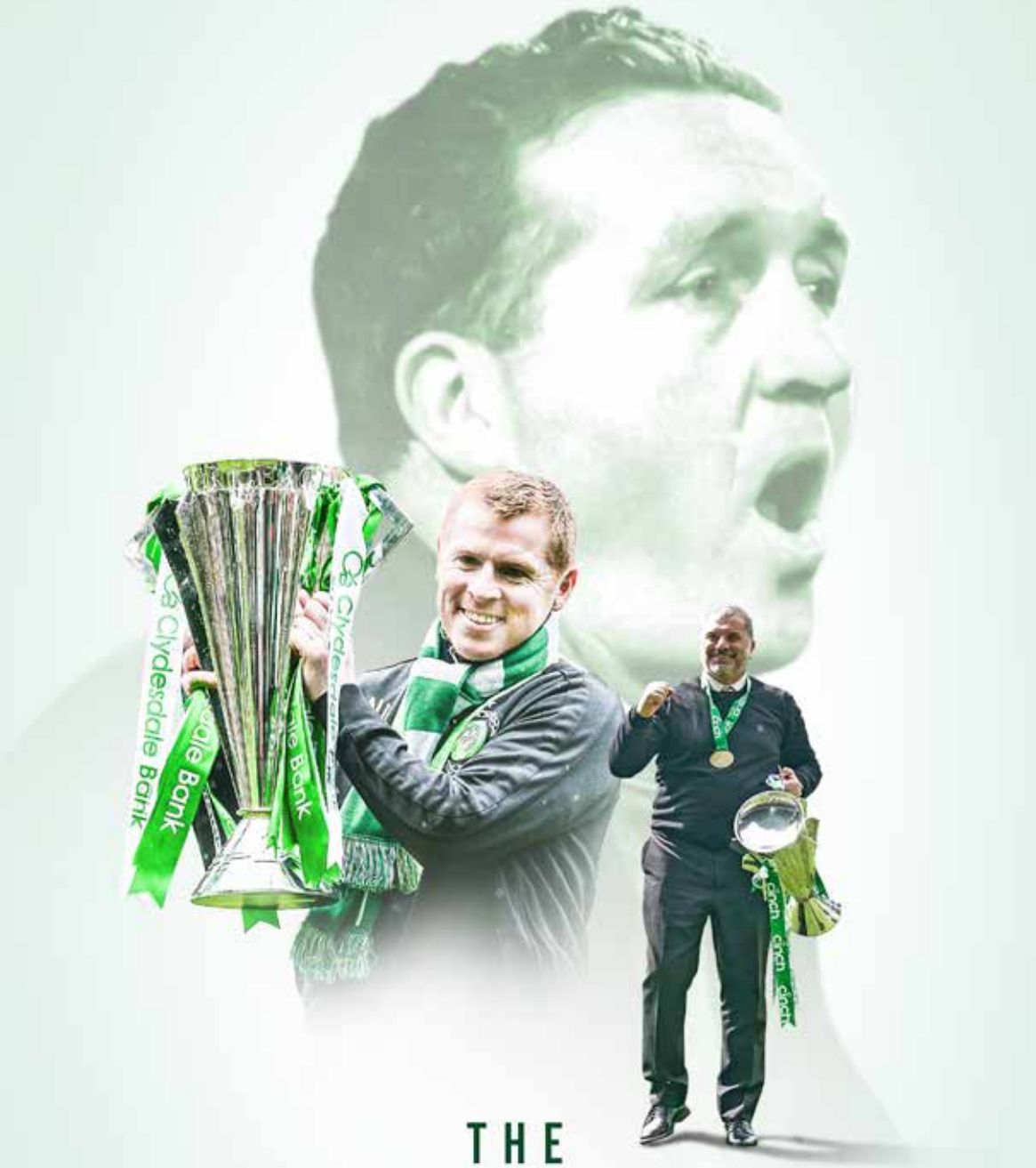
PHILLIP VINE



THE IMMORTALS

TWO NINES

and Other Celtic Stories

Contents

THE FIRST HALF

The History Bhoys

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,
It's enough to make your heart go,
Oh,oh,oh,
It's enough to make your heart go,
Oh, oh nine-in-a-row, oh

THE 19TH-CENTURY IMMORTALS 1845–1888

1. WELSH AND MALEY

Dublin, in the autumn of 1867, was not a safe place for Irish nationalists, and Pat Welsh, a 19-year-old member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was hiding from search parties of the Royal Irish Constabulary, from the patrols of the North British Fusiliers and from friends who might be turncoat informers.

After the military failure of the Uprising in February and March in Killarney and Dublin, after the arrests and sentencing of Brotherhood leaders, after the battle at Tallaght in which 40 lives were lost in the firefight with the Constabulary, and after the arrests and executions of the Manchester Martyrs in November, Welsh felt there was no option left but to seek safe passage on a ship bound for Glasgow. It was why he now found himself hugging the dark and damp of the Pigeon House Fort in the Dublin docks, thinking, if all else failed, if he was uncovered by the authorities, the swirling waters of the River Liffey would welcome him home.

Turning a corner, he saw the dark outline of a soldier, rifle at the ready. Welsh ducked backwards but too late.

'Halt, he who goes there!'

There was no escape. Welsh, though, had assessed the soldier's accent. Just as surely as Pat himself was from County Leitrim, the soldier was from the west, County Clare, if he was not mistaken. Welsh raised his arms in surrender, moved away from his cover. 'You're from Ireland?' he said, refraining from asking the next question. 'Why, if you're from this land, are you in the pay of our overlords?'

The soldier nodded.

'Then, for God's sake help me.'

Welsh moved closer to the soldier who remained silent and with rifle cocked.

'As one countryman to another.'

'You're a Fenian?'

Welsh would not deny a heritage he was proud of but neither would he deny himself the opportunity of escape to a new life across the Irish Sea.

'All I want is to find a ship to take me to Scotland.'

Welsh could see the hesitation in the soldier's lowering, then raising of his rifle.

'My name's Welsh, Patrick.'

He didn't think his name was well known to the authorities. He had not been a leader or an organiser of the attack on the police barracks at Ardagh.

Welsh could see the sergeant's stripes on the soldier's uniform.

Two half smiles emerged on two faces and lit the shadows surrounding them.

'Maley,' the soldier said. 'Tom Maley, from Ennis, and I'll help you if I can.'

Welsh fell to his knees in gratitude.

'You'll give up the revolutionary politics, though?'

* * *

Years later, Welsh had become a prosperous master tailor with a business on Buchanan Street. He had kept his promise to Sgt Maley of the North British Fusiliers. He had become a respectable pillar of the Glasgow Irish middle class.

That is not to say, though, that he did not feel a sense of righteous satisfaction when, in 1878, he heard of the assassination of Lord Leitrim by his tenants. The landlord of his parents in Killargue had been a brutal bully, dividing his time between London society and military service in Leitrim. During the Holocaust of 1845 to 1850, he commanded the local militia and organised the removal of Irish food at gunpoint and its delivery to British ships in Belfast. After the Uprising, in which Welsh had played his honourable part, Leitrim spent much of his time in Donegal arranging mass evictions of tenants and then quelling protests and rebellions against these wholesale clearances of native Irish families.

He was sometimes cheered, buoyed by his past. He could still recite the words that accompanied the establishment of the Provisional Republican Government of Ireland in 1867:

'We have suffered centuries of outrage, enforced poverty, and bitter misery. Our rights and liberties have been trampled on by an alien aristocracy, who treating us as foes, usurped our lands, and drew away from our unfortunate country all material riches. The real owners of the soil were removed to make way for cattle, and driven across the ocean to seek the means of living, and the political rights denied them at home, while our men of thought and action were condemned to loss of life and liberty.

'But we never lost the memory and hope of a national existence … unable longer to endure the curse of Monarchical Government, we aim at founding a Republic based on universal suffrage, which shall secure to all the intrinsic value of their labour. The soil of Ireland, at present in the possession of an oligarchy, belongs to us, the Irish people, and to us it must be restored.'

Welsh kept in touch with Maley and, in 1869, the soldier, too, decided a new life in Glasgow would be just the ticket, and asked his friend for assistance in return.

Remembering he owed Maley his life, Welsh provided hospitality and introductions to Glasgow Catholic society, to his friends and to his family.

In December 1877, Welsh, a member of the committee tasked with the establishment of Celtic FC, led a delegation from the club to the house of his former soldier friend with the intention of acquiring the signature of his son, Tom Maley, who was already an established footballer, having played for Partick Thistle, Third Lanark, Hibernian and Clydesdale

Harriers. As the Celtic party, including John Glass and Brother Walfrid, were leaving, having been disappointed to find Maley was not at home but courting his future wife, they met Tom's younger brother, Willie. Touched perhaps by divine intervention, the Marist priest and driving force behind Celtic's formation turned to the young man. 'Why don't you come along and sign for us too?'

Glass shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, 'Why not? What's one more among friends?'

Brother Walfrid smiled, reasoning that if the younger sibling signed then the older one would follow suit.

As those who know their history will appreciate, a series of fortuitous synchronicities had combined to bring together some early immortals in the story of Celtic.

* * *

2. THE EARLY IMMORTALS AND IRELAND

Welsh, Tom and Willie Maley, Brother Walfrid, John Glass; all were early immortals. If one man, however, could be considered the architect of the modern Celtic, with its perfections and imperfections, it is Glass.

Like almost all the Founding Fathers – the exception being David Meikleham, a Glasgow shoemaker and a long-standing member of Queen's Park FC – Glass was both Irish and Catholic.

According to Willie Maley, Celtic's first manager, 'John Glass is the man to whom the club owes its existence.'

Glass was born in 1851 in the slums of Broomielaw on the northern bank of the Clyde. His parents had recently fled from Donegal and from the terrors of the Irish Holocaust, caused by the forced removal, at gunpoint, of food from Irish fields by English armed forces. In Donegal, there had been mass burials, and it had been a place where dogs grew fat on corpses. On Aranmore Island, where all its inhabitants starved to death, animals who fed on human carrion were the lone survivors. In Ireland from 1845 to 1850 there were never fewer than 60,000 British agents of enforcement actively engaged in the export of Irish crops.

In 1848, when Glass's parents escaped from these horrors on a steamship bound for the quays at Broomielaw, there were over 73,000 troops and coastguards and police stationed in Ireland, and all were busy

about their business of genocide. Sixty-seven regiments of the British army were involved in this crime against humanity.

Glass, like his parents, was a survivor. He worked as a glazier and then as manager of his brother's wood merchant and building business in Gallowgate.

Within the prosperous middle-class section of the Irish Catholic community in Glasgow, Glass met Dr John Conway and Brother Walfrid to discuss the formation of a football club to raise funds for the poor in Glasgow's Irish East End.

Later, Glass became a figure of controversy, leading the way to Celtic's cessation of payments to Walfrid's charity, the Poor Children's Dinner Table, calling his opponents 'soup kitchen cranks' and 'dinner table sore heads'.

Still, though, it is probable that without Glass's hard-headed and brutal commercialisation of the football club, there would be no Celtic today.

Certainly, there would be no successful club, at least not in worldly terms.

* * *

Celtic's original committee, as listed in Willie Maley's *The Story of the Celtic 1888–1938*, comprise the bulk of the Founding Fathers of the football club.

They were: Dr John Conway (honorary president), John Glass (president), James Quillan (vice-president), Hugh Darroch (treasurer), John O'Hara (secretary), Willie Maley (match secretary).

The committee was made up of Joseph Michael Nelis, Michael Cairns, William McKillop, Daniel Molloy, Joseph McGroary, Pat Welsh, Joseph Shaughnessy, John H. McLaughlin, Tom Maley, John McDonald and David Meikleham.

These men, these early Celtic men, were Irish and Catholic – even Meikleham was a devout Roman in spite of his association with the Protestant Queen's Park club – and they ensured that the beating heart of the club would always be found in its Irish ancestry and in Irish politics too.

These men, too, were the cream of the Glasgow Irish diaspora that was the consequence of the Holocaust. They were self-made men, wealthy and assured, middle-class and with varying degrees of social conscience,

but all possessed the determination that their project should succeed, and all imprinted their new football club with an indelible identity that was emphasised by the choice of its first patrons, Archbishop Charles Eyre and Michael Davitt.

The first Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow since the Reformation, Charles Eyre was a descendant of the Eyres of Derbyshire whose lands were confiscated in the Henrician purge of recusant Romans in the 16th century.

Davitt was an Irish republican campaigner and activist whose family had been dispossessed by the imperial authorities in 1850 and who arrived in England at four years of age. In 1870 he was convicted of treason and arms trafficking and served seven years in prison. Davitt had planned to attack Chester Castle, steal its store of arms and ship these to Irish freedom fighters via Holyhead but was thwarted by the infiltration of his organisation by police spies.

It says something about the new football club that a man convicted of treason in the courts of the British empire should be invited to become a patron of Celtic. It shouts out loud that, at its inception, in spite of Brother Walfrid's insistence that this was a Scottish and Celtic club, this Celtic Football and Athletic Club was a political institution, a republican and nationalist organisation, a cultural edifice embedded within Glasgow Catholic society, as well as a sporting and charitable institution.

This needs saying and bears repetition. All immortals stand on the shoulders of earlier immortals. If we fail to read our history we risk losing the vision of these men, the panoramic perspective gained from the heights of their achievements.

Without history we are mere mortals. So, before we study the moderns we need to understand the ancients. The true origins of Celtic are to be discovered in the first half of the 19th century.

* * *

3. HOLOCAUST AND SECTARIANISM

No respectful history of Celtic Football Club should begin without contemplation of the horrors of the Irish Holocaust of 1845 to 1850 during which uncounted multitudes – possibly as many as six million men, women, and children – died of starvation and disease in an organised and calculated attempt at genocide perpetrated by English imperialists.

If these brutal facts seem difficult or impossible to believe, it is because there has been a systematic covering up of both bodies, in unmarked graves, and truths. John Pilger, the campaigning Australian journalist, said in 1997, 'The Anglo-American publishing establishment will still kill any book that tells the truth about the starvation of Ireland.' Even in the 21st century, conventional histories of 19th-century Ireland still talk of the Potato Famine or the Great Hunger, as if these deaths were acts of God, beyond the power of man to prevent. Some histories descend further into the depths of deceit by apportioning blame on the stupidity of the Irish, their apparent reliance upon one staple crop of potatoes, or in suggesting it was Irish landlordism that starved Irish peasants. These are both large and powerful lies. The truth is that food in all its rich Irish variety was removed at gunpoint at the behest of absentee English landlords and with the approval and knowledge of London. England's imperial army supervised and enforced this theft and Irish tenant farmers and the surrounding populations were left to starve.

Neither was this genocide an aberration on the part of Ireland's lords and masters. The military conquest of Ireland under the English queen, Elizabeth I, was ruthless and barbaric and, during this war, famine and deliberate starvation became an accepted part of military strategy. In 1574, Edward Berkeley, an English official in occupied Belfast, admitted that, in order to complete the subjugation, the population 'muste be famished'. He concluded his report by justifying this policy of extermination on religious grounds, 'How godly a dede it is to overthrowe so wicked a race … For my parte I think ther canot be a greter Sacrfyce to god.'

Between 1649 and 1654, too, Oliver Cromwell, on behalf of the new English republic, committed further genocidal atrocities, during which around half of the Irish Catholic population was eliminated and many more were sent as slaves to the English colonies in the Americas. During four centuries, according to the dedicated historical researcher Chris Fogarty, 'England turned Ireland into a slaughterhouse of starvelings.' In his book *The Perfect Holocaust*, Fogarty provides irrefutable and detailed documentary evidence to prove the thesis that Ireland was the victim of genocide in the middle years of the 19th century.

Six million murdered Irish sits uncomfortably and unconscionably alongside the six million Jews exterminated in Nazi-occupied Europe between the building of the Dachau concentration camp in March 1933

and the end of World War Two in 1945. Only the methods of execution differed.

* * *

What, though, has this to do with Celtic Football Club?

The simple truth is that without the Irish Holocaust there would have been no football club formed at the inaugural meeting of interested parties in St Mary's Church Hall in East Rose Street, Calton, on 6 November 1887.

In addition to the six million dead, there were at least one million further Irish survivors who escaped from their homeland during the six years of the Holocaust. Most risked the arduous odyssey to North America via the English port of Liverpool. On these voyages there was devastating loss of life, as already hungry and sick Irish men, women and children took passage on notorious Canadian coffin ships on which around one-third of passengers died. One and a half million Irish sought refuge across the Atlantic and one million arrived in Boston, New York and other seaboard cities, to find they had exchanged one form of poverty and destitution for another.

Some 35,000 Irish, however, stayed in Liverpool, making up over 20 per cent of the city's population. Many, too, escaped the ravages of the Holocaust by finding work and accommodation, as well as degrading poverty and prejudice, in the west of Scotland.

During 1848, the average weekly influx of Irish immigrants into Glasgow was over 1,000 people. Between 1841 and 1851 the Irish population in Scotland increased by 90 per cent and one-third of that increase is accounted for by the Irish arrivals in the East End of Glasgow. Irish workers flooded the labour market, eager to take on the lowest-paid work involving the heaviest of manual labour, and happy to accept the most miserable of wages.

These new immigrants faced language problems, as they spoke Gaelic, and prejudice and violence for their willingness to accept payment for their work that undercut the traditional labour markets in the mines, the docks and general labouring. Everywhere the Irish were viewed as drunken, idle and diseased. Typhus was known in Glasgow as the 'Irish Fever' in spite of the causes of this dreaded affliction being unsanitary housing rather than inherent ethnicity.

Naturally, too, there was religious bigotry as well as racial prejudice.

Since John Knox, the firebrand Reformation propagandist, returned to Scotland from exile in Geneva in May 1559 and preached against Catholic idolatry at Perth, inducing Protestant mobs to rampage through Scottish churches destroying all religious images in their paths, Scotland has defined itself as a fundamentally Protestant nation. In 1560, the Scottish parliament renounced the authority of the pope and declared the Catholic Mass illegal. It was a coup of the first order orchestrated by Knox and his military guardians, the Lords of the Congregation, whose foot soldiers' passion for iconoclasm cleansed the altars of Scotland of all things Catholic. The revolution had been remarkable in that it was estimated at the time that a mere ten per cent of the population of the nation was Protestant.

Religious intolerance has continued down the years, through the centuries, and Scotland is still steeped in this foul miasma of sectarianism.

As late as 1923, the Church of Scotland published a pamphlet, *The Menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality*.

There had been Protestant immigration into Glasgow too, especially in the 1870s and 1880s and especially from the most Orange counties in Armagh. Naturally, the Church of Scotland viewed Reformed Irishmen very differently from the Catholic Irish escaped from the Holocaust.

In the pamphlet, it was claimed, 'No complaint can be made about the presence of the Orange people in Scotland. They are the same race as ourselves and of the same Faith.'

Scots Protestants, of course, are not the sole bearers of bigotry. The sectarian divide in Glasgow is not one-sided. When bigotry is combined with power, however, that is when discrimination is practised and when suffering is imposed upon an ethnic and a religious minority.

Inequalities, too, are the inevitable consequence of a concentration of power. Glasgow in the second half of the 19th century was a city divided and ruled by its prosperous Protestant elite, and its East End, the home of Catholic immigrants, was an overcrowded hellhole of insanitary dwellings and smog-suffused alleyways in which human excrement shared deep puddles alongside acid rain from the skies filled with the pollution from the city's heavy industries.

Ruling classes, in all times and in all places, maintain their grasp on power and privilege not merely by coercion and economic dependency but also by the provision of scapegoats and diversions.

In Glasgow, the Irish immigrants were to blame. They were diseased and dangerous and to be kept in their place. However poor the Protestant workers in the shipyards and mines and factories, at least they were not Irish scum, at least they were not Catholics. The poor white trash of the southern slave states of the USA might have been hungry but at least they were not black. They were the attitudes.

The Roman poet, Juvenal, said of the plebeians in his city, 'Give them bread and circuses and they will never revolt.' In Glasgow, the 19th century and early 20th century city fathers understood only too well that poor Protestant workers had to be appeased. They were given Rangers.

The original football club founded in March 1872 by four young white-collar men was not a Protestant institution. Heaven forbid, but Rangers, in their early incarnation, actually signed several Catholics prior to World War One, including Pat Lafferty (1886), Tom Dunbar (1891–1892), J. Tutty (1899–1900), Archie Kyle (1904–1908), Willie Kivlichan (1906–1907), Colin Mainds (1906–1907), Tom Murray (1907–1908), and William Brown (1912).

Everything changed, however, with the arrival in Govan in 1912 of the Northern Irish shipbuilders, Harland and Wolff. In Belfast, the company operated a strictly exclusionary employment policy: no Catholics. In his book, *The Spirit of Ibrox*, Rangers historian Robert McElroy suggests that a loan by the shipbuilders of £90,000 to their neighbours, Rangers, came with strings attached. The quid pro quo was a promise by the football club to mimic the Protestant-only employment strategy of Harland and Wolff.

Worse, too, was the importation of skilled workers from the Harland and Wolff yards in Belfast. These immigrants were hardline Ulster unionists, loyalists to a man, and dedicated to the supremacy of their Protestant faith, and they became the core of Rangers supporters.

In that same year, too, with the death of the respected and tolerant Rangers chairman James Henderson, and the accession to power at Ibrox of Sir John Ure Primrose, an uncompromising Protestant identity was forged by the Govan club.

The new chairman of Rangers was a notorious opponent of Irish Home Rule and the man responsible for the football club's enduring alliance with freemasonry.

In effect, Rangers had become the home of Conservative and Unionist politics, loyalty to the English empire and its monarchs, and a repository of hatred of all things Catholic and Irish.

Rangers had metamorphosed into the club of the indigenous Scots, a bulwark against the invader, a defender of tradition against the enemies within who would betray the national identity and who would permit the dilution and pollution of the purity of the blood with alien, and especially Irish, immigration. One football club was chosen for this sacred task.

The bastions of the press, too, were on board with this mission. In September 1896, the *Scottish Sport* began describing Rangers as 'Scotia's darling club' and lamented, after recent victories of Celtic and Hibernian over Hearts and Rangers, 'The two Irish teams are at the top of the table. Is this not a reflection on Scotland?'

Cartoons in the *Scottish Referee*, according to historian Bill Murray, routinely depicted Celtic players as possessing 'the dumb look of a creature emerging from a peat bog, while the Rangers equivalent had the noble stature and intelligent eyes of the Aryan'.

As early as 1894, the *Glasgow Observer* reported the abuse of Celtic players by their Rangers peers throughout a match at Celtic Park. 'Fenians', 'papists' and 'Irish' were among the insults but their accompanying epithets were, of course, unprintable in a 19th-century family newspaper.

It was a sad decline from the early, friendly relations between the two clubs in the years immediately after Celtic's formation in 1887. Celtic's first match in May 1888 was against Rangers and the friendly was followed by entertainment in St Mary's Hall in Calton. Both Tom and Willie Maley enjoyed close friendships with Rangers players and these bonds were echoed at board level of both clubs. As late as 1893, for matches in Edinburgh, the two clubs travelled by train together.

By the second half of the 1890s, working-class Protestant Scots were being provided with not only an enemy against which to rant and rail, but also an identity that diverted them from any potential common cause with their fellow poor in Glasgow.

If the Protestant majority living south of the Clyde in Govan were poor and exploited, at least they weren't 'dirty Fenian bastards', 'navvies', or 'tattie-howkers'.

* * *

The purity of the Rangers project was an ongoing priority for decades, taking precedence over football matters at Ibrox from the time of Ure Primrose through to the chairmanship of David Holmes, until the arrival of the iconoclastic David Murray in June 1989.

One curious incident concerns Alex Ferguson, centre-forward and scorer of 66 goals in 98 matches for Rangers from 1967 to 1969. Strangely, the ebullient and bullying striker never played for the club again after a Scottish Cup Final defeat to Celtic in 1969 in which Ferguson was detailed to mark Billy McNeill at corners and in which the Lisbon Lion scored a dramatic opening goal, while his intended shadow had gone absent without leave. Rangers never recovered from this hammer blow and lost 4-0 to Jock Stein's rampant Celtic team.

There may, however, have been a darker reason for Ferguson's demotion to the club's junior side and eventual sale to Falkirk.

At some point, someone somewhere within the bowels of Ibrox discovered Ferguson had married a Catholic. Ferguson denies that his banishment had anything to do with his union with Cathy Holding, but whispers persist to this day.

* * *

This abysmal situation at Rangers continued until July 1989 when the signing of the Catholic former Celt, Mo Johnston, brought an end to exclusionary policies at Ibrox.

Sectarianism, however, was not ended by a stroke of the prolific striker's pen on the contract that made him a millionaire.

On the day of Johnston's transfer, a wreath was laid by Rangers supporters outside the front door of Ibrox; '116 years of tradition ended' was the stark message. The general secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland warned, 'There will be an angry reaction.'

As always, it was the economics of the situation that demanded change. Just as in 1912, when Harland and Wolff called the shots, now it was Rangers' desire to participate in a money-making European football league whose constitution would not permit continued bigotry in one of its member clubs.

A deathbed conversion this was not, although the increased debt acquired by Rangers through processing this deal with Johnston was a nail in the coffin of a club that would collapse into bankruptcy in 2012.

* * *

In spite of the cosmopolitan nature of Rangers squads since the David Murray era, the shameful hangover of sectarianism still haunts the club into the 21st century.

The flotsam and jetsam of the past still wash up on Ibrox shores. Much of the club's support is still tribal, still racist, still loyal to the English crown, the Protestant ascendancy and its power brokers in the English Conservative Party that has never done one thing for its white, working-class adherents in Glasgow.

The suffering and martyrdom of Neil Lennon, Catholic and Celtic footballer between 2000 and 2007, and manager from 2010 to 2014 and again from 2019 to 2021, provides all the incriminating evidence necessary for a conviction of the persisting Rangers culture of paranoia and sectarian hatred.

In March 2002, Lennon was forced into retirement from international football for Northern Ireland as a result of death threats from Ulster loyalists prior to a match against Cyprus played at Windsor Park, Belfast. The following year, he was attacked by two Protestant students on the Great Western Road, Glasgow, while in 2004 he was the victim of a road rage incident in the middle of the M8.

In September 2008 Lennon was bottled and beaten by thugs outside Jinty McGinty's pub in Ashton Lane, near to his home in the West End. He was attacked from behind and knocked unconscious before being kicked and punched as he lay on the city street.

The last words Lennon said he heard as he fell were, 'Neil Lennon, you Fenian bastard.'

In January 2011, after threats on his life, Lennon was told by police that it was necessary to place his family and his home in the West End of Glasgow under round-the-clock protection. Lennon's children were escorted to school and their classrooms were guarded by police. Websites sprang up like weeds suggesting that followers should 'Kill Neil Lennon'. In March of the same year, an explosive device intended to do just that was addressed to the Celtic manager at Lennoxtown, the club's training headquarters. It was intercepted by suspicious Royal Mail staff but police admitted that the nail bomb had been put together with the goal of killing or maiming its target.

Similar devices were also posted to Paul McBride, one of Scotland's most prominent and successful QCs, and to Trish Godman, a former

Labour MSP for West Renfrewshire. Neither the law nor politics were professions in which Catholics were accepted with equanimity by the traditional Protestant establishment of Kirk and Tory Party, from whose prejudice the amateur bombers took their lead. A further device was delivered to the Gallowgate offices of Cairde na hEireann, translated as Friends of Ireland. A television news report on the BBC showed one of the convicted pair of bombers wearing a Rangers replica shirt and the other an England football top. Both men, and the minority of the Ibrox club's supporters who still chant 'fuck the IRA', 'kill the Pope', and 'no surrender', are dinosaurs raging against the inevitability of change in Scotland and against their own extinction.

In May 2011, Lennon was attacked in front of 16,000 spectators at Tynecastle, home of Heart of Midlothian, and in front of millions watching on television.

In his times with Celtic, the number of assaults and attempted assaults on Lennon ran into double figures.

It should be emphasised, however, that this ongoing persecution of Neil Lennon no longer had anything to do with the policies or the recent management of Rangers, whose reformation on matters sectarian since the signing of Mo Johnston has been as welcome as it was overdue.

* * *

4. CHARITY MEN AND MONEY MEN

In common with Rangers in 1872, Celtic, 15 years later in November 1887, was founded on specifically non-sectarian lines.

The original purpose of Celtic was charitable. Brother Walfrid, originally Andrew Kerins, a man from County Sligo in the west of Ireland, was the son of a peasant farmer who arrived in Glasgow in 1855 seeking work on the railways. He became a leading light of vision and determination within the Marist Order, and headmaster of the Sacred Heart School in Bridgeton in the East End of Glasgow. He was the driving force behind the formation of a Celtic football club 'for the maintenance of dinner tables for the children and the unemployed'.

Kerins was appalled at the malnourishment of children, at the squalor and disease of the East End slums, made even worse by the loss of businesses and opportunities for employment consequent upon the collapse of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878 with a liability in excess

of £6m. In conjunction with Dr John Conway and the builder, John Glass, Brother Walfrid planned to utilise a new football club to provide sufficient funds to provide 'penny meals' through the auspices of the Glasgow St Vincent de Paul Society.

Brother Walfrid, though, was no mere saintly idealist. His charitable mission was based on hard-headed realism. First, he and his co-worker and fellow headteacher, Brother Dorothea, had watched with interest the rapid growth in popularity of football in Scotland and had discerned its potential for the development and nurturing of a sense of community and of self-esteem in Irish immigrant communities. Exclusively Catholic football clubs had been established in Edinburgh where the early success of Hibernian in winning the Scottish Cup in 1887 was a source of fundamental pride among the Irish community of Little Ireland in the Cowgate, the dark underbelly of the capital city.

Hibernian, incidentally, after their formation in 1875 through the auspices of the Catholic Young Men's Society and Canon Edward Joseph Hannan, who became the club's first manager, suffered from immediate and intense pressure and prejudice. The Scottish Football Association declared no clubs under their jurisdiction should arrange matches against the Catholics from Edinburgh. 'We are catering for Scotsmen not Irishmen' came the portentous pronouncement. Ironically, it was later bitter rivals Heart of Midlothian who defied authority and provided the first opposition for the Hibernian club on Christmas Day 1875.

Irish and Catholic clubs were founded, too, in Dundee, with Dundee Harp in 1879 and Dundee Hibernian in 1909, and in Glasgow, with St Peter's of Partick among a plethora of other sporting organisations, now defunct, that sprang up before Celtic were founded in 1887. St Peter's had actually played Hibs in Bridgeton in September 1886. Brother Walfrid may well have been a spectator.

The two Marist brothers, Walfrid and Dorothea, had the wit and wisdom to envisage the yoking together of this new sport with the opportunities it offered for fundraising for their charity. It was entrepreneurial genius at its finest, incorporating compassion at its heart. The siblings, too, were not unaware of the opportunities offered by football for saving souls. Brother Walfrid, in particular, had been concerned for some time that Protestant soup kitchens were making converts from among his own parishioners.

Something had to be done and, in conjunction with the great and the good – and the wealthy – of Glasgow's Irish community, a meeting was arranged for 6 November 1887 in St Mary's Church Hall.

And the rest, as Celtic people say, is history.

* * *

The formation of Celtic was a political act, an assertion of political will. Feeding starving, malnourished and diseased children with penny meals that also preserved the dignity of hard-pressed parents through the voluntary contribution of one penny was a political declaration of intent, of determination and of self-determination.

It was a direct challenge to a Glasgow society – and to their imperialist masters in London – that permitted and enshrined such poverty within their political institutions and within their economic structures and discriminatory practices.

So, too, was the declaration of 1895 that there would be no tolerance of sectarianism within Paradise.

A proposal was put before the club's committee that there should be a maximum of three Protestant players in any Celtic team. It was decided instead that there should be no restrictions whatsoever. The promulgation was echoed in an editorial from the Catholic newspaper, the *Glasgow Observer*:

'To raise the question of religion is singularly out of place when dealing with sporting matters, and I trust that the last has been heard of it in Celtic circles.'

This tradition, at least, has remained a steadfast core of Celtic's history, although it has proved impossible to entirely eradicate prejudice either from within the higher echelons of the football club or from within the core of the club's support. It took until 1965, for example, for Celtic to appoint its first Protestant manager, and that after great soul-searching by the chairman, Bob Kelly. Among past players, too, European Cup winner and Protestant Tommy Gemmell complained of sectarian abuse from some of his colleagues in his early years at the club. One defeat in the 1950s was followed by dressing room comments about there being 'too many fucking Protestants in this club'. Even in 2021, many supporters mulling over candidates to replace Neil Lennon as Celtic manager were checking credentials in terms of nationality and religious affiliation.

* * *

In 1892, however, when Brother Walfrid was transferred by his order from the Sacred Heart School in Bridgeton to St Anne's School in Spitalfields in the Whitechapel area of east London, some would say that Celtic lost its soul and its conscience.

A living rebuke to soul-sellers and to the harsh realism of the money men within the brotherhood of Celtic's Founding Fathers was gone and lost forever.

First, the generosity of spirit and the helping hands lent by Hibernian to the fledgling Glasgow club were repaid by a ruthless pillaging of their best players by Celtic under the leadership of John Glass and through the illegal means of undercover payments. In August 1888, without the knowledge of either Brother Walfrid or of the club committee, Glass signed eight of Hibs' best players and the Edinburgh club went out of business before the end of that season, although they were quickly reformed, armed perhaps with a less trusting approach to the business of football.

Second, even before the departure of Brother Walfrid, debates were already raging, festering even, within and without the club concerning its nature and purpose. At the annual meeting of members in 1891, two rival parties chose their ground, pitched their camps, set out their battle lines. The *casus belli* was the payment of fees to the club secretary, Willie Maley, but in reality the war was between those who viewed Celtic as a charitable and amateur institution and those who had recently gained the upper hand within the nascent power structures of the club who advocated all-out professionalism.

The amateurs were led by Dr John Conway, the club's first chairman and honorary president, and the man who kicked the first ball at Celtic Park on 8 May 1888 prior to a friendly match between Hibernian and Cowlairs. The *Glasgow Observer* reported, 'Prompt to the advertised time, Dr Conway and Mr Shaughnessy emerged from the pavilion and entered the field, heading the procession of players. The Doctor placed the ball amid the cheers of the spectators, who numbered fully 5,000.'

Conway had worked equally tirelessly on behalf of the poor and diseased in the East End of Glasgow and on behalf of Brother Walfrid's dream of establishing a football club to provide funds for the charity, the Poor Children's Dinner Table. After the match, Conway proposed a toast

to 'the Hibernians', and John McFadden, Hibs' secretary, responded by suggesting, 'It would be a sorry day indeed for the Irish in Scotland when residents of one city should act in an unfriendly way towards those of another.' Just three months later Celtic and Hibernian were at war over the poaching of players by John Glass of Celtic and Conway was outraged by this act of piracy and betrayal and strengthened his desire to regain control of the behaviour of the football club he had helped to found.

Neither should it be forgotten that it had been at McFadden's suggestion and insistence in 1887 that Celtic had been formed in the first place.

At the meeting in 1891, Conway's motion in opposition to professionalism was lost by 102 votes to 74, and he was replaced as president by Glass.

When Conway died in 1894 at the age of 35, his passing received no official acknowledgement by the club he had worked so diligently to found and to keep to its original principles.

Three years later in 1897, Celtic became a private limited liability company and, according to company law, such an institution had a duty to maximise profits for its shareholders. A five per cent annual dividend to shareholders had to be paid before any donations to charity could be considered. The Brother Walfrid project was at an end.

Some 5,000 £1 shares were issued by the new company and Glass, described in the accompanying documentation as a 'builder's manager', received 100 shares and an honorarium of £100.

Approve or not of Glass's actions, he was the builder of the modern Celtic Football Club.

* * *

From 1887 to 2022, the debate about the soul of Celtic, its primary purpose, growled and grumbled on, although the power of shareholders enshrined in law and in the family blocks of shareholdings that have controlled the club through most of its history generally ensured the primacy of the service of Mammon over the gentler workings of compassion and charity.

In 1894, the *Glasgow Observer* complained that Celtic had become, 'A mere business, in the hands of publicans and others. Catholic charities get nothing out of the thousands of pounds passing through the treasurer's

hands.' The newspaper then posed the question, 'Can we not get a club that will carry out the original idea of Brother Walfrid?' That question was answered finally in 1897.

Into the 20th century, though, the criticism of Celtic's parsimony was still strong enough for Bob Kelly, the controller of his family shares and of those of Mary Colgan of Toomebridge in County Antrim in Northern Ireland, to issue a defence of Celtic morals at the annual general meeting of shareholders in 1960, 'We must come to the conclusion that the club in its present form had over the years done more in the field of charity than it could have done had it remained in its original state.'

Resentment at the takeover of Celtic by wealthy elites and the hijacking of its principles by the power of capital lingered on, however.

The centenary history of St Mary's, published in 1963, suggested that those in charge of Brother Walfrid's former school still burned with indignation and anger at the events of 1897:

'The Penny Dinner Tables lost the financial aid of the Celtic Football Club … The last contribution to the Poor Children's Dinner Table was made at the AGM of season 1891/92. The committee, after a bitter struggle against the honest element among the team's supporters, got their way at last and turned the club into a business.'

Twentieth-century successes on the field of play were not always matched by charitable endeavour. In 1995, however, the Celtic Charity Fund was established by the football club as a means of 'revitalising Celtic's charitable traditions'. In 2006, the Celtic Foundation began its work of coordination of the club's social, educational, and community work under one umbrella. In 2013, the Charity Fund merged with the Celtic Foundation and much first-class work has been undertaken since then to improve health, promote equality, encourage learning, and tackle poverty in Glasgow and beyond. Many millions of pounds have been raised and distributed to charities dedicated to alleviating the sufferings of those afflicted by the continuing scourges of poverty and blighted opportunity. It is wonderful ongoing work. The sole criticism that might be levelled at all this scurry of 21st-century charitable endeavour is that monies are raised in conjunction with the payment of astronomical salaries to Celtic footballers. The twin obscenities of degrading affluence and degrading poverty sit side by side in the East End of Glasgow.

There is, too, the remaining issue of the ownership of Celtic Football Club. Throughout most of the 20th century, the club has been under the control of family fiefdoms. Lineages of descent and hand-me-down shareholdings have passed from fathers to sons and to grandsons. Where strict family connections were not observed, control of the club was by proteges and by proxies. John O'Hara's 390 shares passed to John Glass, already the owner of over 300 shares, in 1904. Thomas White, a lawyer, was Glass's apprentice and inherited his shares in 1906 at the tender age of 22. Joseph Shaughnessy, another of the club's founders, also died in 1906 and his 650 shares passed to John, his son. In 1931, James Kelly's shares were split between his descendants but his fourth of six sons, Robert, was the anointed one with a place on the Celtic board. James Grant's 800 shares in 1914 were eventually transferred, via his executor, Thomas Colgan, to Thomas Devlin, a trawler owner from Leith. On Colgan's death in 1946, shares passed to his granddaughter, Mary. Tom White died in 1947 and his son, Desmond, joined the board. When Colonel Shaughnessy died in 1953, there remained a triumvirate of power at the heart of the Celtic boardroom: chairman Kelly, Desmond White and Tom Devlin. These three remained in absolute control until the arrival of an outsider in James Farrell, who took up the former Shaughnessy shares in 1964. It was all very incestuous to say the least.

It continued, however, through the Stein years of immortal success and beyond. In 1973, James Grant inherited the shares of his aunt Felicia, who herself had come into her brother Neil's 1,705 fully paid and 1,752 half-paid shares. Neil had in turn acquired his grandfather James's shares. The 19th-century James had been one of the derided Celtic 'publicans' and was an original shareholder. The grandson's shares passed to his son, Tom.

In 1982, Desmond White's son, Christopher, joined the board. Kevin Kelly replaced his uncle Bob on the death of the chairman in 1971. Desmond White died in 1985 and was succeeded as chairman by Tom Devlin.

Eventually, inbreeding of shareholdings causes financial problems and in 1994 Celtic was brought to the edge of bankruptcy, saved only by the infusion of new blood in the shape of the Canadian businessman, Fergus McCann.

* * *

The majority shareholder in 2022 was Dermot Desmond, a businessman and financier, the ninth-richest man in Ireland. He was brought to the club as an investor by Fergus McCann. When McCann left Celtic in 1999, leaving Desmond as the principal shareholder, he told the world that the club was 'in good hands'.

Since then, it is indisputable that Celtic has become a well-run, financially stable institution. This, in turn, has facilitated the nine-in-a-row years of almost unprecedented success.

There is, though, another way, another possibility of another way, of running Celtic.

While footballing success masks the galling reality that Celtic is owned by an absentee landlord with a personal fortune of over £2bn and run from 2003 to 2021 by a multi-millionaire corporate accountant in Peter Lawwell, the failure of the mission to win ten-in-a-row raised further questions concerning Celtic's governance.

The Celtic Green Brigade, the 'ultras' group of fans founded in 2006, outlined plans in 2021 for a crusade to implement eventual fan ownership of the football club. 'Celtic Shared' is a call to arms to return to the original principles of the Founding Fathers, to overturn the decisions of the money men of 1897, the 'greed is good' men who have held sway at Paradise for a century and a quarter and counting. It may be a long road but the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

* * *

It's crucial for Celtic fans to remember and to debate the past and to discover and discuss the future.

This book, however, is unashamedly about the past. We can celebrate the past triumphs of the immortals of the first and second nine-in-a-row successes. Then we can turn our hearts and our hands towards imagining and building a new and brilliant future for our beloved club but one that honours the principles on which it was originally purposed.