

I A N C O L Q U H O U N



FROM **OBLIVION** TO
HAMPDEN

HIBS HEROES OF 1991

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Foreword

I'VE spent a large part of my adult life researching the history of Hibernian Football Club. It's a hobby that you can never commit enough time to, and you could research almost forever and still turn up new information. If you've ever wondered how many hours went into www.fitbastats.com/hibs then the answer is simple – countless. I've been to more libraries than I have football grounds, and read more newspapers than I thought possible at the outset. I can tell you all about the Scottish Cup-winning teams of 1887 and 1902, and the league-winning sides of 1903, 1948, 1951 and 1952. I know the League Cup-winning sides of 1972, 1991 and 2007 off by heart and even the Drybrough Cup teams of 1972 and 1973. Then there are the five second-tier league wins. I could go on.

However, out of all those wins the victory in 1991 was the most special to me, because that was the first time I'd witnessed a cup win in person. I think everyone relates to a win you see with your own eyes – and for my generation that was 1991. Of course there was a historical backdrop quite unlike any other in the club's history, where the existence of the green shirts was under a very real threat and it seemed that our beloved Hibernian would be absorbed into Heart of Midlothian and that the pantomime villain Wallace Mercer would achieve his aim of one Edinburgh club 'to challenge the Old Firm'. Mercer wasn't alone in this aim, but fortunately,

or unfortunately depending on your viewpoint, he failed to achieve it and withdrew from football soon afterwards.

So, it had been a dark time to be a Hibernian fan. In reality, the days had been dark for Hibs fans for a number of years in the late 1980s – the initial optimism of the David Duff era giving way to disastrous business dealings that put Hibs in a position where predators like Mercer were able to contemplate putting them out of business. Funnily enough that's just when I started watching Hibs, in the mid-1980s. I don't remember it as particularly bleak, but looking at the statistics now, it clearly was. It must have been really difficult for the fans that had been brought up on the Stein or Shankly teams of the 1960s or Turnbull's Tornados of the 70s.

Nobody really had big expectations in the summer of 1991. Sir Tom Farmer had put the team on a firmer footing and overseen the signing of Murdo MacLeod and Keith Wright. Respectively, they would become Hibs legends as captain and star goalscorer for the team of 1991. The team that wouldn't die. Sir Tom's ancestors had done the same for the club around 100 years previous when the birth of Celtic had been one of the catalysts for the club nearly going out of business.

The Hibernian history is a rich one, with many stories that make up the fabric of what this club is and stands for, and the story of the team of 1991 is up there at the top. It's difficult to believe this happened nearly 25 years ago, and a book on the subject is long overdue. Thankfully, Ian Colquhoun has addressed this for all Hibs fans to read about. I've known Ian for a number of years, and he is a truly remarkable man who I've worked with before. He's passionately Hibernian, and a talented storyteller. He has painstakingly researched this book, and interviewed the key protagonists to give a detailed account of the wonderful games leading up to an unforgettable final.

If you were fortunate enough to be there, this book is a wonderful trip down memory lane, remembering all the

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details you remember and some of the details you've forgot. If you weren't there, this book is an excellent insight into what Hibernian Football Clubs mean, and what Hibernian Football Club stands for.

GGTTH

Bobby Sinnet | @ihibs

Bobby is a respected author, Hibs historian and statistician. He co-wrote Hibernian On This Day with Ian Colquhoun. Bobby also wrote the critically claimed book The Hibernian Miscellany and runs the website iHibs.

Author's Foreword

I'VE been going to Easter Road since the mid-1980s and remember this dramatic period in our beloved club's history well, despite only being a youngster when it happened. Likewise, you probably remember the 1987–92 'adventure' well yourself, and if you don't, you've no doubt heard all about it in the years since.

This wee book came about after a discussion between Bobby Sinnet, Big G and I in the Hibs club in Sunnyside Lane last autumn, when we realised 2016 was the 25th anniversary of the cup win. With their encouragement I spent a couple of months researching and planning it, then wrote it during the winter. The 1991 success and what preceded it are the most important events in Hibs' modern history. It was hard at times to relive the pain and anguish that I experienced as a 13-year-old boy when our team nearly died. They were truly dark days; I imagine it's much the same for you, whatever age you were at the time.

Likewise, the triumph which followed was hard to write about, for very different reasons, as sometimes there are no words to truly describe the utter joy that our survival and subsequent Hampden triumph brought to us. It's a cliché to say but writing this book really *was* a journey, from the opposition's local newspaper accounts of our SKOL Cup ties against them in 1991, which helped to give their chapters more balance, to interviewing our heroes Keith Wright, Mickey

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Weir and Tommy McIntyre, as well as my interviews with Sir Tom and Big Frank, all great guys.

Those five interviews are separate from the rest of the book, as are Bobby's foreword and Matthew Kane's chapter. By that, I mean that I'm solely responsible for writing the main body of the book – their excellent contributions are an integral part of the overall book, but they aren't to blame for any errors or things that may annoy you in the chapters. On the other hand, I couldn't have written this book without them, so if any credit's due, it's as much theirs as it is my own.

I'm just an ordinary disabled Hibby who likes to write about Hibs, and this story needed to be told, so I hope you enjoy reading my humble effort about the club we love. The true triumph was won on the park so I've concentrated on the football side of things, and minimised the detail on the takeover/financial element. I make no apologies for that. It was the boys in Green Jerseys who made this story great so this is mostly about them.

I also make no apologies for writing in a Hibs fan narrative on occasions as, after all, that's what I am. When dealing with such an emotionally charged time in our history, at times it was impossible to always write solely as a neutral sportswriter. If you're under 30 years of age and reading this book, I hope the chapter 'A (slightly) Different Ball-Game' helps you to understand or remember how the game was a wee bit different 'back then'. If you're over 30, I hope it brings back good memories.

I had no desire when writing this to either inflame old problems, write nasty things about people, alive or dead, or to stir up trouble in the present – so I didn't. Please remember, this all happened 25 years ago and the past is the past. Times have changed, at Hibs, in football and in society – but the memory of our glorious 1991 triumph will live forever – no one can ever take that from us.

We are all Hibernian FC.

So, fellow Hibbies, brothers and sisters, comrades in green, or even interested neutrals, come with me now, as we

FROM OBLIVION TO HAMPDEN

go with the Hibs, the team that would not die, from oblivion to Hampden...

Hail, Hail, the Hibs are here, all for goals and glory, now!

Ian Colquhoun

Introduction

IN the beginning, Hibernian Football Club was formed by and for Edinburgh's Roman Catholic Irish immigrant community, to carry out charitable works and to provide an opportunity through sport for men from that embattled, often ostracised community to participate with and in competition against the rest of Scottish society. Alan Lugton's superb trilogy of books *The Making of Hibernian* tells that story comprehensively and passionately – it's the definitive guide to Hibs' origins and the trials and tribulations of the club's early years. Hibs' history has many 'chapters' to it, from the aforementioned origins, to our 'time-out' period in the early 1890s when we effectively went into 'Hibernation' briefly, and what came after.

Our successes and triumphs of the early 20th century, our ups and downs of the 1920s and 30s, the promising but ultimately tragic era in the 1940s under Willie McCartney, the roaring successes and pioneering endeavours of the 1950s with Hugh Shaw and the Famous Five, the heroic, strong teams of the 60s and 70s managed by the likes of Shankly, Galbraith, Stein and Turnbull, and even what came after, the bleak years of the 1980s post-relegation and promotion, under bosses like Auld, Stanton and Blackley, have all, for better or worse, shaped the club that we know and love today.

Likewise, our modern identity has been influenced by the Duffy fiasco and relegation of the late 1990s, our late

90s/early 00s resurgence under Alex McLeish, the ‘could do better’ era under Bobby Williamson, the optimism and restored pride that came with the reigns of Mowbray and Collins and the mediocrity of the five managers who followed, which culminated in relegation in 2014 under the club’s worst ever permanent boss, Terry Butcher, and the cautious new optimism under Alan Stubbs. These bosses, the players who wore the famous green jersey and the personalities behind the scenes have, along with the cup triumphs, memorable results and games we’d rather forget, all played their part in weaving together the rich tapestry that is the history of Hibernian Football Club, and how it got to where it is today – good and bad.

However, any *true* understanding of Hibernian and its fans in the modern era must be primarily based, and I mean *really* based, on one unlikely but tenacious cup run in the autumn of 1991, which was preceded by the most awful period in the club’s modern history, on and off the pitch. For a time in 1990 and 1991 there was a very strong chance that Hibernian FC would die, be wiped from the world’s footballing map and consigned to the history books. Today in 2016, we could be referring to Hibs solely in the past tense, as we do Third Lanark. It’s the stuff of nightmares and it was a nightmare that many of us lived through, one that we all as fans resolved should never trouble us and our beloved club again.

This book isn’t about Hands Off Hibs – it’s a football book – though it is impossible to tell the fantastic tale of ‘what happened next’ without picking scabs, taking our heads and our hearts back to the nightmare that was 1990/91, for to understand that nightmare is to fully appreciate what a fantastic miracle came afterwards as the Hibs arose like a phoenix from the ashes, from zeroes to heroes, from rock-bottom to the top of the world. Hibs almost died, but after surviving we raced to glory and restored the fans’ pride with a tenacity and alacrity that belied the desperate situation which the club had been saved from.

INTRODUCTION

Hibernian FC was saved from extinction by off-the-field actions but the legend that crowned the club's remarkable survival and resurgence in the face of that adversity was forged on the football field by Alex Miller and his small squad of players in late 1991. When it was all over, Hibernian were dubbed by the media simply as 'The Team That Would Not Die'.

To tell the story of how that particular Hibs team gained such immortality in 1991, how Hibernian Football Club went from oblivion to Hampden, we must go back in time a little – not too far. The summer of 1987, or thereabouts, should do it.

Prologue

*'Hibernian FC is the greatest
football club on earth'*

David Duff, 1987

IN the summer of 1987, chairman and local businessman Kenny Waugh, after six years at the helm, sold the club to two ambitious businessmen who had plans to 'revolutionise' Hibernian.

Hibs' largely excellent 1970s period under Eddie Turnbull had ended in relegation in 1979/80. Though Hibs, then managed by Famous Five legend Willie Ormond and then later by ex-Hibs and Celtic player Bertie Auld, easily won promotion back to the top flight at the first attempt in 1980/81, finishing top of the old First Division with 58 points after winning 25 matches, drawing eight and losing just six, with a whopping goal difference of +45, the club's return to the top table did not see a return to the heady days of the 60s and 70s, when it was widely regarded that there were only three top teams in Scotland – Hibs, Rangers and Celtic.

Instead, Hibernian, under Auld and then later managed by Pat Stanton, could only consolidate their top-flight status. Gone were the huge crowds, gone even, for three years at least, was the Edinburgh derby as Hearts were relegated in 1981 just as Hibs were promoted, the Jambos spending two years in the First Division until being promoted in 1983 and even then

they didn't come up as champions. However, some argue that the two years Hearts spent in the lower league helped them rebuild, while Hibs had returned at the first attempt. You could compare the clubs to two schoolchildren, one of whom has been kept back a year at school, but ultimately forms a stronger character because of it while the other just continues without such challenges or reflection on 'what went wrong'. In a wider sense, for Edinburgh football, the early 80s were like the Dark Ages.

Pat Stanton's spell in the Easter Road hot-seat from 1982–84 did not emulate his great days at Easter Road as a player, though he did sign some of the club's future stars. The budget for players was tight in the early 1980s and a lot of people faced financial hardship in Thatcher's Britain and consequently, crowds at most clubs were down, and with them went revenues. Football violence, a problem at all clubs back then, had also seen attendances dwindle, families in particular being put off attending. Commercialism either from TV or serious merchandising was still really in its infancy and things were so tight financially that for a time Hibs even considered going part-time. However, Aberdeen and Dundee United, dubbed the 'New Firm', had bucked the trend and shown that the Old Firm's dominance of the domestic game could be challenged with both sides winning domestic cups and titles in the first half of the 1980s, as well as performing heroics in Europe.

It didn't work out for Stanton as manager and he was replaced in late 1984 by another ex-player and fans' favourite, John Blackley. It could easily be said that Hibs' performances under Blackley were typical of their post-1981 era – you never really knew what team was going to turn up. They were consistently inconsistent. You could usually count on Blackley's team to annihilate lower-league opposition in the cups, to do well against Hearts, Rangers and Celtic, and to try hard in the cup competitions. The 1985/86 season was Blackley's finest. His team reached the SKOL League Cup

PROLOGUE

Final, having knocked out Celtic and Rangers in the quarter-final and semi-final respectively, but they were easily beaten 3-0 by Alex Ferguson's superb Aberdeen team at Hampden in the final.

That same season, Hibs reached the semi-final of the Scottish Cup but lost that one 3-0 to Aberdeen at Dens Park, Aberdeen going on to defeat Hearts by the same scoreline at Hampden in the final just a week after the Jambos had thrown away the league title by losing to Dundee at Dens Park, thus losing out on the championship on goal difference to Celtic, who had beaten St Mirren 5-0 at Love Street on the last day.

In 1985/86, strike pair Gordon Durie and Steve Cowan scored 42 goals between them but the unpredictable nature of Blackley's team nullified this and Hibs ultimately finished eighth in the Fine Fare Premier Division, the same league position they had ended the previous campaign in. However, 1986/87 started well with a pre-season 4-1 rout of Chelsea followed by an opening-day 2-1 league win over big-spending Rangers at Easter Road, but by mid-November Hibernian had only won four league games and had been knocked out of the SKOL League Cup at the quarter-final stage, 2-0 at home to Dundee United.

The club was stuck in a rut of mind-boggling mediocrity and Blackley's time was up. He was replaced by St Mirren boss Alex Miller, who had managed to get the Buddies into the UEFA Cup in 1985 and had knocked out Slavia Prague in what was one of the Paisley club's finest hours.

He had kept St Mirren mid-table in the Premier Division, above Hibs, during his three years at Love Street, despite tight budgetary constraints, and he had a growing reputation as an excellent coach with a good eye for a talented player. 'His' St Mirren team, by then managed by Alex Smith, won the Scottish Cup just a few months after he had departed for Easter Road.

As a player, Miller had played over 300 games for Rangers, mostly as a full-back, scoring 30 goals, and was something of

a cult hero at Ibrox but this did not sit very well with some Hibs fans. Miller, at first, seemed no better than Blackley, Hibs managing just six more league wins between his arrival and the season's end to finish ninth in the Premier Division. They also suffered a humiliating Scottish Cup fourth round exit, 1-0 to Clydebank at Kilbowie Park.

Apart from its opening day, 1986/87 was best forgotten by Hibs fans. The 1987/88 season would give the supporters a chance to see what their new manager could do with his own team in place. Hibs still had some fantastic players, from Alan Rough in goal to Gordon Rae at the back, John Collins, Paul Kane, Eddie May and Mickey Weir in midfield, and those two businessmen were about to bring their 'revolution' to Easter Road.

A New Regime

'There will be a revolution, but it won't happen overnight. It could take five years but I would like to do it in three.'

David Duff

THOSE were the words of Edinburgh-born Hibernian fan David Duff in August 1987, when he became Hibs' youngest chairman at just 33 years old. 'La Bamba' by Los Lobos was number one in the UK singles chart when he took the helm. The song, from the hit movie of the same name, had an uplifting, popular intro and has often been used in other films in scenes where something 'big' is about to start. Maybe that was quite apt. Maybe.

The Conservative Party had recently won a third successive General Election. Vampire classic *The Lost Boys* had just been released in the cinema. Duff had watched Hibs from the terraces as a boy and he had big plans for the club, plans that he envisaged would restore the side to their former greatness in Scottish football and pull the club out of the crevice of mediocrity into which it had slid.

It was a tall order; the club hadn't won a major trophy since the 1972 League Cup against Celtic and hadn't featured in European competition since 1978/79, the latter situation being particularly irksome to the majority of Hibs fans as

the club had enjoyed many memorable European ties in the 1960s and 70s, beating the likes of Sporting Lisbon, Barcelona, Napoli, Rosenborg, Malmo, Porto and Belenenses and suffering valiant defeats to teams like Liverpool, Leeds United, Roma, Valencia and Juventus.

Besides the 1985 SKOL League Cup Final defeat to Aberdeen, the club's last appearances at Hampden in the cups had ended in heartbreak with a 5-0 Scottish Cup semi-final defeat to eventual winners Celtic and three matches against Rangers in the previous year's Scottish Cup Final, losing the second replay 3-2 after two goalless draws. Duff, like any Hibs fan, wanted to bring back the glory days of regular Hampden appearances and European runs.

To assist him, he brought in his businessman brother-in-law, Jim Gray, as the club's first full-time managing director. They acquired Hibernian from Kenny Waugh for around £900,000 in total, but all that did was buy the club, so to show that they meant business the new owners backed manager Alex Miller. Defender Tommy McIntyre joined for a nominal fee from Aberdeen late in 1986 and left-back Graham Mitchell was signed from Hamilton Accies for £30,000 around the same time. But the new regime was about to splash the cash. Utility player Neil Orr was signed from West Ham United for £100,000 and midfielder Andy Watson 'crossed the divide', joining from city rivals Hearts for £30,000.

Two months into the season, Hibs made the headlines by breaking their transfer record on signing goalkeeper Andy Goram from Oldham Athletic for £325,000. The highly-rated Goram already had four Scotland caps (in friendlies) and had actually been on Hibernian's radar since John Blackley's reign. Ageing custodian and great servant Alan Rough never picked up the gloves for Hibs again after Goram's debut in October 1987, leaving in 1988 to pursue a career in America. Hibs had also been looking at English goalkeeper Ian Andrews before signing Goram, but it turned out that they had a lucky escape where Andrews was concerned. He moved from Leicester

City to Celtic a year later in 1988 and was in goal when Celtic suffered their worst defeat to Rangers in 30 years, going down 5-1 at Ibrox with Andrews largely to blame.

Alex Miller had strengthened the team in every area except up front – Hibernian would start 1987/88 with just three strikers, Steve Cowan, Joe McBride and veteran George McCluskey, though they could always count on goals from midfield with players like Kane, May, Weir and Collins in the side. The season itself began well enough with an exciting 3-3 draw away to Dunfermline. Miller then got one over on his old employers Rangers in the second game, winning 1-0 at Easter Road in front of over 20,000 fans. Hibs were at home again the following week to Jocky Scott's Dundee side, who obliterated the Hibeers 4-0. Many Hibs fans left the ground at half-time, expecting a massacre, but 4-0 it stayed.

Soon afterwards, talented winger Mickey Weir made a shock move to Luton Town for a fee of around £200,000. Thankfully for Hibs, Mickey didn't settle at Kenilworth Road, where the Hatters played on a terrible artificial surface, and he was welcomed back in January 1988 for the same fee.

Hibs were again eliminated from the SKOL League Cup at the quarter-final stage, losing 1-0 to Motherwell at Fir Park, having disposed of Queen of the South and Montrose in earlier rounds. In the league that season, four games against Celtic produced three narrow defeats and one draw. The four Edinburgh derbies produced two goalless draws and a win each for the two rivals, Alex Miller getting his first victory over Hearts on 17 October 1987 at Easter Road with Eddie May and Paul Kane earning a 2-1 scoreline.

The other three matches against Rangers produced two narrow defeats and one draw, the latter a 1-1 at Ibrox near the end of the season when Weir was sent off and Hibs scored through a Kane penalty. Hibs' real problem in 1987/88 was scoring goals. Steve Cowan, prolific two seasons earlier, was sold to Motherwell for £30,000 at the end of August 1987. Miller spent much of the latter half of 1987 pursuing an

attacking midfielder who played for Crewe Alexandra in England's Fourth Division.

The 21-year-old had bagged 56 goals in 130 appearances for Dario Gradi's side after being released by Manchester United in 1985. Miller was sure that he would be a superb signing and would provide the goals and assists that the team sorely needed. Seven games between 19 December 1987 and 30 January 1988 saw the Cabbage score just one goal, from youngster Paul McGovern in a 1-1 draw with Morton at Cappielow.

Crewe wanted £200,000 for their star forward but Hibs were only willing to pay around half that amount, and lost out on 2 February 1988 when he signed for Aston Villa, then in England's second tier, for £200,000. That player went on to bag 50 goals in three years at Villa before moving to Italy's Serie A, where he starred for Bari, Juventus and Sampdoria then returned to England to impress for Arsenal.

He ended up gaining 62 England caps, scoring 27 goals at international level, including at the 1990 World Cup, and he scored 151 goals in 448 club appearances across his career. That player who Hibs narrowly missed out on signing was named David Platt.

Disappointed, Hibs hurriedly recruited English striker Gareth Evans instead, in a £55,000 deal from Rotherham United. Evans ended the goal drought, scoring on his debut in a 2-1 win against Dundee on 6 February 1988, but only netted once more that season. Though Platt is one of the biggest 'what if' episodes in Hibernian's history, in the context of this story it worked out just fine in the end, for all parties.

Hibernian's Scottish Cup run in 1987/88 consisted of a 0-0 draw against Bertie Auld's Dumbarton at Boghead in the third round with Hibs winning the replay at Easter Road 3-0, only to be knocked out by Celtic in the next round, drawing 0-0 at Parkhead in a live televised match before losing the replay 1-0 at Easter Road. In the league, the season ended up being about consolidation. League reconstruction loomed

with the Premier Division being cut from 12 to just ten teams for 1988/89, meaning that three teams would be relegated at the end of 1987/88, with one team coming up.

Miller's team ultimately finished sixth in 1987/88, a respectable improvement and one that thus far vindicated the club's new owners. They were on the right track but there were still worrying signs as 44 league games in 1987/88 had seen the Hibeers collect just 43 points, with a goal difference of -1. Hibs had won 12 games, lost 13 and drawn 19 but they had finished well above the relegation zone and dodged the extra relegation places with ease.

There were other reasons to be cheerful. February 1988 saw Scotland draw 2-2 in a friendly match in Riyadh against Saudi Arabia, with young midfield maestro John Collins making his international debut, starting the match and scoring with a sublime free kick. Three months later Collins won the SPFA's prestigious Young Player of the Year award. Collins would gain four Scotland caps while a Hibs player. Later that year, goalkeeper Andy Goram would make his competitive international debut, against Yugoslavia in a World Cup qualifier.

The defence and midfield had been improved, so Miller would next seek to further strengthen the attack. Hibs' top scorer that season was midfielder Paul Kane with 12 goals as the strikers simply hadn't delivered and Miller's team were the league's third-lowest scorers. Big changes would come in the next season, on and off the pitch – a superstar was about to arrive to try to solve the scoring problem, and in the new-look ten-team Premier Division there were still five European places up for grabs, Scotland having extra places in Europe from 1985 to 1990 because all English clubs were banned from European competition.

There had been multiple instances of hooliganism that had culminated at Heysel in May 1985 when 39 Juventus fans were killed after a wall collapsed during a fight in the stadium before Liverpool played Juventus in the European

Cup Final. A number of Liverpool fans were later charged with manslaughter in connection with the tragedy.

That aside, English football's loss was Scotland's gain and these circumstances gave Hibernian a real chance to get back into Europe for the first time in a decade.

Duff, Gray, Miller and his team and the whole Hibs support would have to dig deep, financially and emotionally, in order to take that chance in 1988/89.

On a lighter note, two hilarious footballing incidents gave Hibs fans a cheery end to 1987/88. Firstly, Hearts threw away a 1-0 lead over Celtic at Hampden in the Scottish Cup semi-final with the Glasgow side winning 2-1 thanks to two howlers in the dying minutes from goalkeeper Henry Smith, which earned him the nickname 'Drop the Ball' and even led to a pop song by boyband Bros having the lyrics changed by fans from 'Drop the boy – ooooh' to 'Drop the ball – goooaaalll'.

Secondly, in the season's final match at Easter Road, Hibs beat relegated Morton 3-1. That in itself wasn't that funny but the amusement was caused by Andy Goram scoring one of the goals, directly from a clearance from his own box! Goram thumped the ball from the Dunbar End down the slope towards the Cowshed End. Morton's David Wylie advanced to meet the kick but misjudged the ball, which bounced on the penalty spot and over his head into the empty net, Wylie making himself look even more foolish by falling into the net after the ball in a desperate attempt to keep it out.

Mark Oxley did the same thing 26 years later, shooting the other way, against Livingston at Easter Road in August 2014. Still, 1988/89 loomed, and it was indeed to be a memorable season.