

David Herd & Ian Stewart

TORRY



The Life and Career of
TORRY GILLICK
a Football Great

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CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY YEARS

GARTNESS IS a small village on the edge of the Lanarkshire town of Airdrie. In the 19th century, it was part of a heavily industrialised area, with iron works and coal mines providing employment for the local population. It is, perhaps, a village not particularly known to the majority of the people of Scotland, especially since the demise of these old industries. But Gartness has a claim to fame in the world of Scottish football, as it was the birthplace of a footballer who carved out a unique career in the blue of Rangers, Everton and Scotland. His name was Torrance Gillick, but he would become known throughout the football world as Torry.

His father, Lawrence, was born in 1891 in Moffat Mills near Airdrie, the youngest child in a family of 12. Coal mining was a hugely important industry in the area, with young Lawrence joining several family members and school friends in becoming a miner in the local pit. He would meet and then marry a local girl, Isabella Sinclair Ferguson, on 2 June 1911. The happy couple then settled in Gartness, where they remained for the rest of their days.

The couple welcomed their first child, a daughter they named Annie, in 1913. Then, as Britain was enduring the hardship and the horrors of the Great War, their next child came along. This time it was a boy, who they named Torrance, a name that had also been given to one of the newborn's many uncles and went back generations in the Gillick family. He arrived into the world on 19 May 1916, blissfully unaware of the desperate times the country was enduring.

Lawrence was in a protected profession, the country desperately needing coal to provide the power for homes and industry and to underpin the war effort. Having already started a family prior to the 1914 declaration of war, Lawrence would not have been enlisted, although many young fathers in non-protected professions were accepted as volunteers.

Young Torrance would end up as the middle child, with Lawrence and Isabella's second daughter, Kate, being born just after the war ended to complete their loving and close-knit family. With a mother he adored, and two sisters at home, Torry would be well looked after by the Gillick ladies as he grew up.

Torry was a child with a keen sense of adventure and one who, from an early age, showed great natural ability at football. The sport was the nation's favourite getaway from the hard times following the conflict, with massive crowds attending the biggest matches in Scotland and most young boys dreaming of stardom wearing the colours of their favourite team. At Moffat Mills Primary School, young Torry shared that distant dream and, unlike the vast majority

of other lads, he was showing the natural talent to perhaps make those dreams a reality.

He would be seen kicking a ball with his friends for as long as his mother allowed him to stay out and he quickly became the first player chosen for team games in the streets or the playground. As he progressed to secondary school at Airdrie High, he was quickly the star player – not just for the school itself, but for the local district. A player with dazzling ball control, a consummate ability to beat a defender and a deadly accurate shot, Torry racked up the goals and the accolades.

By 1928, at the age of 12, he had been instrumental in helping his school win the local schools championship for their age group. By 13, he had been snapped up by the crack local side Clarkston Juveniles and he was quickly playing in age groups far beyond his tender years. Around this time, father Lawrence had left the mines to start work in one of the local paper mills, a job that allowed him to support his family and didn't involve the dangers of underground life. Torry was now very much hoping his future life would be in a very different world again – that of professional football.

However, he wasn't the only promising footballer in the family. In fact, there were many in the Gillick clan who thought his cousin, Jim Gillick, was even more talented. Torry and Jim were very close, possibly due to their shared love of the game. But Jim was a painfully shy boy and he found it difficult to get changed and bathed before and after a match in a communal dressing room setting. He was known to even attempt to wear his football kit under his clothes and simply

put his shirt, jacket and trousers back over the top of his muddy strip rather than undress in front of his team-mates. This shyness and a reluctance to mix with other young men would eventually drive Jim away from playing the game, despite cousin Torry's attempts to change his mind. Maybe Scottish football would have celebrated two stars named Gillick had circumstances been different.

Torry wasn't particularly academic; his ambitions from early on were aimed at the football pitch rather than educational achievements. Away from football, he also developed a love of fishing from an early age. His father and his uncle, Bob, were both keen anglers in the local waters and Torry would often be seen with them casting a line if he wasn't leaving defenders in his wake with a ball at his feet. Both sports would be a passion for the rest of his life.

Bob, who was two years older than Lawrence, was the man who showed Torry how to make and cast a fly, a skill that he was to hone over the following decades. Their favourite spot in later years was in Callander, many miles north from when their love of fishing together started. But no matter how effective his own flies would be, Torry kept hold of those Bob had made him all those years ago, as they seemed to have that extra magic that was needed to outwit the fish.

On leaving school, Torry's heart wasn't in any job that might come along. His goals were attracting attention in the football community and it looked only a matter of time before a club would persuade the rising star to sign on the dotted line. In 1932, that club finally came calling, and 16-year-old Torry Gillick was on his way to stardom.