

THE CONTROVERSIAL AND COLOURFUL LIFE OF ONE OF
FOOTBALL'S MOST DOMINANT PERSONALITIES

TOMMY DOC



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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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Piecing together the jigsaw of someone's life, even in the instant-research age of the Internet, is impossible without a lot of help. Most importantly, this book has drawn upon interviews with many people, all of whom have my sincere gratitude. The list of those who declined to speak about Tommy Docherty or didn't respond to my requests was, in its own way, almost as revealing. I won't name names, but most readers will be able to work out upon which side of the divide most of the characters in this story sit.

Sadly, one of those I interviewed, Brian Greenhoff, died during the editing stage of this book. I have left his comments in the present tense in order to give a better sense of our conversation.

I have been very lucky that Tommy himself agreed to participate in the project without asking for any control over the end product. For that I have also to thank his wife, Mary, for allowing me to persuade him to be interviewed.

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It is no exaggeration to say that Bill Campbell at Mainstream Publishing changed my life 12 years ago when he phoned to commission an idea I had pitched to him. Suitably buoyed, I have been writing one book or another ever since and I have been fortunate enough to have worked on several further projects with Bill and his talented team, including Graeme Blaikie, Fiona Brownlee and many others. In thanking them for their support and professionalism with this book, I also have to express my regret that the imminent closure of the company means this will be the final time we work together. I know many other authors are sharing the same sense of loss. I sincerely wish the very best to everyone at Mainstream as they write their own new chapters.

My own family might sometimes wish that I was similarly exiting the publishing world. If so, they do a fantastic job of keeping it to themselves and continuing to offer support and patience. This particular book is dedicated to Amy, Sarah, Laura, Karis and my wife, Sara.

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INTRODUCTION

The face, contentedly world-weary, betrays no hint of a smile. The punchlines are delivered with perfect timing, the pause before the pay-off measured immaculately for maximum impact. Les Dawson, the king of the deadpan comedians, couldn't have done this any better. The audience has been warmed up with lines such as 'growing up in the Gorbals in Glasgow, if you wanted a new pair of shoes you went down to the swimming baths on a Saturday morning' and are now roaring their way through a series of clashes with club chairmen and anecdotes about football's most famous names.

This is Tommy Docherty - 'Tommy Doc' to some; to others simply 'The Doc'. Captured on camera during a one-man theatre show in Norwich in the mid-1990s, the figure perched on the centre-stage stool is the embodiment of how many have come to regard one of the sport's most vibrant and divisive characters in the years since his managerial career ran out of last chances. A few gags, an avalanche of name-dropping and a checklist of opinions on the modern game when questions are invited from the auditorium. Job done.

It's a well-rehearsed turn and Docherty appears as comfortable in it as when he sits at home on the edge of the Derbyshire Dales in his slippers. Well into his 80s and into the second decade of the new millennium, the act is still getting a regular airing. But this is not Docherty the football man. It's not the driven and ruthless former Scotland international who arrived at two of the biggest clubs in

England wielding an axe that sliced through a forest of veteran players, nurturing exciting young teams and transporting Chelsea and Manchester United from the wretched depths of relegation to the elevated rapture of Wembley appearances and title challenges.

The figure on stage is the caricature, the public persona whose jokes, for all the entertainment they offer to folk happy to shell out a few quid, give little insight into the trials and triumphs of a remarkable life. The failures and foul-ups of his managerial career, at places such as Rotherham, Aston Villa and Derby, are merely providers of comedic material. So, too, is the episode when he almost went to prison after admitting to telling lies in court. For many years he even used 'ladies and gentlemen, you're not going to believe this' as the opening line to his speaking engagements. Knowing his public has arrived for gags and giggles, the personal pain of such episodes or analysis of where things went wrong remains hidden behind the one-liners. The stage is no place for self-pity or self-assessment; nor does he use his platform to advance, or even pose, any debate about just how a good a manager he actually was.

'To hear the Doc speak about his career now, it all seems like a bit of a joke,' says author Jim White in *Manchester United: The Biography*. 'To watch him at his prime was to observe a master of the art, charismatic, not fearing of reputation or personal feeling.'

Watching the glib, wisecracking character in full flow it is easy to imagine him among the mud and wintergreen, raising spirits when results were going badly and getting a laugh out of players who really didn't fancy training on a cold, wet winter morning. But you don't see the darker side that clearly existed: the jokes that could frequently be laced with venom, leaving rancour-infested dressing-rooms divided along pro- and anti-Docherty lines. The roadside of his life is strewn with the wreckage of relationships with

players, employers and even his family, some of whom have not spoken to him for more than three decades.

Chelsea's rise under his management in the 1960s was accompanied by the rhythm of players' boots clacking down the corridor to his office to hand in transfer requests. Over the years, he fell out with some of the biggest names in football: Terry Venables, George Graham, Barry Bridges, George Best, Denis Law, Willie Morgan, Paddy Crerand, Jim Gregory, Bruce Rioch, Gerry Daly, to name just a few.

Yet rather than destabilising performance on the field, the fact is that the longer Docherty remained at a club - Chelsea and Manchester United being the cases in point - the more successful his teams became. If that was because he managed over time to get shot of those who failed to respond to his methods, then it is hard to hold that against him, on a purely professional basis at least. Of course, the alternative argument is that perhaps he could have won more than one League Cup, two promotions and an FA Cup had his team environments been more harmonious. Even at the two clubs where he achieved most, his reigns eventually came to an end largely because he had run out of allies when he needed them most.

Deteriorating rapport with the board and players at Chelsea meant that when he picked up a one-month ban from all football for abusing an official during a summer tour game in 1967, weeks after leading the club to the FA Cup final, it was made clear to him that his time at Stamford Bridge was at an end. And, most famously of all, he was dismissed by Manchester United within weeks of guiding them to Wembley success in 1977 after revealing that he had been having a relationship with Mary Brown, the wife of the club physiotherapist. Theories abound about why United felt compelled to dismiss Docherty after originally intimating that he could remain in their employ, but the feeling remains that had he not made enemies of influential board members, not strained his relationship with certain players

to the limit, and generally been less of a roguish character, his misdemeanour would have been viewed more sympathetically.

Docherty was as unreconstructed as the northern stand-up acts, whom he so admired, that you'd see around that time on shows like ITV's *The Comedians*. Yet time caught up with him. He learned the hard way that the laddish pranks of the dressing-room, the dodgy deals of a typical football club, telling a few porkies in the manner of most football managers and, yes, sleeping with a colleague's wife had a price that had to be paid in the real world.

Former United player Eamon Dunphy, in his masterpiece about the club, *A Strange Kind of Glory*, states that 'the Doc's life at United was lived on a number of levels'. He says, 'He fought with players, behaved as venally as was necessary to survive, socialised with the Busby family one day; dealt with Stan Flashman the next.' Docherty undoubtedly ignored the romantic notion of Old Trafford under Sir Matt Busby in the post-Munich era and scuffled and scrapped, and wheeled and dealed in the same way that he would have done at a hard-up, lower-division club in the provinces. 'Nobody objected,' says Dunphy. 'Until Tommy Docherty fell in love with Mary Brown.'

Yet among the many paradoxes of Docherty's career is the issue of whether the 'Mary Brown Affair' was genuinely a transgression too great for United to ignore or whether it simply gave the club the excuse they'd been seeking to get rid of him. He had, after all, been the subject of investigation by private detectives supposedly working for those with connections to the board. Docherty always insisted that he was 'sacked for falling in love', yet as he looks back on that period now even he admits that he doesn't know what motivated the club's decision.

While Docherty found personal happiness with Mary, to whom he is still contentedly married, he never recovered professionally, bouncing around from club to club, including

three managerial stints in Australia. It all ended with an acrimonious departure in 1988 from non-League Altrincham: his 15th managerial appointment. It was an inauspicious, undignified final curtain for a man whose sides are still revered at two of the modern era's mega-clubs and who might, on the evidence of a year or so of high promise, have turned out to be the greatest manager the Scotland team ever had.

Just as Docherty has been a reliable resource for media over the past half-century by virtue of his ready pronouncements on everyone and everything in football, so it is almost impossible to find someone who does not have an opinion about the Doc - although the number of people who declined requests for interviews for this book suggests that many would rather keep them to themselves. The comment from one former player that 'if I haven't got something nice to say about someone I'd rather say nothing' appears to reflect the outlook of many. Even one of Docherty's biggest supporters, former Chelsea man Charlie Cooke, admits, 'I know there are people who would put the boot in on him, but not me.'

Lou Macari, whom Docherty picked for Scotland, signed for United and fell out with on a regular basis, says, 'Along the way he has annoyed a few people, but I don't think that bothers him a great deal. If you are not the forgiving type or can't accept that is what he is like then you can spend the rest of your life holding a grudge against him.'

Similarly, Gordon Hill, the England winger Docherty purchased on three occasions, admits, 'There will be a lot of people who hate the Doc, absolutely despise him. One man's meat is another man's poison, I suppose. At times he would back you up and could help you out in a difficult situation, but would I completely trust the Doc? I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. But I don't think he would ever do anything deliberately harmful to anybody. It

was just his nature. His football was the number one consideration.'

Over the years, Docherty has remained mostly unperturbed by adversarial comments, his skin thick enough for them to merely bounce off. As journalist James Lawton once put it, 'Docherty needs our approval about as much as Jesse James needed a credit card.' Besides, Docherty would tell you, football history is punctuated by the unfulfilled promise of men such as legendary former England captain Billy Wright who turned out to be 'too nice' to succeed as managers.

On the one occasion Docherty did take noticeable offence to criticism, when Morgan described him on television as 'the worst manager there has ever been', he launched an ill-advised libel case that led to his own appearance in the dock on perjury charges. He was accused of deliberately lying during a case that collapsed more spectacularly than the poorest team he ever managed. 'It is the biggest regret I have,' he admits. 'I'd never let what anyone said bother me before that.' It was the only time he forgot comments such as, 'If people take the piss out of me I don't mind. If you give it out to them you have to expect to take it back.'

Docherty could dish it out more than anyone, yet there is little evidence of him being the 'foul-mouthed' character one writer described him as a few years ago. In the hours I spent talking to Docherty for this book, not once did the F-word fall from his lips. Even when a 'bastard' slipped out, he quickly added, 'Excuse my language.' It was as endearing as his habit of adding 'God rest their soul' whenever he mentioned someone who had passed from this world.

A man who often failed to walk the fine line between instinct and impulsiveness, Docherty offers a story rife with unfathomable contradictions. At times he could be a fierce disciplinarian, to the point of banishing eight of his Chelsea team from a vital game in the Championship run-in over an after-hours drink in Blackpool. Yet he could be childishly

undisciplined himself, as his penchant for starting bread-roll fights in inappropriate situations shows. He loved to be one of the boys away from the field, but was quick to fall out with them in the dressing-room, especially when he attempted to pull them up over behaviour he could easily have been guilty of himself on another occasion.

Players speak of his ability to give a club an immediate lift with the injection of energy he brought to a struggling team, which, in the nature of football management, most were when Docherty arrived. 'He tackled life with an explosive energy that often made him seem like an earthquake waiting to happen,' is the description of Docherty by George Graham, who played for him at Chelsea, United and Scotland.

Yet Docherty's record suggests he was not the man to appoint if you wanted a quick fix. The first five English clubs who appointed him as manager were relegated either that same season or the season after. The two clubs who retained Docherty long term beyond such disappointment, Chelsea and Manchester United, were rewarded, in particular with the style of football and excitement his teams delivered to the fans.

Detractors point to the failure to win more at Stamford Bridge and Old Trafford, yet those who watched their teams under Docherty talk animatedly about the vibrancy that transferred itself from pitch to terrace, the team and players each feeding off the fervour of the other. One example of that is voiced by Brian Mears, a board member at Chelsea during Docherty's reign and son of then chairman Joe Mears. In his 2001 memoir of life at the club, *Chelsea: Football Under the Blue Flag*, Mears junior adopts a tone of disapproval of much of Docherty's behaviour and personality. Yet, like many, he is able to overlook the faults in favour of the thrills. 'His flamboyant ultimate failure was better than the benign success of Vialli,' he states, before addressing the 'dinosaur' comment made about Docherty

by celebrity fan David Mellor. 'Whatever history says of Docherty, his contribution to Chelsea was 1,000 times that of Mellor and his ilk.'

Similarly, Richard Kurt and Chris Nickeas, in *The Red Army Years: United in the 1970s*, are aware enough of the manager's flaws to refer to 'Docherty's wankerhood', yet at the same time they acknowledge, 'He played on the fans' erogenous zone - he gave us a young team, predominantly home developed, who truly believed in attacking football, who exhibited a never-say-die attitude and played with the flair, passion and the skill for which United have traditionally stood.'

Brian Clough even said of United at the height of their powers under Docherty, 'They have dragged people from their armchairs who abandoned my game years ago.'

The Doc's preferred method at most clubs was to weed out the ageing and the cynical, offering opportunities to those with young legs and impressionable minds. One such player was the late Peter Osgood, who would describe Docherty as 'one of the few people I can honestly say has really influenced my life'. He added, 'His contribution to the game has not been fully appreciated. Like Clough, he could motivate previously average players to become exceptional ones.'

Docherty's own playing days as a wing-half for Celtic, Preston, Arsenal and Scotland were notable for a combative style that he saw as a necessary platform from which more gifted colleagues, such as the great England winger Tom Finney, could perform. 'The fame and success he went on to enjoy as a manager certainly came as no surprise to me,' noted Finney, adding, 'All his teams put the emphasis on good football - fun was always the name of Doc's game.' But it should not be overlooked that his teams, when required, could complement his love of an attacking game featuring orthodox wingers with the same pragmatism with which he played. There would be times when Docherty

abandoned his beliefs for a formation designed to achieve a specific result. He might have been a romantic about the beautiful game, but he wasn't stupid. He regularly voiced his admiration for the achievements of Don Revie at Leeds United. After an FA Cup victory with Aston Villa – against the QPR team he'd recently left – Docherty remarked, 'I would rather be an unpopular winner than a good loser.'

There were periods when Docherty drew criticism for the artisan nature of the football played by his teams, especially in the early days at certain clubs before he had completed the task of installing a young team to reflect his expansive ambition. Certainly, no one who saw Manchester United fighting relegation under Docherty would have predicted what was to come in the following three seasons.

In his early days as a manager, Docherty was considered an innovator. His Chelsea team was acknowledged as one of the first to utilise overlapping full-backs on a regular basis, and he was quick to embrace new training methods, attempt tactical complexities and study the mental approach of teams such as world champions Brazil. Much of that has become buried beneath the public image of a rent-a-mouth. 'My reputation has maybe overshadowed whatever ability I had,' he has said, although adding, without being entirely convincing, 'That doesn't bother me.'

Docherty's long-time colleague Frank Blunstone suggests, 'The trouble is, if you tell too many jokes people treat you as a joke.' But in their study of Scottish bosses, *The Management*, authors Michael Grant and Rob Robertson attempt to redress the balance:

There was much, much more to Docherty than that. Not for nothing had he managed Manchester United, Chelsea, Aston Villa and Scotland by the time he was 49. He was a focused, hungry, driven manager with a fastidious attention to detail. He was years ahead of his time in embracing sports psychology and media manipulation, in checking the bloodline of players who might be eligible for Scotland caps, in bringing African players to the English league. He was still a serving player when the SFA asked him to compile reports on the opposition at the 1958 World

Cup finals. These aren't the acts of someone who was nothing more than a tabloid windbag. Docherty was a manager of substantial talent and vision.

Veteran journalist and author Norman Giller argues, 'I wrote a book with Tommy called *The ABC of Soccer Sense* and people don't quite realise the depth of knowledge of football and tactics that Tommy had. People are quick to pooh-pooh what he achieved and give all the credit to his coaches, but he really did know the game.'

Yet too frequently the accomplishments and ambitions of Docherty's career were undermined by that impetuous Gorbals-formed personality. 'Often the hopes have been mangled by the quirky impulses of his nature,' Lawton wrote during the last days of Docherty's career.

Similarly, his acts of kindness are compromised by tales of ruthlessness, even cruelty. Blunstone relates a tale of Docherty's generosity from an occasion when members of the United coaching staff visited a clothes wholesaler. 'I saw a coat there and thought it was nice, but it was 600 quid so I said, "Bugger that, I expect a suit for that price." Later that afternoon Tommy came to me and said, "Here you are." He had paid for it himself.'

Steve Coppell made sure I knew about Docherty cutting short a holiday in Malta to fly home for his university graduation. 'I remember how impressed and touched my mum and dad were by that,' he says.

But for every tale of sending Coppell and his girlfriend to the Lake District at his own expense; or telling Brian Greenhoff to disappear for a few days during the season with his wife, who was unwell during her first pregnancy; or travelling to Scotland to take George Graham's parents to their son's Scotland Under-23 debut, there is a damning counter-balance. For example, Denis Law's shock at hearing of his free transfer from United after thinking he'd agreed a more graceful exit, or the various players banished to train

with the reserves, or the club captains stripped of their role without explanation.

Terry Venables, who went from the status of beloved son to undesirable influence in Docherty's eyes at Chelsea, said, 'One minute you would be a favourite, the next, someone else would be flavour of the month and you were on the outer. He fell out with everybody.'

The words with which the *Daily Mirror's* Ken Jones reported Docherty's departure from his first managerial post at Chelsea would have been just as appropriate as a summary of his entire career. 'He has always said what he means, often without thought, and rarely with any regard for the outcome,' he wrote. 'He bought, sold, built and destroyed. In five years he came close to greatness but never achieved it. He had teams that were the envy of almost every manager in the country - and then tore them apart.'

Author Sean Egan notes in *The Doc's Devils*, his book about the Docherty era at United, 'Only a psychiatrist would be able to explain why someone who is a warm and generous friend and mentor to people currently in his favour should - as in the Law case - seek to put a distance between himself and people he has decided have outlived their usefulness with a completely unnecessary degree of cruelty.'

Yet Docherty insists that the majority of players who have taken against him over the years have done so simply because that is what happens when players realise they are not the key figure in a manager's plans. He does add, though, 'I was a good judge of a player, but maybe not a good judge of character.' That perhaps contributed to some of the quarrels and is why he confesses, 'One or two weren't good signings, but I got rid of them quickly.'

Whether the public took offence at the infighting within the dressing-room - as long as they didn't see it affecting performance on the field - is debatable. Rather, they appeared to lap up the soap opera of his life. As Lawton

wrote, 'The great redemption of Docherty, outweighing his cynicism, an unscrupulous streak that he has rarely attempted to conceal, has been his clear love of the interaction between one man, eleven players and a public hungry for colour and incident.'

He certainly provided that. Even if his teams weren't in the points he was usually in the headlines - sometimes unintentionally and not always for the better. Even though the contemporaries he admired most were the likes of Revie and Bill Shankly - for sheer consistency of performance - it was Clough and Malcolm Allison with whom he is more frequently bracketed. The trio occupied the same top table of quotability and rare was the day when one of them wasn't in the news. Docherty himself would concede that his achievements don't measure up to either of those men, Clough having performed miracles over an extended period at Derby and Nottingham Forest, and Allison masterminding Manchester City's domestic and European dominance over a shorter period under Joe Mercer.

It is Allison to whom Docherty's descent from the pinnacle of his profession bears the most striking resemblance. Allison spent the years after his first spell at Manchester City, where he won four trophies in three years, trying to balance his increasingly parodied media image with a quest for glory that took him around various League grounds, foreign fields and non-League arenas. So it was with Docherty, following his departure from Old Trafford. It was little wonder that two kindred spirits should end up working the theatres together for a spell in the 1990s.

While Docherty could match Clough and Allison with his tongue, his greatest feats on the field were creating the promise of what could be - and what might have been. That was particularly so at Old Trafford. When he departed Chelsea in 1967 it felt as though he had taken his team as far as it could go, yet the United team he left behind in 1977 appeared to have the potential to build on its FA Cup

triumph. Juventus manager at that time, Giovanni Trapattoni, was predicting European triumph for them, and even the retired Shankly looked at the imminent challenge to his beloved Liverpool and said, 'There is a team from the East Lancs road that could take the title from us.' Of course, with Docherty in charge, maybe the divisions among the players and his confrontations with those he felt were getting too comfortable after a taste of success would have ensured it all ended in tears anyway. Perhaps ending on a high was the more poetic conclusion.

It is the 'what ifs' of Docherty's career that dominate his story and make him such an intriguing subject. If only he'd not been tempted to Old Trafford - something he now looks back on with some degree of regret - he could perhaps have become the greatest manager his national team ever had. Look at the talent his successors, Willie Ormond and Ally McLeod, had at their disposal in the World Cup finals of 1974 and 1978 and imagine the likes of Bremner, Lorimer, Gemmill, Macari, Dalglish and Souness galvanised by Docherty's dynamism during the white heat of tournament play.

Or suppose he'd been able more often to nurture player relationships for the benefit of a harmonious, united dressing-room. And what if he'd burned fewer bridges, retained more allies for when times got tough? Would Sir Matt have stood behind him when he declared his love for Mary Brown if he'd previously sought compromise rather than confrontation with loyal Busbyites such as Law, Crerand and Morgan?

The stage act Docherty has been performing for three decades might have been unrecognisable from the now-familiar routine. Without the self-deprecation, without the shortcomings, scrapes and sackings, there might have been no act at all. With more trophies, there might have been no need for it in the first place. Undoubtedly, this book would have progressed down an alternate path - one potentially

far less interesting. The life behind the one-liners would have been a very different story.

PART ONE

BLUE IS THE COLOUR

'Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it. The man who knows how will always have a job. The man who also knows why will always be his boss.'

*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-
1882)*

'Matt Busby said to me, "What are you going to do when you've finished playing?" I said, "I've half a mind to be a manager." He said, "That's all you need."'

Tommy Docherty

1

GLASGOW BOY TO INFANTRY MAN

'Your mother bought all your clothes at the Army and Navy store. It wasn't much fun going to school at the age of seven dressed as a Japanese admiral.'

The Gorbals. The name has a harsh, uncompromising edge that hints at the remorseless austerity of life within its boundaries. Certainly of the existence eked out by its inhabitants in the inter-war years when this district of Glasgow, situated south of the Clyde river, bulged with the overcrowding of its housing and cowered in fear of the 'razor gangs' who ruled its filthy streets.

Home to the Docherty family - who welcomed a son, Thomas Henderson, to the world on 24 April 1928 - was a single room in one of the Victorian-built tenement blocks that symbolised the bleak struggle for survival. These soot-stained 'single-end' dwellings, of which there might be a dozen spread over three or four floors in each building, frequently had seven or eight inhabitants each. Families endured miserable conditions, often frightened of telling the landlord of the latest leak or infestation for fear of being hounded for their rent arrears, or even evicted.

By the time Tommy was delivered into the world to mother Georgina and father Thomas, Glasgow's population, which had barely reached 80,000 at the start of the 1800s, had

grown to almost 1,000,000 as the Clyde burped out myriad new industries along its banks. Migrant workers had eagerly taken advantage of employment opportunities, the Gorbals becoming a melting pot of cultures. Irish Catholics, Jews from Eastern Europe and Scots down from the Highlands worked, played, loved and fought in suffocating proximity. The size of the workforce had quickly outgrown the job market, just as surely as the population was bursting at the seams of available properties. Author John Burrowes, taking Florence Street as his example, calculated that seventy-nine children lived in two adjoining buildings - 'closes' - and the most populous close of all housed twenty-six families.

Slowly decaying below clouds of coal smoke, pinned in place for most of the year by the cold air, the tenements had been seen originally as the solution to the urgent need for mass housing. As many as four people might share each of the 'cavity beds' that were squeezed claustrophobically into what were effectively cupboards sunk into the walls, behind doors that remained closed during the day. Docherty recalled being forced to sleep with his father, mother and sister Margaret in a bed that was nothing more than a piece of board inserted into a slot in the wall and topped by a mattress and blankets.

Published in 1935, the novel *No Mean City* offers a vivid depiction of the Gorbals slums, where even darkness brought no relief from the unremitting drudge of tenement existence. Authors Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long wrote:

Night brings no kindly silence to the tenement dwelling of the Empire's second city. The wide streets are deserted; the courtyards are empty; here and there the close-mouths may shelter shadowy figures, but each box dwelling is sealed by its own front door. The tenements themselves are never silent. There are sick children who wail and healthy ones who get restless; half-drunken men who snore and mutter; half-sober ones who quarrel with their wives. In the 'hoose' next door, or in some other 'hoose' on the landing above or below, there may be a party in progress which will last for forty-eight hours. As ever and anon front doors will

open to allow some hurrying figure to reach the single landing closet which serves three households.

In common with most Gorbals families, there was no close bond between Docherty and his father, who worked at the Stewarts and Lloyds iron foundry and who his son recalled as constantly fighting against ill-health. 'I never remember my father reading me a story or buying me an apple or taking me for a walk in the park or to a football match,' he says, with no trace of regret. 'That was no different to the norm.' Life for most working fathers consisted of long hours 'at toil' and spending whatever money was not required for rent, fuel or food at the pub. Thomas senior was better than many, however, neither leaving his family short of life's essentials nor coming home drunk to administer the beatings to wife and offspring that were a regular occurrence in many homes.

With little other than the evening radio shows to amuse him indoors, Tommy would be outside until dark playing football with rolled-up newspaper or, if he had been fortunate at Christmas or if a few pals had chipped in the odd penny, a small rubber ball. Or there would be street shows to stage with the neighbourhood children. Showing an early aptitude for comedy by aping the 'wireless' performers to whom he listened, the likes of Sid Field and the Crazy Gang, it was the first manifestation of the repartee that would earn him so many headlines.

When Docherty was only nine - and his mother pregnant with second daughter Mary - his father 'lost the fight to keep himself alive', succumbing to pleurisy. Georgina took a second cleaning job to make ends meet, leaving home at 4.30 a.m. and returning a couple of hours later to wake her children and get the older ones ready for school. At least the leftovers she was given by the middle-class families for whom she worked helped to enliven the staple family diet of 'mince and tatties'.

Even with his mother's income, there was still the occasional need for Tommy to take the family's mantelpiece clock to the pawnbroker, where it would fetch two shillings and sixpence (12.5p) to tide them over until they could afford to redeem it for the original sum plus sixpence interest. His clothes had known previous owners, but were always clean and ironed following Georgina's trips to the communal washhouse. There were even new football boots every couple of years, second-hand of course, but with fresh studs nailed in by the local cobbler. 'They were two sizes too big, massive,' Docherty recalls, 'but they were cheap. She said, "You'll grow into them." She bought them from a place called Barrowland, near Glasgow city centre. There were all these stalls, hundreds of them. You name it, they sold it.'

None of this seemed remotely unusual or unjust. 'You don't know the good times,' Docherty says. 'It's rough all the time and you accept it.' According to McArthur and Long, 'The slums as a whole do not realise they are living in abnormal conditions.'

The extent of the ambition of most young men in the Gorbals was to have a clean home and a pretty wife to look after it. Only those who excelled at football or boxing dared dream of a life beyond the tenements.

The Gorbals' most celebrated sporting figure during Docherty's childhood was boxer Benny Lynch, who in 1935 became world flyweight champion by pounding England's Jackie Brown in Manchester. In *Benny*, his book about Lynch's life, Burrowes has one of his characters summarising the pride felt in the fighter's achievement by saying, 'The only thing they knew about the Gorbals or Florence Street before Benny was that we were the arsehole of the country.'

When Lynch returned to Glasgow as champion, more than 20,000 crammed the concourse at Central Station before he paraded through the banners and bunting of the Gorbals, whose excited inhabitants at last had something of which

they could be proud. Even then, a cautionary tale was close at hand. Only 22 when he was crowned champion, Lynch was already a heavy drinker. His career ended three years later: he was knocked out in his final fight while bloated and drunk, and in 1946, aged thirty-three, his booze-worn body succumbed to pneumonia.

Boxing was not for Docherty, who had no love of a fight. Nor at a young age did there appear to be much potential for a career within football, given that he was no better than most boys in the teams for whom he played. Instead, the two men who made the biggest impression on him were from very different professions. He marvelled at the magnetism of the local 'ragman', who handed out toys in exchange for old clothes and ornaments as he drove his horse and cart through the neighbourhood. And then there was Father Joseph Connolly, the Catholic priest who visited the family on most days. 'He never stopped talking football to us,' Docherty said of a man whose support he valued so much that he vowed to reward him with an entire weekly wage packet for use in one of his causes. When he began work he would keep his promise, handing over £1 5s. 9d.

Attending St Mark's School, Docherty was averagely gifted, capable in the basic subjects and reasonably well behaved. 'I was a scallywag,' he admits. 'I would pinch an apple out the shop: mischievous things. As kids we were always pinching something. The coppers, rather than arrest you, would give you a thick ear. And you were more scared of the priest than the police. The saving grace for me was the Boys' Guild run by Father Connolly. You had to go Mass and Holy Communion or you didn't play football. He reminded me of Bing Crosby in the movies. You used to be able to get in at the pictures by taking a jam jar up to the cashier and that's what we did.¹ I used to watch people like James Cagney and you copied a lot of the things they did. But then the Catholic priest, Bing Crosby, would put them on the right path. Father Connolly was like that. I used to go to

Mass every morning, because if I did that and I was good enough I would be in the Boys' Guild team.'

Unsurprisingly, the football field held greater interest than the classroom for Docherty, and the highlight of the school week was when the games master handed out shirts on Friday afternoon to those selected for the next day's game. Having played in the morning for St Mark's, where future Kilmarnock and Scotland defender Willie Toner was a teammate, Docherty would spend Saturday afternoon turning out for Father Connolly's team, St Paul's Boys' Guild. Those matches offered him his first sight of different areas of Glasgow.

Docherty had almost escaped the Gorbals at the outbreak of the Second World War in an evacuation to Stirling. But when his mother discovered that the family would have to be separated, she announced, 'If we're going to die, we'll die together in our own home.' The family was briefly relocated to the Gallowgate district and finally granted the blessed relief of a council house in Shettleston shortly before the arrival of peacetime. With an inside toilet and three bedrooms it was 'undreamed-of luxury' and made Docherty fully aware of the deprivation of his life thus far. It gave him a vision of future possibilities and he would claim that his background 'was why my ambition in life was to become successful'.

It was Parkhead, home of Celtic, where football dreams were fortified. Now living even closer to the ground, Docherty was a frequent visitor, although he had to content himself with watching only the final 20 minutes after the gates opened to liberate the early leavers. Celtic had broken the grip of dominant rivals Rangers long enough to win the Scottish League Championship in 1936 and 1938. However, the post-war team, with goal-scoring legend Jimmy McGrory beginning a 20-year spell as manager in 1945, would have to wait until 1954 for its first title as Hibernian and Rangers,

built around their 'Iron Curtain' defence, vied for pre-eminence.

Docherty idolised right-back Bobby Hogg, outside-right Jimmy Delaney and inside-forward Gerry McAlton, although it was at centre-half where he played most of his football. His hopes of joining the world of his heroes might have intensified, but first there was real life to contend with. Having left school at 14, he flitted at rapid speed through a variety of jobs - window cleaner, factory worker, bottle worker - that neither suited his temperament nor allowed him sufficient time to play football. But once he had settled into the enjoyable routine of a bread delivery boy, whose work hours were 4 a.m. until noon, his football found a further vehicle for advancement when he was recruited by Shettleston Juniors. The club even offered a £3 signing-on fee, weekly expenses ranging from half-a-crown to £1 and an occasional share of gate money.

Docherty was still employed by the bakery when, at the age of 18, he received his call-up papers several months after the end of the war. Turning down the opportunity to work down the coal mines as a 'Bevin Boy', he was ordered to report for two years of National Service with the Highland Light Infantry (HLI). 'It was the making of me,' he believes. After the somewhat haphazard, hand-to-mouth nature of his early years, he enjoyed the structure, purpose and camaraderie of army life. He learned about teamwork and the importance of relying on one's practised skills at times of pressure - lessons he would carry into his sporting career. 'I learned self-discipline. I was given responsibility and responded well to it.' It was also where he first began to realise that his football ability was something out of the ordinary.

Six weeks of basic training at Whittington Barracks in Lichfield, Staffordshire, took him out of Scotland for the first time, and during three months stationed in Edinburgh he learned about - and took great pride in - the history of his

regiment. The daily army rations were a dietary improvement on what he'd been used to, and his level of fitness, always good, was honed to even greater sharpness. 'Willie Waddell, the Rangers outside-right, was there and he was good to me,' Docherty recalls. 'He used to let me miss the passing-out parade so I could get the train to Glasgow to play for Shettleston. Then I woke up one morning and lorries took us to Southampton. We were on a ship for four weeks and ended up at Port Said.'

There was plenty of decent football to be played during that posting to Palestine, the area now recognised as Israel and Jordan. 'When we arrived at camp in Jerusalem, the first thing they asked was whether there were any athletes. That determined which company you went in.' Docherty instantly identified himself to his superior officer as a footballer.

'Who do you play for?' came the demand.

'Shettleston Juniors, sir.'

'Professional?'

'Semi-professional.'

'That'll do. Charlie Company.'

When it came to the business of soldiering, one contemporary of Docherty's explained on the HLI Association's website that his memories of Palestine were of 'extreme boredom and heat, being stuck in the desert for weeks at a time, with only the occasional jaunt into Jerusalem or Cairo to break the monotony'. Yet it was one of those visits to the holy city of Jerusalem, early in his posting, that was to remind Docherty that National Service was no paid vacation, that life in uniform was lived under threat of violence, even death.

Although both sides had fought together against the Nazis, the tension between the British and Palestinians was all-encompassing. Since 1920, the British Mandate for Palestine had placed the region under Britain's administrative control. The Mandate was the League of Nations' recognition of the stated purpose of 'establishing in

Palestine a national home for the Jewish people', but in the meantime the British were viewed by both Arabs and Jews as an army of occupation. One local, Elli Baram, told me, 'It was not the easiest of times and there were a lot of underground organisations that were against the British.'

One such group was Irgun, a militant Zionist faction whose leadership included the future Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. On 22 July 1946, Private Docherty was on guard duty outside the modern, six-storey King David Hotel, in which were housed the headquarters of the British forces and government secretariat. A group of Irgun loyalists, dressed as Arabs, entered the basement kitchens with 350 kg of gelignite and TNT hidden inside seven milk churns. At 12.37 p.m., the explosives were detonated, bringing down much of the building's southern corner, in which the British offices were situated. Amid billowing smoke, the screams of terrified people diving down side streets, police whistles and the wails of bending, crashing girders, Docherty's training - 'all three months of it' - kicked in.

Without conscious thought, he found shelter from the flying debris and established communication with fellow troops. Then, having been stationed on the opposite side of the building to the damage, he was dispatched to the south side. There he was faced with scenes to which no human ever expects to be exposed. 'Carnage, much of it human, of the most unimaginable sort,' was how he described it. One witness recalled, at the moment of detonation, 'bodies falling down off the road and winging through the air'. A YMCA building across the road bore, at third-storey height, a gruesome bloodstain where a man had been blown 150 yards into the side of the building. A young typist had her face ripped off her skull and flung into the road, where it landed, still fully recognisable.

Docherty has always chosen not to describe in detail the bloodbath confronting him, but author Thurston Clarke, who spoke to numerous witnesses for his book *By Blood and Fire*,