

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Celtic: The Lisbon Lions

Andy Dougan

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ABOUT THE BOOK

'Our objective is always to try to win with style.' Celtic manager, Jock Stein. 40 years ago Celtic entered the European Cup for the first time. They made history simply by becoming the first British team to ever reach the final, let alone win it. The 1967 European Cup final remains one of the golden moments of British football history.

A crowd of 77,000 thronged the stadium. Inter Milan was one of the richest, most feared teams in the world and their defensive strategy had been unbeaten all tournament. Celtic were 11 men, all born within 20 miles of Glasgow who had joined a struggling team and fought their way up the League just to reach the European Cup. The odds seemed hopeless.

But Celtic had two weapons; their legendary manager, Jock Stein, who revolutionised the game of football through his positive playing techniques, and their unflagging self-belief. Andy Dougan, life-long Celtic fan, takes us on the thrilling journey with Celtic as, round by round, the team's passion, inventiveness, and above all style brings them to the biggest game in their club's history. A timeless story of inspiration, determination and love of the game.

CELTIC: THE LISBON LIONS

Andy Dougan



AUTHOR'S NOTE

ANYONE WHO FELT so inclined could have seized complete control of Glasgow on the evening of 25 May 1967. For two hours - from around 5.15, until 7.15 - the city was completely deserted. A few moments after 7.15, the city felt like VE Day, New Year's Eve and the party round at your house the night you win the lottery, all rolled into one.

Only one thing could unite a city like Glasgow, no matter how briefly - football. Some 2000 miles away Glasgow Celtic were in the final of the European Cup. Not only were they in the final, but they had won it crushing the might of Inter Milan in the process. It was a great moment to be alive and to be a Celtic supporter. It was the night the Lisbon Lions were born.

There are two dates which every Glaswegian child of the sixties remembers. The first is 22 November 1963 when the city's huge Irish-Catholic community felt the death of John Kennedy almost as keenly as they did across the Atlantic. The second is 25 May 1967 when the city was united behind a team of young men, all of them born within 30 miles of each other, who were going out to show the world how football should be played.

I remember exactly what I was doing on both those days, but I suspect the Celtic game will live with me longer. It was a defining moment of my childhood, as it was for so many others. It was the first time that I realised why - even though I had never heard the phrase at that time - football is called 'The Beautiful Game'.

The Lisbon Lions were simply breathtaking. It was 40 years ago this year. This is the story of their adventure - a football fairy tale.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY IN THE evening of 25 May 1967, Billy McNeill made footballing history in Portugal. He was captain of a Glasgow Celtic side which had just beaten Inter Milan – the pride of Italy – in the European Cup final at the National Stadium in Lisbon. The Italians were such hot favourites you could scarcely find an Italian bookmaker who would take a bet. Celtic were a local team barely fit to lace the boots of the Italian maestros, so the argument went. Yet it was McNeill, and not his opposite number Giacinto Facchetti, who was the triumphant captain. Celtic beat Inter 2-1 and became the first British side to win the coveted trophy. They were also the first northern European side to win, ending eleven years of dominance by Spain, Portugal and Italy.

His fellow Celtic players called McNeill 'Caesar'. The nickname has its origins in the 1960 movie *Ocean's Eleven* which so impressed some of the young Celtic players that they formed their own Parkhead 'rat-pack'. McNeill was the only one with a car, and he was nicknamed after the character played by Cesar Romero, who did all the driving in the film. But, that day in Lisbon, his nickname took on more imperial connotations. His face a mask of confusion, disbelief and elation, sweat matting his hair to his forehead, he looked every inch the conquering hero as he lifted the trophy over his head.

He was the first British captain to get his hands on the world's leading club trophy. This moment of triumph completed an incredible journey for the then 27-year-old footballer. McNeill unashamedly talks about the 'fairy tale' which surrounds Celtic, but this was not a happy ending. This was only the beginning of the most remarkable period in the club's history, a period in which they would achieve

an unprecedented domination of British football, as well as becoming one of the most feared footballing sides in the world.

The men who re-wrote the record books one afternoon in Lisbon became known as the Lisbon Lions. They were a carefree, happy-go-lucky bunch of young men whose adventurous and cavalier approach to their play swept away a style of football which threatened to choke the life out of 'The Beautiful Game'. But it was not all style without substance. They also contained some of the hardest players ever to set foot on the field, and a great many sides would discover that you crossed these men at your peril. They were mainly forged in the adversity and poverty of the Lanarkshire coalfields and the Glasgow housing estates, and they were magnificent in their pomp.

They owed their allegiance to two things. The first was to their club; these men lived and died for Celtic. The second was to their manager. Jock Stein was a man whose tactical reading and mastery of the game was second to none. He was the man who made the difference and the man who bullied, threatened, cajoled and nurtured eleven supremely talented players into the best club side in Europe, and possibly the world.

Like great plays, great films and great books, great football teams are not created overnight. Although Celtic took the footballing world by storm in 1967, their *annus mirabilis* was the culmination of a process which had begun more than ten years previously.

Celtic and Rangers - the 'Old Firm' of Scottish football - have dominated the game in Scotland almost since a ball was first kicked in anger. They have see-sawed in their pre-eminence - they are seldom great at the same time - but together they have left every other club in Scotland choking on their dust. Fans of both sides will tell you there is no greater club game than the Old Firm derbies. This is not true. There may well be no greater rivalry - although fans of

the rival teams in Manchester, Liverpool, Milan and Madrid would probably argue their case with some justification – but to be depressingly frank, the sectarian element of the enmity between the two sets of Glasgow supporters probably does give an Old Firm derby the edge over any other game in terms of sheer animal passion. That apart, the truth is that games between Celtic and Rangers are fierce, competitive and occasionally brutal, but rarely do they provide classic football.

The traditional New Year encounter in 1956 was one such game. Rangers won 1-0, but the game is only significant now for an injury to Jock Stein who was then the Celtic centre half and captain. Stein had been troubled by an ankle injury which he had picked up at the start of the season, but the recurrence of the injury in the Old Firm game was to effectively finish his career as a player. Despite a determined battle, he would play only three times more for Celtic and, after taking the advice of a Harley Street specialist, he was forced to hang up his boots at the end of the season.

Jock Stein was born in Burnbank, near the Lanarkshire town of Hamilton, on 5 October 1922. He was born ‘John’ and remained so in his youth, but by the time he started playing football, the Sunday name was reserved for close friends and family. Burnbank was a close-knit mining community, and like almost all of his contemporaries, Jock Stein’s future was mapped out for him with numbing clarity. He would finish school at fourteen and go down the pit. Although Stein is remembered now as a great bear of a man, at that time his youth and his hard work meant that he was as lean as a whip. He toiled in the pits but, unlike others, he had been provided with an escape route through football. He played at amateur and juvenile level and briefly for one of Scotland’s most famous junior football sides, Blantyre Victoria. The turning point for Stein came not long after his 21st birthday. It was 1942, and although football

was continuing, it was badly hit by the Second World War. As a miner, Stein was exempt from military service and, with his junior football experience, he was invited for a trial with Albion Rovers. The Lanarkshire side were in desperate straits because wartime reorganisation had left them as a Second Division side well out of their depth in a reorganised First Division.

'They were then as they are now, everybody's chopping block,' says respected sports journalist and broadcaster Bob Crampsey. Stein had three trials at centre half - the first, ironically, in a surprisingly creditable 4-4 draw with Celtic - and eventually signed for the Coatbridge club. Crampsey, a Stein biographer, believes that as a player Stein was much better than many people - including the player himself - gave him credit for.

'I saw him play quite a lot, and I can honestly say that I am one of the few people now who did see Jock Stein play a lot,' says Crampsey. 'When I first noticed him playing for Albion Rovers, the thing that struck me about him was that he was a great trier on behalf of a lost cause. Even a Martian going to a game and watching Albion Rovers for ten minutes would have worked that out. I think, though, that it was useful for him to have been with Albion Rovers because it gave him a genuine sympathy for smaller clubs. I don't think this was an assumed sympathy; I think there was a genuine fondness and understanding of the plight of the small side.'

Stein is generally regarded as one of the best signings Albion Rovers ever made and, lost cause or not, it was largely through his commanding presence on the field that Rovers won one of their rare honours when they were promoted from the Scottish Second Division in 1948. Then, as now, money was tight at Cliftonhill, and Stein found himself, not long afterwards, in an argument about wages. Throughout his career, Stein was a great believer that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and he was always

determined to make sure that he got what he believed he was entitled to. When it was not forthcoming Stein was determined to move on. His next destination was a bizarre one.

Stein answered a newspaper ad placed by the Welsh non-League club Llanelli. The advertisement said that they were looking for 'players of proven ability. Transfer fees no detriment, only top players need apply.'

Having just had one row about money and possibly foreseeing more on the way, Stein signed for the Welsh club in a move which must have been inspired by financial reasons more than any serious career ambition. They were offering him £12 a week - twice what he was getting at Albion Rovers - and the chance of making a full-time living from football. So Stein duly headed for South Wales, leaving his wife and daughter at home in Hamilton.

'Non-League football in Wales really was the elephants' graveyard,' recalls Bob Crampsey. 'I think he was always grateful to Celtic for bringing him back from Llanelli. The chap who did that and clearly remembered him playing for Albion Rovers was called Jimmy Gribben. As Stein became more and more successful for Celtic, the chairman, Bob Kelly, used to remember more and more about him, but it was really Gribben who should get the credit.'

Celtic were in dire straits at the end of 1951. The club was in the middle of an injury crisis, and it was indeed reserve-team trainer Jimmy Gribben who suggested Stein as a possible replacement who might tide them over. Stein at that time was so unhappy in South Wales - possibly due to homesickness as much as anything else - that he would have signed for anyone to get the chance to go back home. Stein was duly signed for a fee of £1200 and made his debut against St Mirren on 8 December 1951 in a game which Celtic won 2-1.

'Jock Stein wasn't really bought to play first-team football,' explains Bob Crampsey. 'He was bought, at the time, as a

useful second-eleven player and maybe someone who could teach the youngsters a thing or two.'

All the best stories require an element of luck, and providence took a hand almost as soon as Stein arrived at Celtic Park. The one thing which the Celtic side was actually overburdened with at that time was centre halves. There were three in the queue ahead of Stein, hence the feeling that he had only been bought to bring on the youngsters. However, first-choice centre half Jimmy Mallan quickly aggravated a groin strain; Alec Boden injured his back; and Johnny McGrory was still recovering from a cartilage problem. Stein was barely in the door when this spate of injuries to the defence forced manager Jimmy McGrory to turn to his new signing. Stein seized the opportunity with both hands. Once he was in the side, he made the place his own and was never out again except through injury.

Fate once again took a hand to cement his place in the side. In those days the club captain was able to name his vice-captain and, by extension, his successor. The captain at that time was Sean Fallon, who had nominated Stein as his number two ahead of men like Bertie Peacock and Bobby Evans, who might have seemed more obvious choices. Just before the Christmas of 1952 Fallon broke his arm and was sidelined, so the captaincy then passed to Stein. Fallon plainly saw something in Stein which no-one else had at the stage when he nominated him. Fallon was one of the club's greatest servants, but he yielded to no-one in his admiration for Stein and, in later years, would set aside his own ambition to allow Stein to take over the managerial reins.

But together they formed a great partnership which was responsible for establishing the club's reputation. With the added authority and responsibility of the captaincy, Stein immediately set about stamping his mark on the Celtic side. He read the game superbly and organised his defence magnificently. In the space of three years he led them to a

Coronation Cup win and a League and Cup double, as well as victories in the Glasgow Cup and the Charity Cup.

In football terms Jock Stein died a warrior's death. He collapsed at the track side with a massive heart attack during a World Cup qualifier between Scotland and Wales, at Ninian Park in Cardiff, on 10 September 1985. As Scotland manager, he had just sent on Davie Cooper, who scored the goal which gave Scotland the point they needed to be almost certain of qualifying for the World Cup finals the following year. Stein died 30 minutes later. One of the last interviews he gave before his death was an extended two-hour chat on stage with Crampsey. The occasion was part of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Dunfermline Athletic, a club which Stein had managed and injected with a renewed sense of self-belief, making the club a significant force in Scottish football in the sixties.

'He had been very friendly with Dunfermline, and he genuinely believed the club had done a lot for him,' explains Crampsey. 'It was a very relaxed discursive sort of interview, and at one point I said to him: "How would you describe yourself as a player?" He laughed, and then said: "A very average player". But he was better than that. He could pass that lunatic test that footballers impose on their managers. That ritual of "Show us your medals", which is the footballing equivalent of "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" He was good enough to have won a League Championship medal, a Scottish Cup medal, a Coronation Cup medal, and one Scottish League cap against the Football League. That's just about enough to shut up the boys in the dressing room.

'He was never a player about whom you would have said, "This man must play for Scotland." He was never even a semi-automatic pick; he was never in that category. But he worked very hard at his game. He was a good player and very good at utilising his own perceived weaknesses, such as a lack of pace, and being a bit one-sided.'

Despite his own assessment of his game, there is no doubt that the loss of Stein to injury at the end of 1956 was a devastating blow to Celtic. The half-back trinity of Bobby Evans, Jock Stein and Bertie Peacock was one of the finest the club has produced. The then manager, Jimmy McGrory, described Stein's injury in the Old Firm game as the turning point of Celtic's season. However, the Celtic side that Stein left was very quickly approaching its sell-by date. He himself was 35, and others, like Charlie Tully, Bertie Peacock and Bobby Evans, were also on their way out. As a counter measure to their ageing first team - who would incidentally have a glorious last hurrah by massacring Rangers 7-1 in the 1957 League Cup final - the club was setting great store by its youth policy. Critics maintained that it was simply a way for the side to avoid paying transfer fees, but chairman Robert Kelly insisted this was the way forward. They were known as 'the Kelly Kids' and the chairman believed they showed promise. However, they needed guidance; an old head who could settle them down and help them mature as players. Stein was the natural choice. He took over in the summer of 1957, and his brief was to take the youngsters from the school and juvenile ranks under his wing. In the club AGM of September 1957, an obviously delighted Kelly remarked that: 'The misfortune to Jock Stein has in a certain way been good fortune for us. Jock Stein is the ideal person to take on these boys and create a training school which could easily be the nucleus of our teams of the future.'

Stein took to his new task with relish and plainly enjoyed working with the youngsters. They were equally enamoured of him. Here was a man who was prepared to sit and talk with them and explain the game to them. Players never saw the notional manager, Jimmy McGrory, from Saturday to Saturday, unless it was in exceptional circumstances. In that respect Stein was a breath of fresh air which invigorated these young men. Perhaps he saw in them the nucleus of future Celtic sides which Kelly had spoken of. Whatever the

reason, he was delighted to be working with young men who shared his enthusiasm, and whose talents he could harness. He was determined that if he was to do his job of bringing them on, then they would need improved facilities. One of his first moves was to persuade the club to buy a proper training ground and, under his prompting, Celtic acquired Barrowfield, which still serves as their training facility.

Stein was a forward-thinker, and he may well have seen, even then, that there was every chance that he would one day manage the club. He ran the reserves and the schoolboys his own way, resisting any interference from either Jimmy McGrory or the board. These youngsters could be the basis of his future at Celtic. If that was to be the case, then they would need someone to lead them on the pitch, as he would lead them from behind the scenes. Every great side needs an inspirational leader, and Stein believed he had found his.

Celtic Park had been used as the venue for a Scottish schoolboys' international in 1957, and one player in particular caught Stein's eye. Whether Stein knew it or not - and given his astonishing depth of knowledge of the game, it is unlikely that he did not - other clubs like Arsenal and Manchester United also had their eye on the player. Stein moved first. He had words with Kelly and McGrory. They already knew of the player because one of their Lanarkshire scouts, Eddie McArdle, had been recommending the young man for some time. Stein's endorsement tipped the scales, and so in 1957 at the age of seventeen Billy McNeill signed for Celtic as a part-timer.

The fairy tale had begun.

CHAPTER 2

BILLY MCNEILL IS the most successful captain in Celtic's history. His long career has been studded with national and international honours. He is, without doubt, in the hearts and minds of the Celtic faithful, 'the greatest living Celt'. He was an outstanding defender, a superb captain for club and country, and a marvellous ambassador for Scottish football. Once, on a European trip to France, the French hosts issued a gracious welcome to the Celtic side at a civic reception. After a moment, McNeill stood and issued an equally gracious reply in French. He is intelligent, articulate, and a deep thinker about the game. He has also been a successful manager at the highest level, including two spells at Parkhead. In short, he is a natural leader, and it is those qualities, more than anything else, which Jock Stein doubtless spotted when he saw the seventeen-year-old McNeill in that schoolboy game.

'I wouldn't have been at Parkhead if it wasn't for Jock Stein,' says McNeill, without equivocation. 'Jock Stein was impressed at that game, and it was basically his influence that brought me to Celtic Park. If it had not been for him, then I would have gone down south to either Arsenal or Manchester United. I had just sat my Highers, and there had been all sorts of offers - including some from other Scottish clubs - but my father never wanted me to do anything until I was absolutely sure about it. But Big Jock came out to the house with a man called Eddie McCardle who was a former provost of Motherwell, and did a wee bit of scouting. Eddie had been at the powers that be at Celtic to sign me for long and weary, but it wasn't until Big Jock saw me playing that it became a reality.'

McNeill kept on the day job after he had signed for Celtic and worked in a very understanding firm of insurance brokers who accommodated his requests for time off. It was obvious right from the start that there was an affinity between Stein and McNeill. For one thing, they both shared a position: they were both centre halves. But there was another, deeper bond – they were both from Lanarkshire. For all that it is located midway between, but still close to, the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, that buffer-zone status produces a unique insularity about people from Lanarkshire. Their coalfield provided the raw material for Scotland's once vital manufacturing base, and there is a fierce shared pride and determination about their local identity. Although it is no more than 25 miles from Glasgow or Edinburgh, Lanarkshire is virtually a subculture founded on the twin virtues of hard labour and an innate sense of working-class fairness.

'With the possible exception of Sean Connery or Jackie Stewart, Jock Stein was probably the best-known Scotsman in the world,' argues Bob Crampsey. 'But he was really more than a Scotsman, he was a Lanarkshire man. He laughed when I told him once that one of the things that that entails is that he gets homesick going through the traffic lights at Baillieston, on the Glasgow boundary.'

Billy McNeill, too, believed that their shared geographical bond contributed to their working relationship. When Stein took over the Celtic reserves he was still living in Hamilton, while McNeill was nearby in Motherwell.

'Perhaps it was because he came from Lanarkshire,' McNeill concedes, 'or maybe, now, it just seems like that. There were three centre halves signed in the same year. There was me, a lad called George Gunn, and another lad called John Curran. But Big Jock, being a Lanarkshire man like myself, obviously had a big influence on me. He was the first one who took me and showed an interest in me – and

not just me, but lots of the other lads who were there at the time.'

Travelling to Celtic Park, a couple of evenings a week, was a long and tedious journey for McNeill and his Lanarkshire cohort. After training, they would brave the winter chill or the driving rain for the long walk from Celtic Park up to the end of Tollcross Road to wait for their bus. The route on the twenty-mile trip back home was hardly what you would call scenic. But then fortune favoured McNeill - one of the first of the many times it would smile on him in a distinguished career.

'Celtic eventually got Jock a car,' recalls McNeill. 'Where we were fortunate was that, being from Lanarkshire, Jock used to give us a lift home after training. He used to take me, John Clark and Jim Conway, and drop us off at various stages along the route.'

During those car journeys, McNeill and his young cohorts learned huge amounts about the art of football, from one of the masters of the arcane craft. It is easy to dismiss Stein as a typical big man who had fallen into management by dint of having a career prematurely ended by injury. Anyone who did - and there were several Continental managers who did - were given a short, sharp reality check when they faced his Celtic side. Playing at centre half throughout his career had given Stein an unrivalled opportunity to read a game, to judge the ebb and flow of its playing patterns, and to acquire a tactical awareness and an intelligence which belied his bulk. And although many of the practices at Celtic Park in those days were archaic, there were others which were, with hindsight, astonishingly forward-thinking. Celtic officials, for example, were encouraged to go to England to watch the major European sides, who were frequent visitors for club and international friendlies. It was these high-profile club games which ultimately led to the foundation of the European Cup. This meant Stein saw at first-hand the magnificent Hungarian side which tore England apart at

Wembley in 1953. He also saw, at first-hand, the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland, in which all of the British teams were thoroughly humiliated. Stein saw all of this, absorbed it, learned from it, and was now passing it on to his young charges on their journey home to Lanarkshire in his car. No-one, incidentally, was happier to see that car than McNeill, Clark and Conway.

‘Before he got the car, Jock had to get the Lanarkshire bus as well,’ McNeill remembers. ‘If our bus came first, it was no go for us, we had to wait with him. His bus went by a different route, and his had to come first or we had to wait. But he was terrific with us, and the experience of those early days sort of set the standard for what to expect when he came back as manager.’

Glasgow Celtic Football and Athletic Club, to use its full and rather romantic title, has its origins in the crippling poverty of the East End of Glasgow in the late nineteenth century. The man largely responsible for the formation of the club was Brother Walfrid, the head teacher of the local Sacred Heart school. A sincere and good-hearted man, he saw his responsibilities as extending to more than simply providing spiritual platitudes for people who had neither food on their tables nor clothes on their backs and were singularly missing the means to remedy either situation. The club was formed as the very embodiment of muscular Christianity to provide a way of raising money for the poor of the East End. It was also intended to give the large Catholic community a sense of identity by giving them a team to rally round, much as the Irish community in Edinburgh had been doing with Hibernian. It was the Hibernian secretary John McFadden who suggested that a similar club be set up in the West of Scotland. Celtic duly and officially came into existence when they played their first game – against Rangers of all sides – on 28 May 1888. It was a friendly match in both name and spirit, since the sectarian aspect, which would taint future games, had not

yet emerged. Celtic won 5-2, playing the kind of stylish football which has become their hallmark through the years.

The young reserve side which Stein took over in 1957 were the inheritors of a proud legacy. They included not only McNeill and Clark but others who would become first-team regulars in their time, like Frank Haffey, Pat Crerand and John Divers. But in the three years that he was in charge, he would also influence the careers of Steve Chalmers, Bertie Auld and John Hughes, who would all come under his guidance at one time or another. Five of those men would play crucial roles in the 1967 European campaign. Those who joined the club just after Stein had moved on for a legitimate taste of first-team management with Dunfermline, included Tommy Gemmell, Bobby Lennox, Bobby Murdoch and Jimmy Johnstone. Although they would not be directly influenced by Stein first time round, they would benefit from the systems he had left in place.

One other thing from which those in Stein's charge benefited was a winning habit. He proved enormously successful with the youngsters who won the second-eleven Cup in 1958, beating Rangers 8-2 on aggregate. They also won the reserve League title. On top of all this, the fans were starting to notice the difference.

'In those days Celtic used to play their reserve games on a Friday night,' recalls John McCabe, a Glasgow schoolteacher who has been watching Celtic for more than 40 years. 'A friend and I used to go along occasionally, and you could see what Stein was doing with them. You could see that they had a plan. You could see that they were playing as a team and that there were tactics at work there. He was very, very good with these young players.'

The idea behind a youth policy is to nurture young talent and provide it with a protected and protective environment in which to grow. Alex Ferguson's almost obsessive cosseting of young players like Ryan Giggs and David Beckham at Manchester United is a textbook example.

Doubtless that was Robert Kelly's thinking at Celtic, too, but it wasn't working out that way in practice. Even by their own recent low standards season 1959-60 was a dismal one for Celtic. They had failed to qualify from their League Cup section, they averaged less than a point a game in the League, they lost to Rangers in the Scottish Cup semi-final, and they came within six minutes of being beaten by non-League Elgin City.

The Kelly Kids, the alleged jewels in the crown of Celtic's future, were being used like cannon fodder. John Hughes, who had signed in 1959 as a 16-year-old, played 34 games in the 60-61 season and 43 the following year as a raw 18-year-old. McNeill had been playing regularly since making his debut in the 58-59 season. Other young players like Chalmers, Auld and Charlie Gallagher, were also being thrown into the breach in a desperate attempt to get some kind of success. The fact is that the club was in the middle of a run which would see them go eight years without winning a major trophy.

In the midst of all this, Celtic also managed to part company with the man who, even without the benefit of hindsight, was their best hope for the future. Stein's reserve side was winning trophies regularly, and it now seems glaringly obvious that since a lot of the youngsters he had worked with in the reserves were now in the first team, it would make sense to promote Stein. The moribund Celtic board, like their predecessors and successors, were never ones for doing the obvious. Instead, they persevered with the amiable and well-liked, but largely ineffectual, Jimmy McGrory.

Stein, meanwhile, had been talking to chairman Bob Kelly about his future. No matter who was in the manager's chair, no-one should be under the impression that anyone but Kelly ran Celtic at that time. His self-appointed responsibilities were awesome, and he claimed a dynastic right to virtually run every aspect of the club, even to the

point of changing McGrory's team selection on an *ad hoc* basis. In an interview with the BBC some years later, Stein would reveal the gist of their conversation. One popular view among Celtic fans was that the club was looking to farm Stein out to another side to get a little managerial seasoning before bringing him back into the fold. That certainly doesn't appear to be Stein's recollection.

He told the BBC that, as far as Kelly was concerned, he had probably gone as far as he could at Celtic. There was a perception that, with the addition of Sean Fallon to the coaching staff, Stein's promotion chances had slipped somewhat. There was also another more sinister inference which Stein drew from his conversation with Kelly. Stein was a non-Catholic and Celtic, whose origins lie in a Catholic religious order, had never had a manager, or a board member, for that matter, who was not a Catholic.

'I was a non-Catholic,' Stein told the BBC, 'and maybe they felt that I wouldn't achieve the job as manager. But I moved out to try and prove that I could be a manager.'

Dunfermline Athletic were struggling against the prospect of relegation in 1960. Their board, which was plainly more forward-thinking than their counterparts at Celtic Park, saw Stein as their salvation and made an approach for his services as manager. Celtic tried to hold on to him by offering an extra £250 a year - the average working wage was less than £500 a year at this time - but Stein was adamant that he wanted the chance to manage his own side. He also asked that he be allowed to leave immediately to try to save Dunfermline from the drop. His players were distraught and despaired for their future if Stein was allowed to leave. But after their initial offer, Celtic did not stand in his way. Stein had been approached by Dunfermline on Sunday, 13 March 1960. The following Saturday he was in charge as manager for the first time. Ironically, they were playing Celtic, and the revitalised Dunfermline won 3-2 to

begin a run of games which would see them successfully steer clear of relegation.

Having avoided the drop down to the old Second Division in his first season, Stein continued to thrive at Dunfermline. He took a provincial side and instilled in it a self-belief based on the basics of good football. One of their most significant results of his tenure was a Scottish Cup win in 1961. Again, Celtic provided the opposition for another managerial triumph. Celtic were fancied to win, but Stein organised his side superbly, and his goalkeeper Dennis Connaghan had the game of his life. The first game finished 0-0 and more than 115,000 spectators were at Hampden for the replay. Stein had made a couple of tactical changes from the first game, but, once again, Connaghan was in inspirational form. At the other end Frank Haffey was in goal for Celtic. Haffey had recently had the misfortune to be in goal for Scotland when they were hammered 9-3 by England. Another of his Celtic team-mates - Billy McNeill - made his international debut against England that day, but McNeill had an outstanding game and was one of the few Scottish players to emerge with any credit.

Although he was now playing in a Scottish Cup final replay, the England debacle had affected Haffey, and it clearly still preyed on his mind. Dunfermline had already gone a goal up, but Haffey gifted them the game two minutes from time, by dropping the ball at the feet of Dickson who duly stuck it in the net. After his triumphs with Dunfermline, Stein then moved to Hibs, briefly, where his knack of winning trophies continued to flourish with a win in the now-forgotten Summer Cup, before the start of the 64-65 season. Celtic, for their part, continued to struggle, losing another Cup final, this time to Rangers. It was plain that something would have to be done and soon.

'Celtic, before 1965, were a shambles,' says Bob Crampsey. 'They would do things like win the first leg of a semi-final in the old Fairs Cup 3-0 here, and then go to

Budapest and lose the away tie 4-0. They were going nowhere.'

Joe Connelly had seen Celtic play for the first time back in 1939 when he was a boy of seven. He genuinely despaired of them winning anything in those days. 'They were terrible,' he says simply. 'Nobody knew what they were doing, and Bob Kelly had far too much of a say in things. I think he was a straight man and an honest man, but he knew nothing about picking a football team.

'I remember when I was still a boy at school, and I'd come in from the match, and my mother would say: "How did they get on, Joe?" I'd tell her: "Ma, we were all over them; we did this, we did that, we were great. We hit the post, we had penalties denied." Then she would say: "What was the score, Joe?" And I would say: "Rangers won 4-0." She said: "Joe, son, I think you're going off your head."' "

If he was, then Joe Connelly wouldn't have been the only one. The disaffection which was being voiced privately in the boardroom, and publicly among the fans, was also spreading to the players. Even the lion-hearted McNeill was looking to his future and considering his options after Stein had been allowed to leave. Pat Crerand, the immensely gifted midfielder who had signed on the same day as McNeill, had already been transferred to Manchester United. That was in 1963, but it looked like McNeill would be following him south.

'I was twenty-five, and all of a sudden my career didn't seem to be heading any which way,' says McNeill, who by this time had the pressure of a wife and family to provide for, and a mortgage to pay. 'Celtic as a club were not being given any direction. To be quite honest I would probably have joined the drift of people away from the club. Celtic were heading nowhere. We had a whole lot of talented kids who had now got that bit older, but still didn't seem to be going anywhere.'

By 1965, Celtic had had only three managers in the club's history. After the formation of the club in 1888, Willie Maley was appointed the first manager in 1897. He was succeeded by Jimmy McStay in 1940, and then Jimmy McGrory took over in 1945. McGrory was one of the best-loved players ever to pull on a Celtic jersey. As a centre forward he set, and continues to hold, all of the club's goal-scoring records. His job as a manager appears to have been largely titular. The autocratic chairman Robert Kelly picked the team and also had a large say in the tactics. McGrory was simply a figurehead. He was, however, revered by players and fans alike - even now Billy McNeill still refers to him as 'Mr McGrory' as a mark of respect - and if change were needed, then in his case it would have to be change with dignity.

The pressure for change was growing and, as is often the case at Celtic, it began with the fans. They could not help but notice how well Dunfermline and Hibs had done under Stein's stewardship, and how poorly their own side was doing. They started to talk and chant openly about bringing Stein back to Celtic Park. After starting 1965 with three defeats, one of them against Rangers in the New Year's Day game, Celtic held an emergency board meeting. Stein had kept in regular touch with Kelly who, despite his own doubts about the suitability of the manager's religion, must have at least begun to see that he had made an awful mistake. Kelly was never one to admit his mistakes, but Stein tipped the scales when he let it be known that he was considering moving to England following tentative approaches from Wolves. Kelly spoke to the board and, after that emergency session, he was given permission to approach Stein. Naturally, Stein was more than receptive to the idea, but he was now also negotiating from a position of strength. He had managed two First Division teams without any of the sort of boardroom interference which had been the hallmark of the Celtic administration. If he was coming back, then he would want things done his way, or not at all.

However, the board were keen, and rightly so, to spare the feelings of Sean Fallon who was then McGrory's assistant. Although McGrory was the nominal manager, Fallon was the *de facto* manager, and his contribution to Celtic should not be overlooked. He was the one who was ultimately responsible for the signing of many of the players who would provide the club with its greatest success. Quietly spoken, and diffident to the point of shyness, in public, Fallon appears to have had no taste for the high-profile job of being a football manager. He and Stein met to discuss the situation, and Fallon assured the board that he would have no problem working with the man he had, after all, nominated to succeed him as club captain. Accordingly, a formula was worked out whereby it could be announced that Stein would be manager, but McGrory would take on the newly created post of public relations officer. Sean Fallon would stay on as Stein's assistant. The announcement of Stein's arrival was made in January of 1965, but he had been given dispensation by Kelly to remain at Hibs who had an outside chance of winning the League. He eventually took over at Celtic Park on 9 March.

The change from McGrory to Stein had immediate effects, and the first to feel the effects were the players. 'Mr McGrory was an old-style manager,' explains Billy McNeill, who by 1965 was team captain. He had taken over from Duncan MacKay at the start of the 1963-64 season. 'He had a trainer who did all the training, and Mr McGrory might come in and talk to you about the team. The training was different, too. There was a theory when I first went to Celtic Park that if you didn't see the ball all week it made you hungrier for it on the Saturday. That might well have been the case, but I used to think that you might well have been hungry for it but, if you hadn't seen it all week, you wouldn't know what to do with it. Big Jock changed all that. Obviously, there was still a lot of running; you can't

eliminate that entirely, but it was done with a ball as much as possible.

‘Mr McGrory was a lovely man, a real gentleman, but he was an old-style manager, and in his place we had this new modern image. I can’t remember ever seeing Mr McGrory in a tracksuit, but it’s hard to think of Big Jock out of one.’

The one other major change of the Stein regime was that the team manager now picked the team. Robert Kelly may not have liked it, and indeed there is every sign that he did not, at least to begin with, but the club was in such a state of crisis he could hardly object.

‘I think when Jock came, it was going to be his team that played, and not part of a team with somebody else’s influence over it,’ continues McNeill. ‘That was very important to him, and I think Celtic realised that they had to do something dramatic. They accepted that, and from then on, it was just Jock Stein and us, the players. Directors didn’t matter. Directors were just people who turned up at games and sat in a different seat from you. We were never really involved with them in any shape or form. Jock was the man you were involved with on a day-to-day basis.’

The last Celtic side in the pre-Stein era was the one which turned out against Aberdeen at Celtic Park on 30 January 1965, the day before it was announced that he would be rejoining the club as manager. John Hughes scored five goals, and Murdoch, Lennox and Auld scored one each as Aberdeen were hammered 8-0.

It is worth remembering that seven of that side would play and win in Lisbon two and a half years later. Three of the other members of the European Cup winning side - Simpson, Craig and Johnstone - were already on the Parkhead staff, but not playing that day.

Whether he knew it or not, Jock Stein had been given the tools to finish the job.

CHAPTER 3

BILLY MCNEILL'S DELIGHT at Jock Stein's return to Parkhead is a well-documented part of the club's folklore. McNeill predicted to anyone who would listen to him that they would see some big changes.

Team-mate John Divers recalls McNeill announcing, when he heard the news, 'Oh, that's fantastic. Wait and see how things change now.' It's reasonable to assume, football dressing rooms being what they are, that McNeill, perhaps, phrased his observation more robustly. But he was right, of course; change was on the way. Not just on the training field, but in the dressing room, the board room and, more importantly for the players and fans, the trophy room. Within six weeks of Jock Stein arriving at Parkhead as manager, Celtic had ended their eight-year trophy drought. They won the Scottish Cup for the first time in eleven years and began an unprecedented run of success.

McNeill and Stein had kept in touch in the five years since Stein had left the post of reserve-team manager at Parkhead. When he heard that Stein was coming back, his first reaction was to go to a phone and call him. Another member of the Parkhead squad wasn't quite so enthusiastic. Goalkeeper Ronnie Simpson had been snapped up from Hibs by Sean Fallon. He had been about to go to Berwick Rangers as player-manager when Fallon moved in and signed him from the Edinburgh club, who were then managed by Stein. The thinking by Celtic fans, especially those given to conspiracy theories, was that Stein had deliberately sold Simpson to Celtic as a sort of secret weapon, secure in the knowledge that he would soon be moving there. Stein's biographer, Bob Crampsey, suggests that this is so much

nonsense. Having been sold once by Stein, Simpson fully expected to be on the transfer list again.

‘Stein didn’t shed any tears over losing Ronnie Simpson,’ says Crampsey emphatically. ‘Ronnie would tell you that himself. In fact Ronnie’s own reaction, when he heard the news of Stein’s impending arrival at Celtic Park, on television, was to shout through from the dining room to the kitchen, “Pack your bags, Jean, we’re on the move again.”’

Napoleon preferred his generals to be lucky above all else. Football chairmen prize the same virtue, equally highly. Successful football managers, like successful generals, often need luck more than skill, and Stein had indeed been lucky up till now, if only for being in the right place at the right time. According to Crampsey, who had been a promising goalkeeper himself, and was, in fact, Simpson’s deputy in the Glasgow Schools side, Ronnie Simpson was one of Stein’s biggest slices of luck.

Simpson was known to one and all at Celtic Park as ‘Faither’ in deference to his advanced years – he was 35 when he signed. He had had a remarkable career, and not just in terms of its longevity. He had played for Great Britain four times as an amateur, and had played twice in the 1948 Olympic Games. His club sides included Queen’s Park, Third Lanark, Newcastle – in the same side as the great Jackie Milburn – Hibs, and now Celtic. He was a remarkably agile keeper possessed of great powers of concentration. He could be called upon to perform great saves after long periods of inactivity, a gift which would be a prerequisite of Celtic goalkeepers under Stein’s managership.

‘Stein had only one weakness, and that was that he was a very poor judge of goalkeepers,’ argues Crampsey. ‘Simpson was an accident. Who did he sign that was any good? Stein would sign people like Livingstone, who was a reserve goalkeeper for four years, and who never played. He signed people like Evan Williams and Alastair Hunter who were never quite there. Dennis Connaghan was probably about