Introduction

The following was a contribution made in October 2012 to a publication by Edinburgh University Press called “Bigotry, Football and Scotland”. Slightly amended, it contains points and ideas, most of which, three and a half years later, perhaps needs a wider social media airing given matters of trust and integrity have deteriorated since 2012.

This version was prompted by an article by the Clumpany

https://theclumpany.wordpress.com/2016/07/22/the-hate-game/

who himself was commenting on a Tweet by Keith Jackson (Daily Record) that suggested those making the case on social media for a return to integrity were driven by hatred. I thought what was said in 2012 is as much if not truer today and might act as a reminder of what needs to be done by the named main stakeholders in Scottish football to restore the integrity of and trust in the governance of Scottish football.

Sectarianism Sells – or Does It? A Celtic Supporter’s View

Auldheid

Introduction

I was flattered to be invited to provide a chapter for this collection of views on football, bigotry and Scotland. I am no academic and my only public literary experience is the occasional article since 2008 on online Celtic forums and blogs on issues affecting Celtic FC and Scottish football. However, it is in writing those articles and reading others, coming from what I believe is a well-educated and articulate support base, that I have formed a view of what the relevant issues and concerns around sectarianism and Scottish Football are and developed my thoughts on where it might all lead on both the football and social front. I will begin with my conclusions on sectarianism in our game gained through my own eyes and experience of life and of being a Celtic supporter and I will describe how I reached them. My views on sectarianism are based not so much on my earlier experiences, for reasons that will become obvious but mainly on what has emerged from the downfall of Glasgow Rangers since 2008 when Lloyds Bank said “enough!” and the aftermath. My four key conclusions are:

1. First and foremost in the context of Scottish football, there is a perception that sectarianism sells, that it makes money. It sells season books, newspapers and advertising, TV rights globally to a world that watches for the potential for violence as much as for the quality of football. It therefore has a high commercial value to the many parties involved not only in partaking of the game but in the administration and reporting of it. For them all - sectarianism sells.

2. At a human level sectarianism appeals to an individual’s sense of needing to belong to something greater but draws on the inner instinctive response if one’s “sect” feels threatened.

3. It can be subconscious and those expressing sectarian views or acting out of a sectarian attitude are often unaware of doing so or will deny that they are.

4. Consequently we will never completely eradicate sectarianism in Scotland but we can limit the damage it can cause Scottish society if as a nation, like an alcoholic taking the first of the twelve steps to recovery, we admit there is a deep seated problem that measures like The Offensive Behaviour at

Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 will no more heal than will putting an Elastoplast on a broken leg.

A brief personal history

You will note that in my conclusions there is no mention of religion, Ireland, Irish history or the Orange Order and I was conscious when asked to write about sectarianism in football that I had not myself suffered from sectarianism to any marked degree during my childhood years in the early nineteen fifties or adult life thereafter. My father, a Catholic Calton man, had experience of it, as had his father, but whilst my father disliked Rangers as a sectarian institution with a vengeance, he went to some lengths to impress on me the difference between the institution and the individuals. One of his favourite boasts was that I played football with the Catholics in the morning (St Mungo's Academy) and the Protestants in the afternoon (St James Calton Boys' Club).

My own epiphany, when I realised and internalised my father's message, came on a visit to Ibrox as a teenager. This required a walk to the St Enoch Underground station from Glasgow Cross to wait in a long queue before getting the Underground to Copeland Road. Bedecked in our Celtic scarves my pals and I were ushered into the near front of the queue by our Rangers supporting pals that we played football in Bell Street with under street light most week nights. We played the usual banter games whilst in the queue and in those days a Rangers victory at Ibrox was an almost certainty, but it was all good humoured. We separated at the ground, they to the Broomloan Road 'Rangers end', myself and my pals to the Helen Street 'Celtic end.' The singing at first was weak but as the crowd increased so too did the volume and number of hymns of hate that were being hurled from both sides of the stadium at each other. "Hang on a minute," I thought to myself, "those are my mates over there, not some Orange bastards I want to see die no more than they want to walk knee deep in my Fenian blood" and I stopped joining in. Apart from a Glasgow Cup game in 1967 when Bobby Lennox tore Rangers apart in a 4-0 victory that was to be the shape of football things to come, I have never gone back to Ibrox or attended a Celtic v Rangers game at Celtic Park. That did not mean my passion for supporting Celtic diminished, although like many young men growing up, getting married and having families, the passion did not always manifest itself by attendance at games, although European Cup/Champions League nights always had a magnetic attraction.

If anyone ever wishes to experience that deep feeling of 'belonging', one that is the natural and beneficial side of sectarianism, then there is nothing like being at Celtic Park on a Champions League night. The 4-3 game v Juventus in October 2001 stands out as much as the hairs on the back of my neck stood up in an 'I was there' night.

In my working life too, because I worked in the UK Civil Service administered to UK national standards from London and not Edinburgh, I rarely encountered malevolent sectarianism to further prejudice any views I might have, although I do recall two instances on which my conclusion of the often-subconscious nature of sectarianism is based. It must have been in early 1980 when I was joined on a Board recruiting staff for Civil Service jobs in East Kilbride (one successful applicant incidentally later found himself as The Rangers manager in the most turbulent period in their history, that a fellow recruitment board member from Centre One remarked to me that he was mildly surprised at the quality of the candidates presenting from Catholic schools. I was briefly thrown by this indication of Protestant superiority, but I detected there was no malice in the statement, just an observation being made in an unconscious way. Thus, I nodded in agreement but was thinking "*I'm not a bad example of a Catholic education myself pal*" (Italics being the only way to get my annoyance across on paper!)

I managed our office football team for two years and it was a true and full social mix of both sides of the sectarian divide throughout the office and East Kilbride itself. Indeed, one of the future, Rangers manager's friends, now sadly nutmegging angels, was as big a Celtic supporter as you will find. So, it is no exaggeration to say we all got along. However, I did find my patience tested over a couple of days when I was unlucky enough to be in the company of one Rangers man, a civil soul on a (aptly named) Disaster Recovery Course in London after a disastrous Celtic defeat at Ibrox. No matter how a conversation started he always brought it around to the game and how bad it must feel to be a Celtic supporter at that time. He was pleasant about it but so incessant that I concluded after a while he was simply unaware of the possible impact on his nose had I been a less tolerant human being. However both instances, in the context of civil persons in a civil service in a civil society, serve to reinforce my view that whilst some folk might be openly sectarian and malevolent of intent, there are many decent others who are friends but unaware of the impact of superiority thinking that comes from being part of the bigger side of the sectarian divide in Scotland, a kind of intellectual superiority snobbery that I believe a good Catholic education system has neutralised in modern Scotland.

So, given that the vast majority of my personal 'sectarian' experiences or individual encounters have not been of the malevolent variety, why is it that my perception of sectarianism in Scotland is that it is more a malevolent than benevolent force? What takes sectarianism out of the personal arena and into the institutional one and affects me and fellow Celtic supporters to varying degrees from annoyance to anger and possibly in some cases hatred? The answer to that has to be the way that Glasgow Rangers, before their demise, became the totem around which the most malevolent attitudes of sectarianism were allowed to gather and flourish, to the betterment of that entity at the expense of the great game of football in Scotland and to the financial cost of the other professional football clubs in Scotland, including my beloved Celtic.

However, in the lead up to 2008 and for a couple of seasons thereafter, it was my own and others' accepted thinking that it was sectarianism based on the religion of the two sides that was the driver of malevolence. It took a while before it became clear to me that it was not sectarianism on religious grounds that was driving Rangers the institution, or the Scottish Football Association, or their institutional 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil' media supporters in press and broadcasting, but rather the money that all three parties perceived was being generated by sectarianism. In my view this was, and is, the underlying reason for sectarianism flourishing and corrupting the game.

On 10th May 2008 when Craig Levein, in a famous post-match interview ranted "It's all about Rangers, it's all about Rangers…. It's important that Rangers do not lose the title" no one in Scottish football could have known at that time just how important winning the title and securing Champions League money was to secure the future of Glasgow Rangers. Or perhaps, more accurately, how this postponed their final demise which began when they ironically failed the UEFA footballing qualification test in 2011 against Malmo and Maribor, having originally secured admission under questionable circumstances in relation to the interpretation of the unpaid social tax rules set out in UEFA Club Licensing 2010, by a compliant Scottish Football Authority. Many thought in May 2008 that it was just a continuation of the days of yore when Jim Farry held up the registration of Jorge Cadette in 1996, apparently (to some at least) to hinder Celtic's chances of winning a title or when Bobby Tait, a Rangers-supporting referee was appointed to officiate a crucial title deciding game against Kilmarnock in 1998, where he allowed 6 to 8 minutes injury time giving Rangers more opportunity to score to win. Ironically to many Celtic fans, Kilmarnock ended up scoring the winner during injury time, thus clearing the way for Celtic to stop Rangers winning ten in a row.

In the spring of 2010, due to a season of 'honest mistakes' , an Open Meeting of Celtic supporters took place at St Mary's Calton. They were angered by Dougie McDonald's decision to order off Scott Brown and not Kyle Lafferty in a game at Ibrox; These fans blamed the sectarian persuasion of the alleged MIBs (Masons in Black) rather than on any monetary reason. It became clear however that something was afoot and deeper questions started to be asked when the same referee, Dougie McDonald and Head of Referee Development and his boss Hugh Dallas, got into a muddle involving Neil Lennon, and Steven Craven, a third match official no longer allowed to referee even at lower levels, in attempting to publicly justify McDonald's decision to change his mind about a decision that McDonald had made to award a penalty to Celtic in a match in October 2010 v Dundee United at Tannadice.

Even in this instance though, the departure of Dallas was coloured more by the religious perception of sectarianism than any financial one, when it was reported by Phil Mac Giolla Bhain, a Scottish free-lance journalist residing in Ireland, that Dallas had passed on a tasteless email message about The Pope who had visited Scotland earlier in September. Dallas was removed from his post for that email but no questions were asked about his explanation of events or why McDonald, already with a history of questionable decisions against Celtic, was chosen for that particular match at a venue where Celtic could always expect a hard game. However, even if these questions had been asked, the first impulse would have been that it was purely the sectarian influence from a religious perspective that was behind it.

The financial imperatives driving 'sectarianism'

That all changed for me in 2010 when Phil Mac Giolla Bhain broke the story that Rangers were being investigated by HMRC in respect of their usage of Employee Benefit Trusts (EBTs) to pay players by a route that avoided the full payment of tax and national insurance. That really blew away the legend or myth that sectarianism in Scottish football was at heart a religious issue with historical roots. No it wasn't, not any longer. Now it moved from being about religion or religious rivalry to being about the money that "sectarianism" brought into the game in Scotland, which I would argue has fuelled the Scottish professional football industry to the detriment, indeed corruption, of the sport itself as well as the ethics of mainstream journalism.

That this is so can be seen from the response to Rangers' difficulties by both the Scottish Premier League and the Scottish Football Association, who, rather than apply the rules without fear or favour, instead, out of concerns for financial collapse and backed all the way by the mainstream media, (some of whom were ex footballers and alleged EBT beneficiaries, but all of whom were benefiting from reporting on Scottish football), attempted to gerrymander a rescue of Rangers. Not because they were a Protestant club, not because they operated in a sectarian society, but because of the fear of the loss of revenues and jobs all of those in Scottish football thought would happen if Rangers disappeared.

'Scotland needs a strong Rangers' was the mantra of the rescuers, completely ignoring that a truly strong Rangers had never really existed since at least 2000, when they started to indulge in the twin financial steroids of ever rising debt and ever increasing use of EBTs until 2007, when with EBTs under question, they reduced their usage and returned to debt as their main stimulant. The myth of a strong Rangers is proving one difficult to dispel even following their administration and liquidation in 2012. However, in spite of the SPL/SFA machinations the light being shone on dark places by online blogs and forums like The Rangers Tax Case, (who had inside information on EBT usage at Ibrox and used it splendidly), Celtic Quick News, Celtic Underground etc. as well as the ongoing probing by Phil Mac Giolla Bhain and others, had an unanticipated effect.

Their sharing of information and ridiculing of some of the outrageous utterances from football authorities via mainstream media, like claims of Armageddon for Scottish football or civil unrest, sufficiently informed and influenced the minds of supporters of other clubs throughout Scotland to exert pressure on SPL club chairmen not to allow a passage back into the top flight for Rangers that sacrificed sporting integrity on the altar of commercialism.

It would be remiss at this point not to mention the courageous lead set by Raith Rovers Chairman Turnbull Hutton when the same football authorities tried to browbeat the lower divisions of Scottish football to accept a plan to treat a now liquidated Rangers differently that undermined the sporting integrity and the merit principles on which the whole game is based. Such courageous leadership and adherence to ethics by Mr Hutton should find its way to the top of the governance of our game, if not in said gentleman's elevation to an influential SFA post, then certainly in the job specification of any future SFA leaders.

One would imagine, or maybe simply just hope, that at this point an awareness would start to emerge amongst the key stakeholders in Scottish football: the SFA as governors; the mainstream media who depend on the reporting of the game for a living and whom I believe fuel sectarian attitudes as a result; the supporters of Scottish football who, as the game is a key component of the fabric of Scottish society, have to live with sectarianism's effects; and the Scottish Government itself (who have hidden behind the 'FIFA will not allow us to interfere' excuse). This would require an understanding that by now, with the old Rangers no longer in existence and with the very integrity of the game in serious question, the belief that sectarianism sells, that sectarianism makes money, is highly questionable, immoral and not actually true..

Sectarianism not only does not sell, it eventually destroys all those who promote, allow or enable its use it for short term commercial gain. You would think now, that with the consequences of a false perception staring them in the face, Rangers' demise would be seized upon to replace them with something completely different in attitude and approach.

However, the message that sectarianism does not sell does not seem yet to have been realised and internalised. Instead, we had the football authorities talking about league reconstruction to try and restore the failed Rangers model back into the top levels of the game as soon as possible. We had the new the owner of the new club called The Rangers trying (and succeeding) in selling tickets on the back of maintaining the same truculent traditions that were the underlying cause of Rangers demise in what appears to be a headlong rush by all stakeholders (bar the supporters of other clubs) to get back to business as usual leading to more failure (as usual).

The need for change

The reality is that there is no quick cure, no easy answers and there is much work to be done by all the stakeholders. I believe the following are the issues that need to be addressed or are change-bringing factors that will determine the future role of sectarianism in Scottish football.

To the SFA as governors I say "explore and establish what your job is and do it or step aside!" Let those who are willing to see change undertake the following:

- Recognise that, even without the financial drivers, sectarianism in the sense of wanting to belong to a group is a normal human condition that requires rules and regulations in a transparent and accountable regime that must deter or prevent the creation of bias to a degree that corrupts. Create such a regime based on fair play, financial as in UEFA rules and ethically through the fair

running of the game. I would, for example, look at making refereeing a service more responsive to the clubs and supporters who ultimately pay them than the SFA who train and appoint them. However, and most importantly police and enforce the rules and processes for adherence in order to discourage skulduggery.

- Create a proper system of checks and balances between yourselves and the Scottish Premier Football Leagues, where the SFA makes sure that sporting integrity is not hostage to, or violated by, commercial deals entered by the League, all working to a clear governance structure of checks and balance.

- Establish your purpose through a clear mission statement that separates roles and responsibilities between yourselves and the League and if a changing footballing world and markets suggests the purpose of serving the Scottish game requires your absorption into something greater (like a UK FA) then do so for the good of Scottish football.

- Above all 'Be Honest', you have nothing fear and so much to gain.

To the League as providers of the game I say "Scotland has one of, if not the highest, record of match day goers in Europe if not the world –do not forget our love of the game, for love never fails." The Scots want to watch fair competition not Goliath slaying David week in, week out. Work on providing a competitive league but in particular look at removing not only what I believe to be one of the biggest 'skew' factors, but one of the reasons why Rangers in 2007/08 took the decision that history will I am sure show, is the explanation of why they ultimately failed which was the pursuit of UEFA Champions League money. Although qualification for the group stages is more difficult now, the rewards for qualification are so high and the consequences of failure so dire in competitive terms they not only encourage clubs to act foolishly, but render the league uncompetitive.

A more equitable distribution of Champions League earnings (that will not realistically effect the unlikely prospect of a Scottish cub winning the Champions League) should be looked at. Also remember that the core business of football is sport and that for a sport to be a sport it must have integrity, supporters must believe it to be fair and will obey its own rules. If there is no integrity there is no sport and so no business.

To the mainstream media I say in the words of former Celtic Chairman John Reid (in a different context) "Those days have gone": those days of faithfully regurgitating what has been passed on by a club's Public Relations department have gone. Those days of unthinking acceptance of what appears in print, if it is ill thought out nonsense, particularly carrying bias from one side of the sectarian divide for or against the other, like a big toe being dipped into a pool of piranhas, is immediately savaged by the Twitterati and stripped to the bone. Your audience is smarter, more informed, more articulate and educated than days of yore. My advice here is if you cannot beat them, join them in serious debate, not point scoring, , or retire, You serve neither Scottish football nor yourselves when you shy from the truth and peddle PR in a vain attempt to keep a failed business model alive.

To the supporters of Scottish football, I say "Take a bow - but continue to organise." It is now a matter of record how supporters throughout Scotland fought to maintain the integrity of Scottish football by refusing to buy season tickets until the then SPL reached the right decision on the footballing fate of Glasgow Rangers. That honourable stance was reflected throughout all professional divisions to the credit of all clubs. As a result of their stance, supporters established themselves as main stakeholders in the game and we are now seeing further initiatives from for example The Scottish Football Supporters Association with a portfolio of policies launched at

Holyrood at the end of 2015 that make footballing and buhsiness sense. (http://scottishfsa.org/transforming-scottish-football-the-fans-manifesto).

An organisation like this, along with Supporters Direct if they amalgamate could provide an opportunity for everyday supporters individually or Associations or Trusts to get involved in the future of Scottish football. Get involved, get in touch.

To the Scottish Government I say, "Stop hiding behind the FIFA rules about governments not interfering in football and find ways to get involved." The UK Government managed to do it in 2008 in England when they established an All Party Parliamentary Football group, so why not the Scottish Government? In Feb 2012 The First Minister when asked about HMRC and Glasgow Rangers was reported (see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-17067135) as saying:

Equally, they've [the HMRC] got to have cognisance of the fact that we're talking about a huge institution, part of the fabric of the Scottish nation, as well as Scottish football, and everybody realises that.

It almost beggars belief that a Government holding that view refuses (at least in public) to get involved in addressing the issues surrounding Rangers and Scottish football. The then First Minister's view also suggests a fear of the unwanted social consequences of what would happen if Rangers folded, certainly one expressed by Stewart Regan CEO of the SFA. (see:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/18719894).

That fear depends on the personal perception one holds of Rangers supporters and mine is coloured (as is everyone's, so they will differ) by their life experience.

Are the guys who let me skip the long queue back in the fifties going to turn into a mob? Are the many Rangers supporters I have met in my working and social life going to do the same? Are the good Rangers supporting lads that my boys have played football with and against potential social vandals? Will there be social unrest to a degree civil authority cannot cope? Not if my experience is an indicator. That there are Rangers supporters who hold narrow intolerant views of Catholics I have no doubt, and the characteristics of such folk are not confined to Rangers supporters.

However, what cannot be denied is that Glasgow Rangers before their demise provided a totem around which malevolent sectarianism could gather and give the impression of being many. When in 2007/08 Rangers were under the microscope for their supporters singing The Famine Song, it was noticeable that in telling their support to desist they never condemned the song itself, just said the supporters could face arrest and distanced themselves from the police decision to do so.

Some might say this was just the club pandering to the extreme sectarian element of their support, but given what we now know of Rangers precarious financial situation in 2008, there can be no doubt that the loss of the money ('the bigot pound' in Celtic vernacular) even if only from say 10 per cent of their 40,000 regular supporters, at around £2 million a year, is a price they could not afford to pay.

Conclusions (in 2012)

Roll forward to late summer 2012 and the new owner of The Rangers, phoenixes from the ashes of the old, has had to use the same traditional truculent sectarian mindset in order to finance his plans for the future of the club. It may be a new club/company but its dependence on the bigot pound seems not to have changed. This is where the Scottish Government can play its part in reweaving the social fabric of Scotland, by recognising, with the rest of Scotland and Rangers, that culturally they

have malevolent sectarian issues that they may need financial help to deal with. This would require the Scottish Government to get together with the SFA and the club to set out a plan to remove any of 'The Rangers' financial dependence on the more extreme element of their support.

This could be in the form of a guarantee of payment over a limited period, on agreed verifiable evidence of success, to offset any sales lost by any reduction in their support base arising from the kind of cultural change that would make crowd reduction a real possibility. I say 'any' sales lost as the removal of undesirables may encourage the return of Rangers supporters discouraged by them, thus rendering any guarantee redundant.

Sectarianism, from the very narrow perspective of Scottish football and the mainstream media journalists and pundits appears to sell, but only at a cost to Scottish society, a cost that Scottish society should tell football in firm but helpful terms, it is no longer prepared to bear.

I can see fellow Celtic supporters and other citizens being unhappy at the suggestion of using public money to help a club whose debt to the public purse will never be paid. However, it is not about the past, it is about the future, and not just the future of Scottish football but the kind of Scotland we want to leave to our children. Even if the price were five times that suggested, if it led to a football and civil environment where we had football rivalry without the poison, where we had benevolent sectarianism **because the linkage to commercial gain had been cut**, it would, in my view, be worth every penny.

Updated Conclusions;

The foregoing article with some changes was drafted as a contribution to a publication by Edinburgh University Press called "Bigotry, Football and Scotland" in 2012. Seven and a half years later the game in Scotland has not moved on, certainly not in the realms of

- The SFA who are as unaccountable as ever but are persistently being questioned,
- The Scottish Main Stream Media where matters have deteriorated as a result of not only refusing to investigate the truth when put on a Tax Justice plate but in doing so are attempting to create a version of reality that attempts to air brush from history the enormity of and damage caused to Scottish football by what was allowed to happen under the governance of the SFA since 2000, compounded by their integrity destroying efforts in 2012 that poison the game still.
- There is still some hope that enough fair minded supporters individually or via their Associations and Trusts as well as Social Media Blogs and Bloggers from all clubs will coalesce around a central footballing supporting organisation like the SFSA who, as mentioned previously launched their manifesto at the home of The Scottish Government in Holyrood and need support to make it happen.
- The Scottish Government itself has shown signs of being dissatisfied with the SFA and perhaps the Scottish Football Supporters Association , Supporters Direct and the Scottish Government **working together** and using some of the findings in this GlobalSportsJob Article might come up with a solution to save an industry that is clearly unable to save itself from itself.

Ultimately sectarianism in Scottish football will continue for as long as the football industry itself thinks they benefit financially from its existence. Remove its financial value and that thinking changes.