Bill Shankly: It's Much More Important Than That

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About the Book

'Football is not just a matter of life and death: it's much more important than that' Bill Shankly (1913 – 1981)

Bill Shankly was without doubt among the greatest football managers of the post-war era. But to football fans everywhere, Bill Shankly was far more than just a manager: he was a folk-hero whose legend still dominates the game.

Bill Shankly's wit, down-to-earth wisdom and sheer determination set a standard that holds good to this day. This full and frank biography tells his larger-than-life story, and is an inspiring tribute to one of football's most enduring heroes.

About the Author

Stephen F. Kelly has written more than 20 books including a number on Liverpool Football Club. These include: *You'll Never Walk Alone: The Official History of Liverpool FC*, *Liverpool In Europe*, *The Kop* (updated and reprinted half a dozen times), *The Boot Room Boys* and biographies of Bill Shankly (reprinted seven times), Kenny Dalglish (updated three times), Graeme Souness and Gerard Houllier.

BILL SHANKLY: IT'S MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT

A Biography

Stephen F. Kelly

For Nessie Shankly

Illustrations

Shanks leads out the Scotland international team in a wartime match *(Steve Hale)*
Fifty years later, Bill and wife Nessie outside Buckingham Palace with his OBE *(Press Association/Steve Hale)*
Shankly as a Preston North End player, parading the FA Cup in 1938 *(Steve Hale)*
Shanks deals with Arsenal’s Lishman in one of his last games for Preston, 1949 *(Steve Hale)*
Shankly looks over Denis Law’s shoulder as he signs professional forms for Huddersfield Town, 1957 *(Steve Hale)*
Shanks being typically competitive in a dads’ and kids’ kick-about on an open field, Huddersfield, 1957 *(Steve Hale)*
Shankly looks on as Liverpool pose with the Second Division championship trophy, 1962 *(Steve Hale)*
Manager Shankly shares the 1965 FA Cup with future manager Bob Paisley *(Steve Hale)*
George Graham and Shanks prior to the 1971 FA Cup Final *(Hulton Deutsch Collection)*
Although he lost the ’71 Cup Final to Arsenal, Shankly was still greeted as a hero when the team returned to Liverpool *(Steve Hale)*
Deep in thought during a match *(Steve Hale)*
In the changing room with the UEFA Cup, 1973 *(Steve Hale)*
The famous Liverpool bootroom staff at Anfield, just prior to Shankly’s retirement in 1974 *(Steve Hale)*
Current Newcastle United manager Kevin Keegan with friend and mentor Shankly in 1979 *(Popperfoto)*

1 Say It Ain’t So, Bill

I COULD SWEAR I saw him recently. In the dusk of an autumn evening as menacing clouds rolled in across the Mersey. The last man out of Anfield, switching off the lights, slamming the door shut, then shuffling across the car park towards the Shankly Gates. And before heading off down the Anfield Road, pulling the gates to and locking them securely. Gates almost too heavy for a man of his age. Then off home towards West Derby, a squarish figure in his white mac, the little tough guy, a slight stiffness in his walk, the legacy of 60 years of football.

Connoisseurs of the early Cagney would recognise the style. There goes a satisfied man you might have thought as he disappeared into the blackness of the chill November night, duties done. Tell us you haven’t gone, Bill. Tell us you’re still there keeping an eye on things.

Maybe it was Shankly, maybe it wasn’t. In the half lip of a dull moon, you could never be sure. It was probably just the old memory playing tricks. But others have felt his presence too, stalking the corridors, sitting in the corner of the dressing room or preparing to play five-a-side at Melwood. Shankly is as alive today as he was 30-odd years ago. Make no mistake. Bill Shankly is more than just a legend. He has become a part of the fabric of Liverpool, as unmistakably Liverpudlian as Cilia Black, the Beatles or *Brookside*.

Shankly is everywhere, immortalised in graffiti on the walls, his name etched on Liverpool shirts and still chanted from the Kop. Young kids, born years after he died, have been reared on tales of his exploits; old men who watched and cheered his teams of the sixties and early seventies can never forget the joy and pride he brought to their lives and to the city. His off-the-cuff remarks were immortalised in

print. Shankly is a legend never to be forgotten in this part of the land.

'I came to Liverpool because of the people,' he claimed. 'They have a fighting spirit with fighting blood in the veins, but mixed with it is a tremendous kindness. They will threaten your life one minute and give you their last penny the next.'

There may have been more than a smattering of romanticism in his words, but they caught the mood of a city where sentimentality is as thick as the salt in the sea breezes. To understand how Shankly manipulated that sentimentality, you also need to understand Liverpool and its people.

Liverpool was well capable of being just as obsessive, bizarre, emotional and contradictory as Shankly. They were almost one and the same character. He spoke the dreams of those on the Kop. But he was also full of loyalty, as fundamental a Liverpool characteristic as any. Nor could you pigeonhole him. He was anarchic, subversive and always ready to speak his mind. And of course he was witty. He could so easily have been born a scouser.

It was little wonder they soon took him to their hearts. Shankly was charismatic, a spokesman, voicing their thoughts and speaking their language. All that power. In another man, it could have been frightening. It was a good job he had so many likeable qualities. It's hard to think of anyone in British life, let alone a sportsman, who commanded as much affection and respect, and who could manipulate his audience like Shankly.

Talk to any of the older Kopites and they will tell you the same. 'He was one of us, a man of the people, a Kopite. He understood us, and we shared the same passion for football and Liverpool. He wanted the team to win as much as we did. He wasn't like today's managers with their gold medallions, sleek cars and fast women, taking a few

backhanders here and there for players. He was a man of principle, who loved the game more than anything.'

The respect was mutual. Said Shankly, 'Occasionally, I would have a walk around the ground before a match, and I went into the Kop one day, before it had filled up. A little chap there said, "Stand here, Bill, you'll get a good view of the game from here!" I couldn't take him up on that offer because I had to look after the team. The encouragement the supporters have given the team has been incredible. When there is a corner kick at the Kop end of the ground, they frighten the ball!'

Shankly was a messiah who arrived at Anfield just as the city was set to burst on to the world map. It's hard to think of anyone else, who so captured the hearts and minds of Liverpool people. The Beatles may have brought international acclaim to the city, but once they had achieved their glory they were off chasing the Yellow Brick Motorway to fame and fortune, preferring the suburban squirearchy of Surrey, or the glens of Scotland, to the chaos of Liverpool. But once he had arrived, Shankly, the man from Ayrshire, was here to stay: he was never embarrassed by his fame, nor did he shirk the responsibilities it brought.

He was the ultimate obsessive: fanatical not just about Liverpool Football Club but about football in general. He'd buttonhole fans in pubs, cross swords with journalists in remote corridors of Anfield, argue with his players in the dressing room and then urge them all on from the bench. All he ever wanted to do was talk football, to be involved with the game.

And no game was less important than any other, whether it was Wembley, the San Siro, or a five-a-side at Huddersfield with the dads. Even before his death, he was an icon, elevated to the loftiest position, a god who couldn't be knocked down. It's hard to find anyone with a sour word to say, or indeed a story that shows Shankly in a harsh light. There are hundreds of anecdotes about him. Anyone who

met him has a tale, and the stories are nearly always amusing, bizarre, the stuff of legend.

But of course there was another side. Nobody could be as dedicated without having forfeited something. There's a picture of Shankly taken by Liverpool photographer Steve Hale. It's one of those memorable photographs, instantly recognisable, of a victorious Shankly walking triumphantly around Anfield. There he stands before his beloved Kop, Liverpool scarf tied caringly around his neck, the emperor greeting his subjects. Shankly has an old-fashioned face, grey and seamed, a boxer's jaw, a welterweight's shoulders. But it is his eyes. Look at them. Staring, almost frightening, into the wilderness. The eyes of a man obsessed. There is a mystical messianic quality that cannot easily be explained away.

As a player, Bill Shankly was the archetypal Scottish half back, aggressive, punishing, but always honest. With his short-cropped hair and middle parting, he was a terrifying prospect for any forward, even if it was Matthews or Lawton. He was the leader on the park, motivating his fellow players, urging them on. It was hardly surprising that, when he retired, he should immediately land himself a managerial job.

His career took him across the wastelands of English football, from Carlisle to Grimsby, then to Workington and on to Huddersfield before finally he rolled into Liverpool. Shankly spent most of that time in the Third Division North, hardly ideal preparation for his later success. Yet those places shaped his philosophy and style of football management. But none of his achievements could have come without his loyal bootroom lieutenants at Anfield, particularly Bob Paisley, whose wise, unassuming counsel kept Shankly in check.

Shankly was also the last of a dying breed. By the time he came to retire, football had moved on from the thirties.

Track-suited managers, agents and sky-high transfer fees had taken over. The old loyalties had all but disappeared.

In Shankly's day, they shook hands over a deal and toasted it with a cup of tea. By the eighties, the lawyers were drafting the contracts, the agents doing the talking, and the champagne corks kept popping. Shankly would have hated it all, though no doubt he would have been every bit as successful. However, the game of the 1990s was not the same honest game that he had played.

As a manager, he will always rank among the best. Only Busby and Stein could compare. They were all out of the same mould, growing up with the same set of values, from backgrounds where adversity bred backbone. But Shankly was a one-off. No other manager in the history of the game has been as idolised by the fans. Busby was loved and respected for all his success, but never idolised. Busby did his talking on the football field. Shankly did it wherever he was. For Shankly, football really was much more important than life or death.

On the last day of the Kop on Saturday 30 April 1994, more than 44,000 fans came to Anfield to celebrate the end of an era. It was an occasion dedicated to Shanklyism. The old banners of the sixties fluttered in the breeze and scarves dating back to the days of Hickson and Yeats had been pulled out from bottom drawers, as the chants and songs of a past era were once again aired.

The Kop, in full cry, belted out choruses of 'She Loves You' or 'Go back to Ital-ee'. Many of its younger inhabitants were not even alive when their fathers had sung the same words in the sixties. Yet the songs have been lovingly passed down over the years, each one learnt by a new generation.

That day, one by one, the great players of the past were introduced to the crowd – Albert Stubbins, Billy Liddell, Phil Thompson, Tommy Smith, Kenny Dalglish and so on. But they saved the biggest cheer for a woman, Nessie Shankly, widow of Bill. As she tottered across the pitch leaning on the

arm of Joe Fagan, a roar erupted from the Kop. ‘Shank-lee, Shank-lee, Shank-lee,’ they wailed to the tune of ‘Amazing Grace’. It was their way of saying thank you to Bill Shankly’s widow, after all those years when she had to share him with Liverpool. Twenty years on since he left Anfield, and still they had not forgotten him.

2 The Glenbuck Cherrypickers

NOBODY GOES TO GLENBUCK THESE DAYS. Why should they? Not for the past twenty years has the casual traveller through Ayrshire needed to take a detour from the A74 to visit the lowland village of Glenbuck – though you just might skirt past it on the way to Ayr, Troon or Kilmarnock. It might have been a different story 50, 40 or even 30 years ago. But not any more. The days of Glenbuck as a thriving, attractive community have long gone.

Thirty miles north of Dumfries and twenty miles south of Glasgow, Glenbuck nestles in the Southern Uplands. Today, it’s almost disappeared, a mere pinprick on the map of Scotland. A sleepy little hamlet, not even a village, filled with little else but history. It would be nice to report that its future is uncertain. But that would be wrong. Its future is all too certain. It has been consigned to the dustbin of economic history. Everywhere you can see and smell its past, from half-demolished buildings to the grassed-over remains of what were once coal pits.

In the past twenty years, the Scottish mining industry has been decimated. Back at the turn of the century, there were more than 10,000 miners in Ayrshire alone. Today, there are little over a thousand in Scotland itself. But Glenbuck’s decline goes back much further. At the time when Bill Shankly was born in September 1913, the village of Glenbuck was shrinking. The population then was little more than 800.

At the turn of the century, it was more than twice that. But after 1908, the pits began to close and the population dropped continuously from then on. When the First World War began in 1914, it was down to 700 as men enlisted and began the trek across Europe. Five would never return: their names are inscribed on a memorial stone that has now been

transferred to nearby Muirkirk. There was a brief stay of execution for some pits as the war effort demanded more coal and iron. But it didn't last long and, when the soldiers returned to the 'land fit for heroes', they found 'for sale' notices going up at the pitheads.

Glenbuck's days stretch back to 1659 when the village was first mentioned in the Muirkirk parish records, but little else was heard of it until 1760 when the New Mills Weaving Company of Lanark established a branch there. Prior to that, it had been the favoured hunting ground of the ancient Douglases. Within a couple of years, the population had risen to 580. Thirty years later, English entrepreneurs arrived, hellbent on building a small iron works with a blast furnace and foundry.

The mines soon became a hive of activity and, in the early years of the nineteenth century, further pits were sunk, christened with evocative names such as the Davey, the Lady, Joe and Spireslack. They even tried to build a railway to Glenbuck, but the viaduct that was to carry the line over the River Ayr, east of Muirkirk, proved to be unsafe due to mining subsidence and had to be abandoned. It might have made such a difference.

By the 1870s, Glenbuck was a busy little community, so busy that they had to open a school in 1876 and, six years later, as the population edged towards its peak they built a church. It was a typical Ayrshire pit village. The houses, all owned by the coal company, were mainly long and short rows, many of them with the staircase outside. Few, if any, had baths. There were no gardens either, nor any electricity. The streets were dark with no streetlights and little in the way of pavements. There were of course the usual shops. Sanny Hamilton's butchers shop had been in the family for years; Miss Kerr ran the drapery; there was a co-op, a sub post office, a tailor, a fish and chip shop and of course a public house known as The Royal Arms.

There was also a quoiting green and, on the outskirts of the village, a football pitch. Tom Bone, the famous world champion quoiter, was born and bred in the village. It was said that Bone could toss a 20-pound quoit a distance of 21 yards and ring a gold watch placed on top of the pin.

There was plenty of agricultural activity in the area with the black-faced Glenbuck ram famous throughout the land. But in Glenbuck itself most men worked in the pits. They were a loyal mining community. In the 1926 national coal strike, the Glenbuck miners were solid to the core: there was no danger here that anyone would ever 'blackleg', even though the coal-owners were tempted to evict their tenants from their homes as the strike dragged through its tiresome nine months. If you did 'blackleg', you would automatically be ostracised from this tight-knit community. Keir Hardie, the first leader of the Labour Party, represented the miners of Ayrshire for many years during the 1880s.

Glenbuck had a noble history of trade unionism. The miners were hard men, scarred by their work, believing in fraternity and common decency. If a neighbour or work colleague needed help, they gave it. In Glenbuck, life could only be tolerated if there was a degree of mutual help and unity. The door to every house was always open. You just knocked and walked in. It was the kind of background that rubbed off on you. You could not be a miner in this part of the world and simply forget it all when you moved away. Coal-mining stayed in the blood, along with its traditions and attitudes.

By 1920, Glenbuck was becoming a transient community. Pits were closing fast and men were forced to take the local bus to other pits at Muirkirk or even further afield at Carmacoup. Grasshill was the only pit in the village. Sometimes, families were forced to up sticks and move elsewhere. Glenbuck was beginning to disintegrate. More and more houses were abandoned: it was impossible to sell them or let them out. In the early thirties, the closure of the

Grasshill pit all but finished Glenbuck. In 1954, the church held its final service.

Glenbuck may have been known throughout the county for its black-faced rams, its coal pits and its Covenanters, but it was better known throughout Scotland for its football team, the Cherrypickers. Their exploits alone ensured Glenbuck's survival in the history of English and Scottish football.

In a period spanning forty years, the Glenbuck Cherrypickers sent some 50 players into professional football. Seven of them were capped by Scotland and two won English FA Cup medals. It is an astonishing record probably unequalled by any other village team in Britain. Bill Shankly was to be the finest of all the Cherrypickers, though his connection was always tenuous.

The club was founded in the late 1870s by Edward Bone and William Brown, and originally called Glenbuck Athletic. John Shankly, father of Bill, was a prominent committee member. The Cherrypickers were essentially a pit team, playing competitive matches against other pit villages. They played on a couple of pitches before they finally settled on a field alongside the road that was to become known as Burnside Park.

As you glance through the roll of honour, two things strike you. First, the family connections. Brothers, cousins, all of the same name – the Shanklys, the Taits, the Bones, the McKenzies, the Wallaces and so on. The same surnames recur in regular cycles. Secondly, the Cherrypickers were elite. Everyone who ever played for them came from Glenbuck. Unlike other village teams, they never bent the rules to allow some useful inside forward from a neighbouring village to join them. They were the Glenbuck Cherrypickers, and proud of it. Outsiders were not welcome, no matter how talented they might be.

The team changed its name from Glenbuck Athletic to the Cherrypickers some time around the turn of the century. At

first, it was just a nickname, but it soon stuck and after a while it became official. Quite how they ever came to be known as the Cherrypickers is open to debate. It certainly had nothing to do with their strip of white shirts and black shorts.

The story that has now been accepted into mythology is that two of the players, Tom Menzies and his brother, used to strut about the streets of Glenbuck in caps like those worn by the Hussars. They claimed that they were ‘cherrypickers’, the name commonly given to the 11th Hussars following the Peninsula War in Spain. Arriving in a dusty village one burning afternoon, the Hussars cleaned out a cherry orchard to quench their thirst and hunger. From that moment on, they were known as the cherrypickers and wore cherry-coloured breeches.

It’s likely that there were men from around Glenbuck who would have served with the 11th Hussars in the Boer War of 1900 and they would have passed on their stories to the likes of Tom Menzies. Whatever the truth of the tale, the name certainly stuck.

The football team were very successful. For three years in succession – 1889, 1890 and 1891 – they won the Ayrshire Junior Challenge Cup. In 1906, they picked up three trophies and in later years added countless honours to their collection. It was an infinite nursery of talent. The cherrypickers fame spread south of the border to England with many players signing straight from Glenbuck to the best English clubs including Everton, Aston Villa, Sheffield Wednesday, Newcastle and Sunderland.

In all, six cherrypickers were to win Scottish honours in some form. They were Bill Shankly, Alec Brown, Willie Muir, George Halley, John Crosbie and Bill’s brother Bob. Two others were capped at junior level, while Alec McConnell was selected but then two days later signed for Everton making him ineligible to play.

A total of fifty-odd players went on to play senior professional football in Scotland and England. The most famous of all was, of course, Bill Shankly but others such as Alec Tait captained Tottenham to the Southern League championship and, a year later, to an FA Cup triumph. Indeed, that FA Cup Final winning side of 1901 boasted two Glenbuck lads, the other being goalscorer Sandy Brown, who hit a record fifteen goals in the competition that season – a record which still stands today. Later that year, Tait and Brown returned to Glenbuck bringing the FA Cup with them for display in a local shop window. It sat there proudly for days as visitors flocked into the village just to see the English cup.

Then there was George Halley, the Burnley half back, who won an FA Cup winners medal in 1914 as Burnley beat Liverpool in the all-Lancashire Cup final at the Crystal Palace. Seven years later, Halley won a league championship medal with Burnley. One other footballing fact connected with Glenbuck ought to be mentioned. It is that Glenbuck footballers were renowned for playing the five-a-side game. Quite where and how the five-a-side game evolved is debatable, but it was undoubtedly being played in Glenbuck at the turn of the century. It was usually played in the summer months, bridging the gap between the end of one season and the beginning of another.

Local fairs and agricultural events would often feature five-a-side tournaments, some of which would last a day or more. Glenbuck was fond of basing teams around families, with the five Knox brothers at one time reckoned to be almost invincible. Years later, local dreamers would imagine a contest between the Knoxes and the Shanklys. It was almost certainly this Glenbuck tradition that gave Shankly his love of the five-a-side game, a love he would take with him around the training pitches of the world and which would lay the foundation for Liverpool's later success.

In September 1913, the nation stood less than a year from a World War that would wreak havoc on Europe and destroy the flowering of the continent's youth. The population of Glenbuck stood at a little over 700. It had been a balmy summer and the autumn nights were beginning to draw in, but the evenings were still warm. Tom Bone would no doubt have been practising his quoits, while the younger men of the village might have been over at Burnside Park playing football.

Glasgow Rangers had just completed a hat-trick of championships, though neither of the big Scottish clubs had reached the final of the Cup. That honour had gone to Falkirk and Raith Rovers, with the former winning 2-0. South of the border, Aston Villa had beaten Sunderland to win the FA Cup. But Sunderland bounced back to pip them to the championship. Had you told anyone that gloriously rich, lazy autumn that they were about to be plunged into the most horrific war mankind had ever known, they would have thought you a fool.

Barbara Shankly had ten children, not uncommon in those days, and Bill, born on 2 September 1913, was her second youngest. In all, she had five sons – Alec, Jimmy, John, Bob and Bill – and five daughters – Netta, Elizabeth, Isobel, Barbara and Jean. The sequence was an astonishing son/daughter/son, all the way through the lineage. All five boys would in time become professional footballers. 'At our peaks,' recalled Bill, 'we could have beaten any five brothers in the world.' It was probably true.

But the toll of ten children showed on Barbara Shankly. By the age of fifty, with her hair well greyed and her shoulders rounded, she looked a good ten years older than she was. But if she had grown old physically, she had certainly weathered the years gracefully in spirit. Always smiling, prepared to do anything for her children, she coped cheerfully and magnificently until she was a month off 80.

Sadly, she died shortly before Bill moved to Liverpool and was to miss his phenomenal success as a manager.

Barbara Shankly was born Barbara Gray Blyth. Her brother Robert played for Glasgow Rangers and had then gone on to Portsmouth where he eventually became chairman. Her other brother William turned out for Preston North End and Carlisle where he also became a club director. Football was in the blood. It was little wonder that all her boys became footballers.

Her husband John Shankly was born at Douglas in Lanarkshire, about seven miles from Glenbuck. He was a strong, well-built man with formidable features. In later life, Bill would bear a striking resemblance to his father.

Never a footballer, John Shankly started working life as a postman, but for most of Bill’s time at Glenbuck he was a tailor, producing hand-made suits. Those were the days when all suits were hand-made, never ‘off the peg’. And, like any good tailor, he could turn his hand to the most basic of tailoring. When times were hard, he would tackle any small jobs in the village, altering clothes as well as making trousers longer or shorter for his own lads. Always well-turned out, it was rare to see John Shankly in anything but a suit, or without a grin on his face. It was another feature that was to rub off on young Bill. Rarely would you spot him in later years in anything other than a well-cut suit, collar and tie, and well-scrubbed shoes, topped off by a grin.

‘Sometimes when he did a job for someone,’ remembered Bill years later, ‘they would ask, “how much is it?” “Two shillings,” my father would say. “Oh, I’ve only got a shilling,” they would reply. “Oh, it’s alright,” he would say. “Pay it some other time.” Of course the money was never paid and it was never asked for.’

Although John Shankly was never a footballer, he was always interested in sport, especially fighting, a passion he was to pass on to his son Bill. He was also an athlete, a quarter miler, reckoned to be the best in Glenbuck, and for a

time was a committee member of the Glenbuck Cherrypickers. Like most fathers at that time, he was feared and respected by his family. ‘Do you want to be punished by me or by your father?’ the schoolteacher asked young Bill one day. ‘By you,’ replied Bill, fearing far worse retribution from his father.

The family lived in the second cottage of Monkey Row. Like most houses in the village, there was no bathroom, no hot water and no inside toilet. Twelve of them – ten children and two parents – squeezed into just a couple of rooms. It was a hard life. ‘I don’t know how they coped,’ says Nessie Shankly. ‘There were just a couple of rooms. They even had beds in the wall,’ she remembers.

All ten children were born at home, and for a dozen years or more there was never a moment when there was not a baby wailing or nappies hanging to dry on a creel in the warmth of the kitchen. For a family of that size, cooking alone was a mammoth task as well as an expense. It was a typical Scottish household: the women were all expected to lend a hand with cooking, cleaning or washing; the men to bring home the money.

Winters were hard and cold, and it was not uncommon for snow to lie for weeks on end. There was no heating at number 2 Monkey Row except in the kitchen, where a coal fire and the ever-lit cooker provided the household’s only warmth. Luxuries were few and far between. Christmas was the only time when presents appeared and even then these were simple: sweets, apples, oranges, maybe a hand-me-down pair of football boots or an altered pullover. Holidays were unheard of. The only break might be a visit to nearby Yoker to see one of the cousins, but that was only ever a daytrip.

Like most lads their age, the Shanklys would help themselves to a few vegetables or pieces of fruit from local farms. If it was in the ground, it was God’s own produce. It

was never anything serious, but enough to make them run when the farmer appeared.

Raids were usually ordered like some military operation, under cover of darkness and with one or more of the brothers acting as look-out. They even helped themselves to an enormous bunch of bananas from a lorry on one occasion. This was so enormous that it took five of them to carry it home and a month to devour. But somehow you couldn't think of it as stealing. It was more a redistribution of what belonged to the earth.

Alec Shankly, the eldest of the brothers and 20 years Bill's senior, was born in 1893. Before the First World War, he played professionally in the Scottish league with Ayr United and Clyde, then served during the war with the Royal Scottish Fusiliers. After the war, he was troubled with sciatica and had to abandon his football career. He returned instead to the mines, but mining was hardly the occupation for someone with his health problems and he was soon forced into early retirement.

Jimmy was the next eldest son, four years younger than Alec. After Glenbuck, he signed for Carlisle United, then in the North Eastern League, but later joined Sheffield United for £1,000, a not inconsiderable transfer fee in those days. But it never quite worked out at Bramall Lane where an abundance of centre forwards, in particular Jimmy Dunne, limited his appearances.

In 1928, he was transferred to Southend United, where he enjoyed considerably more success, quickly making his mark with 31 goals in 39 matches – Jimmy was leading goalscorer for six seasons. He was a tough, stocky little character and, in all, scored 96 goals for Southend. After that, he went to Barrow, then in the Third Division North, hitting an all-time goalscoring record for the club of 39 goals in one season.

He had a further season with the Holker Street club, then returned briefly to Carlisle before retiring from the game

and going back home to set up a coal merchant’s business with a little help from his brothers. In the early years, Jimmy’s wages from football helped the family overcome the burdens of poverty. The younger children had benefited the most and, to help Jimmy set up his own business, Bill and some of the others dug into their pockets.

The middle brother was John, at 5ft 6 inches, he was the smallest of the Shanklys. While he was still a teenager, John was spotted playing at inside right for Nithsdale Wanderers and was immediately snapped up by Portsmouth, then in the English Third Division. But life at Fratton Park was not easy and, after just three appearances and one goal, all during the 1922/23 season, he dropped a division, joining Guildford United in the Southern League. The lower league seemed to rejuvenate him, to such an extent that Third Division South Luton Town stepped in and offered him another opportunity.

The following season, 1924/25, he hit 20 goals in 46 appearances, but although the next campaign started brightly enough a strained heart muscle began to cause problems and in mid-season he was transferred to Halifax Town where he scored twice in seven matches. Following a brief spell with Coventry City, he returned to Scotland and joined Alloa Athletic, but by then his heart condition was causing concern and he was forced to quit the game, returning to Glenbuck and the coalmines. John lived on until 1960 when he collapsed in the stand at Hampden Park with a heart attack during the Real Madrid/Eintracht European Cup Final. He died later that evening at the Victoria Hospital in Glasgow.

Then there was Bob, a few years older than Bill, and strikingly similar looking. Bob also ended up in football management, as boss of Dundee after spending seventeen seasons playing with Falkirk. In 1935/36, he was a member of the Falkirk side that won promotion to the First Division and, a year later, was selected for the Scottish League

against the Irish League in Belfast, his only international recognition. But, as with so many players of that era, the onset of war effectively ended his career.

In 1950, he returned to Falkirk as manager, taking over the manager's job at Dundee nine years later. Within two years, Dundee were Scottish champions and the following year enjoyed an outstanding run in the European Cup that took them into the semi-finals. En route, they defeated Cologne 8-1, followed by victories over Sporting Lisbon and Anderlecht. But in the semi-final they lost 5-1 away to the eventual winners AC Milan, although there was some measure of revenge when they defeated the Italians 1-0 at home. Two years later, brother Bill would take Liverpool to a European Cup semi-final. Bob Shankly later became manager of the Edinburgh club Hibernian, and finally general manager and director at Stirling Albion.

When Bill finished school, there was only one place to go and that was down the mine. Schooling had never held much for him. His education was basic, uninspiring and regimented. It was little wonder he was keen to get out into the real world. There were some farming jobs in the community, but the Shanklys were not a farming family. They were miners and, as soon as he was old enough, it was down the mine for Bill where he joined his brother Bob.

At first, he worked at the pithead, earning a couple of shillings a day, unloading the coal from the wagons as they reached the surface. After six months, he went down the pit itself, shifting the wagons from their loading area near the coalface to the cage which brought them to the surface. It was hard work pushing the trucks full of coal along the dimly lit corridors of the mine and then racing the empty trucks back to the coalface. Sometimes, pit ponies were used for the job, at other times it was the miners themselves.

In some ways, Bill Shankly was lucky. He never worked at the face itself, hewing coal – he was too young. Eight hours

a day, he would be down there, nostrils full of coaldust, lungs rasping when he returned to the surface, sucking in gulps of cool, clear Ayrshire air. At lunchtime, they ate down the mine, tucking into the sandwiches his mother had cut and drinking lukewarm tea from the flask that had been with him since early morning. If you wanted the toilet, you found a quiet corner. The conditions may have been undignified, but the men themselves were lordly and proud.

The mine provided a wage, but all Bill Shankly lived for was the hooter and daylight. Then he'd race home, grab his football boots and be off to the nearest pitch for a game. That was what really counted in his life. He didn't watch a lot of football in his early days, other than games in Glenbuck or other local villages.

If he wanted to see a professional match, he had to go to Glasgow, the nearest soccer city. Once he had started work, he could afford the 1s 6d return train fare. He'd go up there most weekends – one Saturday watching Rangers, the next supporting Celtic. And as he travelled back on the train on the Saturday evening, he'd be dreaming of playing for one of the big clubs. If he'd been to see Celtic, he'd be imagining he was Charlie Napier, an elusive runner. If it was Rangers, then he'd be dreaming of David Meiklejohn, that most noble of Scotland and Rangers' captains.

Given the sectarianism of the West coast of Scotland, it was remarkable that Shankly should divide his allegiance between Rangers and Celtic. Coming from a protestant family, a pillar of the Presbyterian church, he should have been a Rangers man alone. Yet it never even seems to have crossed his mind that Parkhead was forbidden territory. It says much for his upbringing that his family held none of the bigoted views that divided Glasgow in two. This cosmopolitan attitude was to remain with him throughout his life.

Thankfully, Bill Shankly's days down the mine were numbered although release arrived in unwanted fashion. It

came in the form of unemployment, the latest in a long line of pit closures. The mine was worked-out and, when it closed, Glenbuck's long history of coalmining was over.

There were other pits in the area and some of the men, particularly those with families, had little alternative but to trek further afield. Two of his friends walked seven miles each morning to their new pit, getting up at five to start their 7 am shift. If the mines had left a sharp impression in his mind, then a couple of months of unemployment was to leave another lasting memory. There were no other jobs in Glenbuck. The thirties were beginning and unemployment was set to soar. The only money he could earn was by doing a paper round.

Shankly's games with the Cherrypickers were few. He was a member of the club and trained with them, but he was still considered to be on the young side – in later years it never stopped the club from boasting that Shankly had been a regular! But with the closure of the local pit, the Cherrypickers went into decline. Shankly played for another village side, Cronberry, about twelve miles from where he lived.

Word soon spread that he was a player of considerable potential. Kilmarnock were said to be keen, but instead interest came from south of the border, from Carlisle, where his uncle was a club director. Bill's father had passed the word on to his brother-in-law, who sent a Carlisle scout to watch him playing for Cronberry in a game at Sanquhar. Within a few days, he received a note asking him to go down to Carlisle for a month's trial. Young Shankly jumped at the opportunity.

3 Uncle Bill

SHANKLY ARRIVED AT Brunton Park in August 1932, a bony eighteen-year-old but boasting enough natural strength and determination to survive the rigours of Third Division North football. Coalmining had at least done him one favour. That year Everton were the English league champions; Newcastle the cup-winners. But Shankly would not be seeing much of them. In store for him were trips to Southport, Darlington and Hartlepool.

Shankly pulled on the colours of Carlisle for the first time in a pre-season Possibles versus Probables trial match on 20 August, playing for the Possibles, or the stripes as they were known that day. It was the start of a month’s trial. Seven days later, he made his debut for the reserves, playing at home to Middlesbrough reserves. The Boro won 6-0. It was not an auspicious start for the young half back although the local paper reported encouragingly that ‘Shankly played strenuously and might develop into a useful left back’.

After his month’s trial with the club, Carlisle, no doubt encouraged by his uncle Bill Blyth, as much as manager Billy Hampson, decided to take him on for the rest of the season. For the remainder of 1932, Shankly played with the reserves in the North Eastern League, reckoned to be one of the strongest reserve leagues at that time, giving some promising performances. Then on the final day of 1932, he was called up to the first team, making his league debut at home to Rochdale in a 2-2 draw. Two days later, he was selected again, this time for an away fixture at Barnsley. Carlisle lost 4-1. Five days later, they lost again, 4-0 at Southport.

But it wasn’t all gloom; there were a few wins. The team slammed five goals past both Halifax and York, but then conceded six at Hull and on the final day of the season lost

5-2 at Darlington. It was not a good season for Carlisle. By the end of their campaign, they were in nineteenth spot having scored fewer goals than any other side in the Football League.

Shankly had played sixteen first team games, but had only been on the winning side on seven occasions. But one local newspaper had at least spotted his potential. 'Shankly is a most promising player,' it reported, adding, 'he is attracting attention'. They were right too. The word was out. The scouts were already reporting on the young Shankly and within a couple of months their flattering reports would be turned into at least one firm offer. Shankly's last game for Carlisle was with the reserves on 4 May, when they beat Wallsend 6-0 at Brunton Park.

At the end of the season, not surprisingly, most of the side were transfer-listed. But young Shankly at least escaped that humiliation. Carlisle's demise was hardly his fault and, while many of his colleagues found themselves looking for new employment, Shankly was instead offered a new one-year contract.

Shankly got on well with both manager Billy Hampson and trainer Tommy Curry. Hampson had played with Newcastle before the War, but then joined Leeds before returning to Newcastle after hostilities ended. He even won an FA Cup winners medal with the Geordies and at one time was the oldest man to have ever played in a Cup Final. When he hung up his boots in 1930, Hampson joined Carlisle as manager but in 1935 left to become boss at Leeds United.

A quiet gentlemanly character, Hampson was protective of his younger players. He would leave Shankly out of the side if he thought it was going to get a bit rough, preferring to let him develop at his own pace. There was no point in forcing him into games where he might be overawed or clattered too often. In those days, there was time to develop players at a more leisurely pace with few of the pressures of today's game.

It was Tom Curry who probably had more contact with Shankly than anyone. An unfussy kind of character, the pipe-smoking Mancunian stood for no nonsense. Shankly warmed to his discipline, something he would pass on in later life. A year after Shankly left, Curry would part company with Carlisle as well to join Manchester United. There, he helped Matt Busby train United's post-war championship and FA Cup-winning side as well as the famous Busby Babes. Curry would later die in the Munich air disaster.

The other big influence at Carlisle was his Uncle, Billy Blyth. He was one of Bill's mother's two brothers. Bill had played with Portsmouth and Preston before joining Carlisle United where he was now a club director. Shankly got on well with his uncle Billy who also owned a pub in town. He went to see him regularly and his uncle passed on invaluable advice as well as making sure that the youngster stayed on the straight and narrow.

Shankly shared digs, just a few minutes from the ground, with the former Celtic goalkeeper Johnny Kelly who at one time had been understudy to the great John Thompson. Also in the same digs was club captain and full back Bob Bradley. The height of their mischief appears to have been a singsong around a piano or the occasional card school. Shankly was not averse to a game of cards in his younger days and, on more than one occasion, came away more than a few pounds down.

The advantage of being at Carlisle was that it was not too far from Glenbuck and, every other weekend, for 12 shillings, Shankly could catch a train home to the family. He was earning £4 10 shillings a week, not a bad wage for an eighteen-year-old, especially considering that the maximum in English football at the time was £8, paid only to top-rank players. It was also more than he would have been earning back at the coalface.