

Updated Author Biography : August 2011

The Author.

Charles Bannerman's first experience of Inverness football was, as described in the new introductory chapter to this book, a fortnightly pilgrimage to Telford Street Park as a Dalneigh schoolboy in the 1960s.

A move "up the hill" to Inverness Royal Academy cultivated a great admiration for Thistle as well while a love for Clach was possibly inspired by a grandmother with Merkinch connections. He continues to be a strong advocate of the game in Inverness.

After four years studying Chemistry in Edinburgh he returned to Inverness and has taught the subject at Inverness Royal Academy since 1977. He is in addition the school's press officer and has also written a series of three "Up Stephen's Brae" books reflecting life at the Royal Academy when it was situated at Midmills.

He has been the BBC's sports reporter in the Highlands on a freelance basis since 1984, contributing to local programming as well as national radio and television. Along with two of the photographers whose work is included in this book, Ken MacPherson and Trevor Martin, he is the only reporter to have followed Caley Thistle since the very start, or indeed before it. This involvement also provided him with much of the material for this book. He has also been the Inverness Courier's athletics correspondent since 1976.

His other great sporting interest is athletics, which he has coached at all levels from primary school children to Commonwealth Games, but he has now "almost" retired from both competition and coaching. He has two grown up children, Jenny whom he still coaches, and Martin.

Revised August 2011.

PREFACE TO THE 2011 ONLINE EDITION

It was an idea which sprung out of nowhere one day in the summer of 2011.

Once again, the Forum on "CaleyThistleOnline.com", the ICT fans' website, was featuring a request for a copy of "Against All Odds", the official history of the club's formation which had gone out of print and sold out some years previously.

As it happens a thought which had never been too far away since the publication of the book in 1997 simultaneously re-entered my head. That was my regret that, in my haste to cut rapidly to the run up to the Thistle and Caley merger, I had not said as much in the book about the two clubs' Highland League past by way of introduction as I perhaps should have.

Then came the "Eureka moment" when it occurred to me in a flash that both problems could be solved at a stroke if the book could be republished online, with an additional, introductory chapter added.

I posted the suggestion on one of the threads on CTO and within 24 hours CTO's leading lights Scott MacKenzie and Don Johnstone enthusiastically came on board to provide a host for this electronic version which can now be accessed universally. Scotty also made the very valid point that younger ICT fans will constantly be getting to the stage of wanting to know where their club came from.

There were one or two issues of having the original book scanned and getting the blessing of the club and the three owners of the photo copyright but that was very easily resolved with regular CTO contributor Neil MacKenzie arranging the vital scanning.

Then of course, the new chapter had to be researched and written, which turned out to be as much of a joy as assembling the original book. So here we are.

I would issue one slight caveat. The original 1997 text, for various, mainly technical reasons, has had to remain unaltered. Although it does not have the Highland League content I would, in hindsight, have liked, it still does have some reference to Caley Thistle's pre history. As a result, there is not quite the seamless join between this additional chapter and the main text that there would have been had the whole thing been written and published at once. As a result there may be the odd small episode of *deja vu* when you get to that original opening content - and especially the first couple of pages.

But what we do now have is an additional brief overview of the Highland League with specific reference to the two merger partners' time in it up until the late 1980s. That is where the original Chapter 1 takes up the tale to which readers can then move on.

And I am so delighted that I will no longer will I have to tell people that the book is unobtainable.

Charles Bannerman, Inverness. August 2011.

INTRODUCTION

INVERNESS AND THE HIGHLAND LEAGUE.

The latter part of the 19th century, and the 1880s in particular, saw rapid development across the entire spectrum of sport both in Europe and in the United States. A lot of clubs and institutions in a wide variety of disciplines have their origins in this period when working practices were beginning to allow enough free time and money to participate more in sport, and competition was aided by the growth of the railways.

Inverness was no exception and all four of its longer term representatives in the Highland Football League have their origins in the mid 1880s. Of these Citadel, based close to where Cromwell's Tower still stands near Inverness Harbour, went out of existence just before the Second World War. But Clachnacuddin still exists at the time of writing in August 2011 as Inverness's only representative in the Highland League.

The apparent caution of that last sentence is easily justified by three Clach crises of the previous quarter century. The first two are described in Chapter 14 of this book, and they all came close to putting Clach out of business. With the third now successfully negotiated, this creates the hope that Clach will continue to represent Inverness in the Highland League for a long time to come.

That then leaves Caley and Thistle - two names which go together to epitomise the phenomenal progress which football in Inverness has made, starting with the transition from the Highland League to the Scottish Premier League in just a single decade.

One of the most conspicuous features of the merger of Inverness Thistle and Caledonian in the mid 1990s was the inability of the two partners to agree on a variety of issues. And it seems always to have been thus, literally from the very start. Because both clubs, quite independently of and oblivious to each other, have laid claim to be the oldest of the Inverness quartet which survived into the 20th century .

On the face of it, this honour looks to fall to Thistle who had always referred to themselves as having been founded in 1885. This includes in "The Hub Of The Hill", Thistle's centenary booklet which appears to be the product of a number of collaborators. On the other hand Caley always appeared to accept 1886 as their date of birth and held their centenary in 1986. But in Caley's centenary history "Caley All The Way", author and former manager Alex Main, on the basis of newspaper research, categorically makes the claim that the seniority lies with Caley.

One of the great difficulties in resolving the question of which of the merger partners is the older club is lack of information. Little of Thistle's early background survives while Caley's early records were destroyed when the Telford Street grandstand burned down in 1950. As it happens, that Telford Street catastrophe seems to have created a precedent. Clach's stand went up in smoke under mysterious circumstances in the late 1980s while Thistle's suffered the same fate in 1995 after Kingsmills had ceased to be a football ground (see page 96).

Both centenary histories have been invaluable in researching this chapter and "The Hub of the Hill" definitely places Thistle's foundation in 1885 by a Diriebught miller by the name of Smith, four of whose sons were players. On the other hand there is no supportive evidence for this statement although the booklet then goes on to claim that Thistle absorbed Crown FC in 1889 before taking over Union. This was in 1896 after Union had finished bottom of the Highland League in both the league's second and third seasons and a number of its players and officials defected to Kingsmills.

Main, on the other hand, puts a slightly different spin on events, suggesting that Crown effectively underwent a metamorphosis into Thistle, apparently at some point after Caley were founded and that the takeover of Union was at a rather earlier stage. This latter element is difficult to reconcile with Union appearing in Highland League tables right up to 1896 although Main does say that Crown and Union both continued as Junior clubs.

Main further edges Caley's foundation back a little in time with reference to a friendly played by a team called "Caledonians" on 9th December 1885. So in effect, despite the dates of 1885 and 1886 stated respectively by Thistle and Caley themselves for over 100 years, seniority is possibly too close to call definitively, especially given the extreme lack of information. And with Clach at the very least breathing down Thistle's and Caley's necks, it is not inconceivable that the seniority race among Inverness's major clubs might indeed be a three horse one with Citadel, founded 1887, also not far in arrears.

Both clubs' colours - which live on today on the shirts of Inverness Caledonian Thistle - appear to have been established at an early stage. Caley began life sporting narrow blue and white hoops before adopting plain blue. At the time of writing a large print of the original team in this livery is fixed on the wall behind the desk of club football secretary Jim Falconer (of whom much more later) in his office at the Caledonian Stadium. Thistle, who in their earliest years played in chocolate and white, adopted black and red from 1894, which makes me wonder if Mr. Smith had any connections with Glenurquhart?

Another sport which took great strides forward in the 1880s is Shinty and, 15 miles along the road from Inverness, Glenurquhart Shinty Club was formed at

almost exactly the same time as Thistle FC and also plays in black and red.

Thistle's first recorded base was right on Mr. Smith's home patch in the area at Diriebught which eventually became the site for Inverness Royal Academy's playing fields and for Millburn Academy which was originally next door and is now located on the old Royal Academy field. There is a further interesting, albeit unfortunate, connection here since it was on these very fields in 1967 that a Millburn pupil called Dodo Sinclair contracted tetanus after a fall, leading also to Inverness's entire secondary school population being inoculated. Dodo's father George, known as "Butch", was a long serving Thistle official and Vice Chairman.

However it doesn't seem to have taken Thistle long to relocate to Kingsmills Park on Kingsmills Road where the club was to stay until it played its very last game there in May 1994.

Onwards from that friendly of December 1885 where "Caledonians" beat Rovers 1-0, there were some others before Caley entered the Inverness Charity Cup in 1886, losing 3-1 to the Cameron Highlanders at the Barracks.

In the club's latter years, Caley fans published a fanzine called "(On A) Life Support Machine" and during the merger controversy in 1993 it featured a photo of the very first Caley team of 1886. Less than 20 years on, it is already possible to smile wryly at the caption the Fanzine editors placed below the photo and which is quoted again on p32.

"Well boys, what's it to be, do we go ahead and form the most successful Highland League club in history, or do we wait 107 years and build a petrol station instead down the dump with Fiona Larg?"

To paraphrase Churchill's response to Hitler's claim that Britain's neck would be wrung like a chicken's, it might be commented: "Some petrol station, some club!"

Just as Thistle played at Kingsmills from a very early stage, it did not take Caley very long to go to Telford Street. However Alex Main reveals that in its very earliest days the club played on The Carse although when he wrote that in 1986 it was just too early to reflect on the fact that, but for District Council indecision, the club might well have returned there just over a century later and the history of football in Inverness might have been very different. (see p8.)

Initially the Telford Street ground was leased and the precise location of the pitch changed slightly, especially before the Glen Mhor Distillery was built in 1905. Then in 1920 the club bought the land for the sum of £275, which pales into insignificance compared with the £1 million it fetched when it was sold three quarters of a century later as the biggest single asset of Inverness

Caledonian Thistle.

But even by the latter years of the 19th century, Inverness was well and truly divided into four football territories, all round the respective grounds. Caley's heartland was therefore the Big Green in the vicinity of Kenneth Street and the River Ness. Thistle had the Crown, Clach's fiefdom was the Merkinch while Citadel's sphere of influence was the Shore by the Harbour. Well over a century on, these lines of demarcation are still identifiable although history has also done much to fudge them.

The Highland Football League was founded in a Working Men's Club on Bridge Street in Inverness on August 4th, 1893. Again there is a parallel with shinty since both sports in the north appear to have enjoyed substantial club development during the 1880s before achieving some kind of inter club organisation in 1893 which is also the year that the Camanachd Association was formed.

The Highland League represented a further step forward in competitive opportunities for the likes of Thistle and Caley. They had both begun by playing friendlies but soon moved into the likes of the Charity Cup and also the North Cup when they both became founder members of the North FA in 1888. The clubs' records say that they each won the North Cup twice before the Highland League was even founded. But strangely they both claim to have been successful in 1889-90, Thistle under the name of Crown. Yet another typically substantial piece of late Victorian silverware, the Inverness Cup - known initially as the Pattison Cup - appeared in 1895 and Caley were its first winners.

That Working Men's Club where the league was founded was demolished in the early 1960s to make way for the development on the south side of Bridge Street which has been criticised for its architecture ever since. As it happens, in the mid 1990s that Upper Bridge Street development also housed the headquarters of Inverness and Nairn Enterprise whose substantial role in the foundation of Inverness Caledonian Thistle will emerge in later chapters. It was there in INE's Bridge Street HQ on 12th January 1994 that the celebration party was held following the announcement in Glasgow that afternoon that the merged Inverness club Caledonian Thistle had finished top of the poll to elect two new members to the Scottish Football League.

So in terms of time and space, the two most significant events in Highland football - the formation of the Highland League and entry to the Scottish League - were separated by almost exactly one hundred years on exactly the same spot.

Inverness's involvement in the Highland League is one of extreme contrast. The first season's line up in 1893 comprised Forres Mechanics and no fewer than six clubs from Inverness where the competition was founded. Then fast forward just over a century to find a league dominated by clubs from Aberdeenshire and

where twice - during Clach's crises of 1997 and 2010 - there was a distinct danger of Inverness interest in the competition disappearing altogether.

The very first Highland League title in 1894 was won by Thistle with Clach successful the next year and Caley's first success came in 1896 after they beat the Jags 1-0 in a play off at Grant Street. It took almost 20 years for the Highland League trophy to move out of Inverness whose four main clubs (Citadel's single win was in 1908-09) dominated the competition. In 1896-97 and again in 1901-02, the only teams to complete the programme were the Inverness quartet of Caley, Clach, Thistle and Citadel. The other Inverness interests in the league in these earliest years were Union, before they were taken over by Thistle, and the Cameron Highlanders.

The first non Inverness winners of the title were Aberdeen "A", which one takes to be the Dons' reserves and who were intermittent Highland League members on either side of World War 1. Aberdeen "A"'s two title victories came on their debut in 1912-13 and in their valedictory season of 1925-26. The pre war victory finally broke the early Inverness domination which, in the first couple of decades, had seen teams from the East regularly fill the bottom places. Forres Mechanics and especially an Elgin team, usually referred to as Elgin City, bore the brunt of the lower placings. Indeed Moray's capital provides the only three examples of "nul points" in the Highland League - a fate almost suffered by Fort William and Clach in the modern era - with Elgin City in 1900 and 1906 and Elgin Caledonian in 1901.

Gradually during the inter war years, teams from the East began to loosen the Inverness stranglehold on the league title. Buckie, who had joined in 1909, had their first success when the league restarted in 1919-20 after the hostilities and were to win it three more times during what has been called "the long weekend" between the two wars. Buckie's arrival brought numbers into double figures for the first time with ten teams including the Seaforths and Camerons, before Fraserburgh, Huntly, Keith, Rothes and Deveronvale all also joined before the advent of the second conflict.

By the time Hitler's Panzers were rolling into Poland in September 1939, the season had got off to a start with a record 15 teams but that was abandoned the following month and the league would not resume until 1946.

Despite Thistle's slightly faster start in those very first years, Caley began to established themselves at a fairly early stage as the more prolific title winners of the two. However this was initially not by as big a margin as later on when the sheer disparity between them in a number of ways would prove a major obstacle for the merger. Up until the Second World War, for instance, Caley won eight Highland League titles and Thistle five. Clach, on the other hand had by then won 15 but Clach's glory days very much came in the earliest years of the Highland

League when they won over half of the titles up until 1924 - 14 out of 26. The following 80 years would yield Clach just four more successes.

Thistle's history in the Highland League tended to feature purple patches whereas Caley's successes tended to be more consistent and accelerated into the 1980s. The first of Jags' three purple patches came in the mid 1930s. Apart from winning the League title in 1935-36 and the Qualifying Cup in 1932-33 they also lifted four consecutive Inverness Cups between 1932 and 1936.

The Qualifying Cup, which had been won the previous season by Citadel, was a particular triumph since it was a nationwide competition at the time and Thistle beat Penicuik 4-3 in the final at Borough Briggs, Elgin. The captain who would have lifted the cup aloft (or maybe not since it is massive!) was an R. Fraser. For an Inverness team this tells us little but this was not the last time that an R. Fraser would star for the Jags.

When the Highland League got under way again after World War 2 in 1946, the post war years provided some success for the Inverness teams. Clach had their "annus mirabilis" of 1947-48 when they won the League and also became the second winners of the new Highland League Cup. The Qualifying and North of Scotland Cups also came to Grant Street, although not the Inverness Cup.

It must have been a wonderful experience at that time to stand on terraces packed literally with thousands of fans, all desperate to inject a bit of Saturday afternoon joy into otherwise unbroken post war austerity. However the glory days of supporters attending Highland League matches in such numbers would not last forever.

Caley won back to back titles between 1950 and 1952 at a time when their ranks included the legendary goalscorer supreme Andrew "Jupie" Mitchell along with "Ginger" MacKenzie. Jupie hit the headlines when he scored all 10 goals for Caley in a 10-3 Qualifying Cup defeat of Fraserburgh in 1952 but it was at Kingsmills, where he went the following year, that he really made history.

Research in 2010 by Nairn based journalist Donald Wilson and former Caley secretary Ian Davidson revealed that it was Jupie with 77 league and cup goals for Thistle in 1955-56 who held the all time Highland scoring record and not that other scoring legend Davie Johnston who amassed 73 for Nairn some seasons later.

But despite the talents of the likes of Jupie, the latter 1950s were a fairly fallow period on the Highland scene at both Telford Street and Kingsmills. After Thistle's league title in 1936 it would be into the 70s before the trophy would return. And Caley's back to back successes of the early 50s provided their only league flags in a period of over 30 years until they won again in 1964, which is

my own first recollection of being a football supporter.

As a kid brought up in Dalneigh, it was almost inevitable that I would become a Caley fan. This may have been a relatively new housing scheme but it was firmly in Caley territory, so it was at Telford Street Park in the early 60s that I had my first experience of watching football. In these days, local urchins like ourselves had an unorthodox and very low cost means of entering the ground. Quite simply we "jooped in" over the back gate on Balnacraig Road at the corner of the Howden End rather than pay out 9d at the turnstiles beneath the two large plaster footballs whose fate, post merger, has never been established.

Once inside, typically at around 1:30pm, the next task was to take a trawl round the entire ground, picking up all the discarded MacKintosh's lemonade bottles - Red Cola, Queens Cup and all the rest - from the last home game and claiming the 3d deposits on them at the club shop. We would go right through the Howden End and also the corrugated iron enclosure at the Distillery End, which became the Comet End when alcohol production ceased on Telford Street and the Glen Mhor was demolished. This trawl would generate sufficient funds not only to acquire a few giant Penny Dainties and a bag of Smiths crisps with the blue paper twist of salt inside. It would also go some way towards raising the shilling it would cost to get into the front stalls at the La Scala the following Saturday if Caley were out of town.

Once the Jim Reeves and Jimmy Shand records on the primitive PA system had given way to an announcer reading the "2-3-5" team lines with its three half backs and two inside forwards - typically from Jimmy Smith in goals through to Ian Nelson at outside left - the game would get under way and apart from our vocal support, all that was required was to change ends at half time to ensure that we always got the best view of any Caley goals. In these days we were seldom disappointed, with the highlight an 8-0 thrashing of Highland League debutants Brora Rangers in that 63-64 championship season.

However the core of the Caley fans, including many of the diehards, would remain in the Howden End which backed on to the nurseries of that name. This was the engine room of the most passionate support for the club where supporters would be engulfed by the most frenetic atmosphere within the ground as well as a unique blend of aromas ranging from alcohol of varying degrees of freshness through cigarette smoke to the pies from the Howden End servery.

There were occasional forays for Inverness derbies to Grant Street and to that haven of black and red paint which was Kingsmills Park. It was less easy to get into Kingsmills for nothing but I think we tried once from MacEwen Drive. It was also difficult to pass the black and red pie shop without succumbing and investing some of the previous Saturday's bottle money. But it was more or less

unknown for us to scale the external staircase off Broadstone Avenue and watch the game from the Thistle stand.

This was a 600 seater structure which had been erected in the early 50s for a grand total of £564.10s.10d but at that stage we were unaware of what was below that grandstand. It was only much later that I learned of the unenviable reputation which the Kingsmills away dressing room had as the worst in the Highland League. On the other hand, I can't imagine Chairman Jock McDonald affording much creature comfort to his opposition.

The mid 60s was still an era of relative harmlessness and naivety and pre dated the advent of the football casuals. Certainly the Caley Animals who would, among other less savoury activities, hold pitched battles with the Elgin Casuals, were still the best part of a decade into the future. And indeed for much of that early part of the second half of the 20th century, Caley's main rivals were Elgin City. Serious rivalry with Ross County was still some time away. Similarly within the town, Caley's principal bone of contention was Clach before Thistle latterly assumed that role.

Over at Kingsmills one legendary institution was the Half Time Harriers who would dash the 80 yards or so to the Corriegarth for a quick pint (or two) right on the 45 minute whistle. Frequently they would fail to return in time for the start of the second half and I still have to establish the authenticity or otherwise of the tale that on one occasion they came back to discover that Jags had conceded five goals in their absence!

However it was not all doom and gloom at Kingsmills Park and how Jock McDonald first became Chairman and then brought "King" Willie Grant in to manage the team to back to back triumphs between 1971 and 1973 is related on page 34. The League Cup in 1971 which preceded the first title was Jags' first trophy for a decade and it was certainly savoured Up the Hill as the start of their second purple patch.

A 6-1 victory over Clach at Telford Street had sealed the triumph for a team managed by Willie Grant with Murd Urquhart as trainer and which included such well known Inverness football personalities as Peter Corbett, Alistair "Titchy" Black, and Roshie Fraser - the second "R. Fraser" - who had been married just the previous day. Corbett and Fraser would for a few months in 1985 become rival managers of Caley and Thistle respectively although the great Inverness rivalry came later in that decade between Corbett and "Lofty" Black - "Titchy's" younger brother Brian who succeeded Fraser.

However Jags triumphant season was 1972-73 when they added the Qualifying and again the Highland League Cup to that second league crown. But the brief spate of successes was soon to dry up again for over a decade before Jags' third

and final purple patch in the late 1980s.

But if Thistle won the Highland League twice in the 70s, Caley did it three times. This also included two consecutive successes between 1976 and 1978 as they headed towards a final tally of 18 league flags - a record which was only equalled by Clach in 2004 a decade after Caley and Thistle had departed. At the time of writing, Elgin City - now also long departed - had won 15 titles, Buckie 10 with Thistle next on 8. So of the Highland League's five most successful clubs, only two remain in 2011.

Caley's double triumph of the latter 70s actually began a run of five titles in eight years since the club also achieved a magnificent triple between 1981 and 1984. Season 82-83 was a particular triumph because Caley finished it undefeated in the league.

Three in a row had only previously been done in the modern era by Elgin (1967-70) and Keith (1978-81). Clach had had runs of four between 1902 and 1906 and from 1920 to 1924. But all of this would later be eclipsed by the five consecutive triumphs from 1993-98 by the Huntly team initially put together by Steve Paterson. Given that Bobby Wilson had been in charge of the Keith side whose three in a row split Caley's five before going on to win it twice with Ross County, the men who pioneered the Highlands' foray into the SFL already had a considerable track record in the Highland League.

Clearly the end of the 70s and into the 80s under Willie Hunter, Alex Main and Raymond MacKintosh had been an extremely fruitful period for Caley. That would also continue from 1985 under Corbett whose first act as Caley manager was to reject an offer by his predecessor MacKintosh to return as a player.

Both clubs, and notably Caley with their formidable youth development organisation, also made their mark in the selling on of formidable local talent to larger institutions. In 1980 Kevin MacDonald moved from Telford Street to Leicester City for a then record £26,000 and from there to Liverpool where he did the English League and Cup double in 1986. In 1983, Thistle sold Darren MacLean for over £25,000 to Liverpool although his stay turned out to be short lived. Later in the decade, Les Fridge moved onwards and upwards from Kingsmills to Chelsea then St Mirren.

Perhaps the most sensational move came in 1978 when Billy Urquhart was signed on the spot for £15,000 by Rangers manager John Greig after scoring two against them in a friendly at Telford Street. After playing for Rangers in the Scottish League and in Europe, Urquhart had a spell with Wigan before returning to Caley to play a formidable part in their fine team of the 80s. His efforts included not only numerous goals but also vital matchwinning ones - including the last (and illegal! - see pages 50-51) competitive goal at Telford Street Park in

1994.

It is not the purpose of this introduction to the story of how Inverness Caledonian Thistle came into being to go into great detail about the honours won by either merger partner. But Caley's seven Qualifying Cup wins in the 19 seasons up to 1984, which also marked the completion of a "three in a row", was another outstanding feat. This also meant that by the mid 80s, especially when Scottish Cup runs were added into the equation, Caley were enjoying a run of success completely unprecedented in the club's and indeed the Highland League's history. This wasn't to last, as will be seen in the next chapter. But what the success of that era did do was to create a certain generation of Caley fans who, unlike their older colleagues, had known little other than consistent success as the club went into the final phase of its history. That would certainly fuel the "go it alone" and anti merger sentiments which would soon exist within the ranks of Caley fans.

Scottish Cup success was a relative newcomer to both the Thistle and Caley portfolios of glory but it came in no small way just as the two clubs were celebrating their centenaries. There is also nothing like a run in the national knockout to draw attention to a smaller club outwith the Scottish League but in terms of gaining entry to that organisation, clubs from the Highland League had drawn consistent blanks for decades with the nearest miss in 1973 when Thistle lost out by a single vote to Edinburgh works team Ferranti Thistle. Conspiracy theories as to how clubs in the South simply didn't want representation from the remote Highlands were abundant - and probably fairly accurate.

Inevitably one other consequence of Inverness's repeated National League rejection was the regular floating of the suggestion that there should be some kind of merger among the town's teams to create a stronger case. This was almost a hardy annual which was especially adept at surfacing off the back of someone's successful Scottish Cup run but never came to anything - until the scenario which is about to unfold. And in these days of Scottish League rejection, a run in the Scottish Cup was the nearest Inverness ever got to feeling part of the national football scene. Also, with only four Scottish Cup places latterly available to them, Highland League clubs had to run the gauntlet of up to three Qualifying Cup ties before they could even get into the competition proper.

Scottish Cup runs of any great length were not at all common before the mid 50s when Caley went out 7-0 at home to Falkirk in 1954-55 in the 6th round. Two years later Raith Rovers put them out 3-2 at Telford Street in round 5.

But Inverness's golden years in the Scottish Cup came in the mid 80s as they both prepared to celebrate 100 years of existence. These years provided huge high profile successes for both Caley and Thistle which made the injustice of the absence of Inverness from the Scottish Football League even more apparent.

In 1984, replay goals from Martin Lisle and Billy Urquhart away to Alex Smith's Stirling Albion brought Rangers to Telford Street for a fourth round tie which caught the national imagination and saw massive queues for tickets although Rangers eventually won 6-0. The following year, Nero MacDonald got two and Wilson Robertson the other in a 3-0 victory at neutral Methil in a second round second replay against Berwick. Hearts at Tynecastle awaited but again the scoreline was 6-0 in the wrong direction. Then in 1987 Smith saw a less disadvantageous outcome in Inverness when his St. Mirren team beat Caley 3-0 on their way to lifting the trophy itself.

Kingsmills' high water mark in the Scottish Cup actually came in the centenary year of 1985 when Thistle pulled off the unthinkable and defeated Kilmarnock 3-0 to win through to a fourth round tie at Celtic Park which must have seen the pound signs positively spinning in front of Jock McDonald's eyes. Once again that 6-0 scoreline haunted Inverness but it was a glorious departure for Thistle.

By now Caley's pre eminence of the 1980s was about to be seriously challenged by their neighbours from across the river. Inverness was about to impose a two way split of Highland League football's honours which would increase rivalry between Caley and Thistle to unprecedented levels. This was a development which would mark the start of what must be the most intriguing period in the history of the game in the Highland Capital.