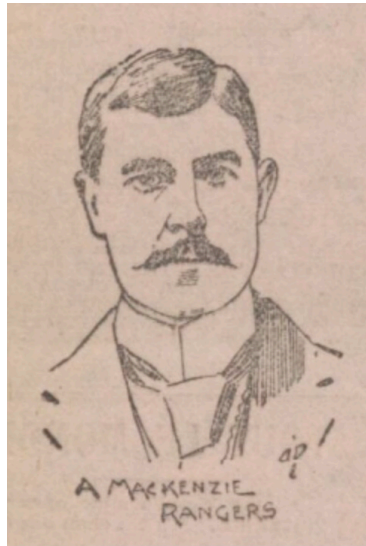


Alexander B. MacKenzie



September, 1902

“Versatility is a proof of genius.” Emerson

On the eve of another engagement between the Queen’s Park and the Rangers, I cannot do better than introduce to you this old, this popular, and this gallant Light Blue.

When some who are now wearing the familiar colours of the Ibroxonians were wrapped in swaddling bands, ‘The Mackenzie of Mackenzie’ was in the field battling right bravely in their defence – just like the Vallances, and the McNeills, who founded the Rangers FC on the Fleshers’ Haugh of Glasgow Green.

Alexander B MacKenzie was born in, Campbeltown, on the bonny banks of the famous Campbeltown Loch. Coming to Glasgow, as many youths have done, to seek fame and fortune, he did so with some natural gifts, such as a good physique and a pleasant and comely appearance. These, aided by a natural aptitude and liking for sport, secured him a ready entrée into the ranks of the Old Pilgrims FC, a very appropriate club for one who has had such a lengthened pilgrimage in which to begin the patos that lead to glory and to renown, in the Pilgrims (whose grounds, I should tell you, were situated to north of the Paisley Road, east of Copland Road) were such noted players as JJ Gow, afterwards the famous Queen’s Park half back; Allan Stewart, who graduated to a similar position in the Queen’s ranks; D. McIntosh, R. Ballantyne, George Miller and K. Goodwin, the last named one of the sprightliest and brightest little forwards on the field it has been my pleasure to see ‘sand dancing’ on the ball.

“Learn young, learn fair,” is not a bad motto for a youth, and acting upon it, A.B., although not exactly an AB physically, played his first Scottish tie for the Pilgrims as a centre forward long before he had reached the age of 17, and that in the year 1877.

The first proof he gave of his wonderful versatility was in playing for the old Cowllairs FC as full back with William MacLeod, the father and founder of that Northern organisation long since extinct. The match this pair partnered each other was in a Scottish tie v Queen's Park on old Gourlay Park, Springburn, the centre forward against them being none other than Dr John Smith, now of Kirkcaldy. Tom Vallance, the then captain of the Rangers, hearing of the budding powers of 'A.B.' called personally at his digs one evening, and induced him to extend his pilgrimage to Kinning Park, then the ground of the Rangers, and famous as the scene of many stirring and thrilling football battles. This was in season 1882/83, and his debut for Rangers was made against their old foes, the Vale of Leven, who had then in their ranks amongst others Daniel Friel, the present Celtic trainer.

Anxious as every youth was then to measure himself against the Queen's Park, his opportunity came in the benefit match for the late and lamented Eadie Fraser, who in that faraway season was ordered abroad for his health, but who, alas, for Scottish football, crossed the bar to return no more. In this match, AB scored one of the two goals by which Rangers defeated the Queen's – a feat of which he was naturally proud.

It was when pitted against Kilmarnock Athletic in 1887, then, by the way, a power in Ayrshire football, that AB gave further proof of his versatility by playing centre half, a position he was fitted to fill by reason of his height and reach of limb.

He was close on six feet, and it took a very clever and knowing forward on the ball to escape his octopus-like tackling toes. His versatile powers made him the Handy Man of his club and no player within my knowledge has rendered more varied or more useful service.

The last place in which he could, of course, utilise his playing ability was in goal, and when he stepped between the standards he filled them to the eye as a Dickson, a Parlane, an Inglis, a Thomson, a McDonald or a Graham did in their day.

It was playing goal that he was chosen for the Glasgow v Sheffield match; a striking compliment being paid him by successive talent selectors, for in one season he was elected Glasgow's 'dernier resort' to resist the 'Blades' and the next he was chosen centre forward to cut them if possible to the bone.

As a keeper one of his greatest triumphs was in the year the penalty kick law was introduced – namely, 1892, when, playing a Scottish Cup tie V Queen's Park on Hampden Park, his confrere, Donald Gow, was penalised twice for violation of the law. AB saved both penalties, a feat then unheard of, and one which secured for him at the time, well deserved rounds of applause from the delighted supporters of his club.

I will furnish you with one more illustration, not alone of his remarkable versatility, but his grit, and to coin a word, his evergreenness, the latter quality, by the way, that no Rangers save, perhaps, James McIntyre and John McPherson, are fitted to be named with him. The illustration to which I refer is this. In 1891 he played against Alloa Athletic as a right wing forward, and twenty years after, and that, too, on the same field and against the same club, he played in goal for the Scottish Amateurs – a nomadic band, in which he finished his grand pilgrimage to perfection.

Considering his long, his varied, and his useful career, you will think it strange he never had an international cap. This, I may say, was due to some extent to his versatility, for his powers were too

diffused. Had he made himself a specialist in any one of the positions he adorned in the field, then the talent selectors must have capped him, although quietly between you and I, up till the dawn of the present Rangers' renaissance, that club's players were not too highly favoured with these ornaments from the SFA.

In athletics, AB also distinguished himself as a half-miler of no mean pace and wonderful staying power. He was one of those who contributed to build up the Rangers' popularity in athletics, and it was a significant compliment to his ability when the members of the SAAA elected him as their president.

This leads me to notice his career as a legislator, which he began in the cabinet councils of the Rangers in 1886, and in which he still retains his seat.

He has also represented Rangers and Glasgow on the SFA committee, and last season he was elected to the presidency of the Glasgow Association, a post, however, which he had to resign on account of the pressure of business.

A wise counsellor, a sagacious diplomatist, and an apt administrator, Mr MacKenzie has rendered valuable service to his club and to the Association with which he has been connected. Personally he is most likeable, a fact that is proven by the host of friends he has formed during his unblemished connection with Scottish sports.

The wish of these, and of all who know him, is that he may be long spared to take an interest in the pastimes he has done so much to further and to elevate.

At the close of the 1910/11 campaign, when Rangers once again were crowned league champions, AB decided to step down from his role as a director of the club. It had been rumoured for some time that the man who had been connected with the Rangers for 28 years was considering calling it a day. Still, though, it had been hoped, up until the last minute, that he would put himself forward for re-election. That didn't come to pass, and his great experience in football legislation – which he had continually been at the forefront of – was suddenly gone. Of course, he would be on hand were he ever required, but his day-to-day involvement was at an end.

Ten years a player, seven years beavering away in the background, and a working director for 11 years. Quite a contribution to the club, and as such, everyone associated with Rangers agreed that the time had come for AB to enjoy an 'outsider's' interest in the game.

At AB's final AGM, he listened on as, one by one, a series of great orators spoke highly of his valuable contribution to the club. It was then gratifying to learn that they were to gift Mr MacKenzie the generous sum of £100, to mark their appreciation for past services, as he had stood by the club during some of the darkest days of their existence. The spirit shown by the shareholders was worthy of praise, but they knew only too well that one of the main reasons the club was able to haul itself out of the doldrums was sitting just a few yards in front of them. AB had worked tirelessly to get the club back on a sound financial footing, and had left no stone unturned in his quest to do so.

Mr Alexander Bryce MacKenzie – who died in Glasgow from heart complications at the age of just 52 – would forever be remembered as a true Ranger.