

1916-17

In September the Forfarshire Football Association postponed making any arrangements for the Forfarshire Cup until the New Year. The season was Brechin's first since 1906 when not a single game was played.

By March 1917 James S Lyon, City's first captain, was serving as an Air Mechanic with the Royal Flying Corps.

Lance-Corporal Robert Jaffray, formerly of the Black Watch, by then of the Machine Gun Corps, well-known Brechin Junior player and a one-game player for City, was awarded the Military Medal in June 1917.

James Low Bushnell, a regular with Brechin Hearts, who had played one game for City, in 1907-08 and who was the brother-in-law, of David Nicholl, was reported as wounded September 1916. Bushnell would return to play for City after the war.

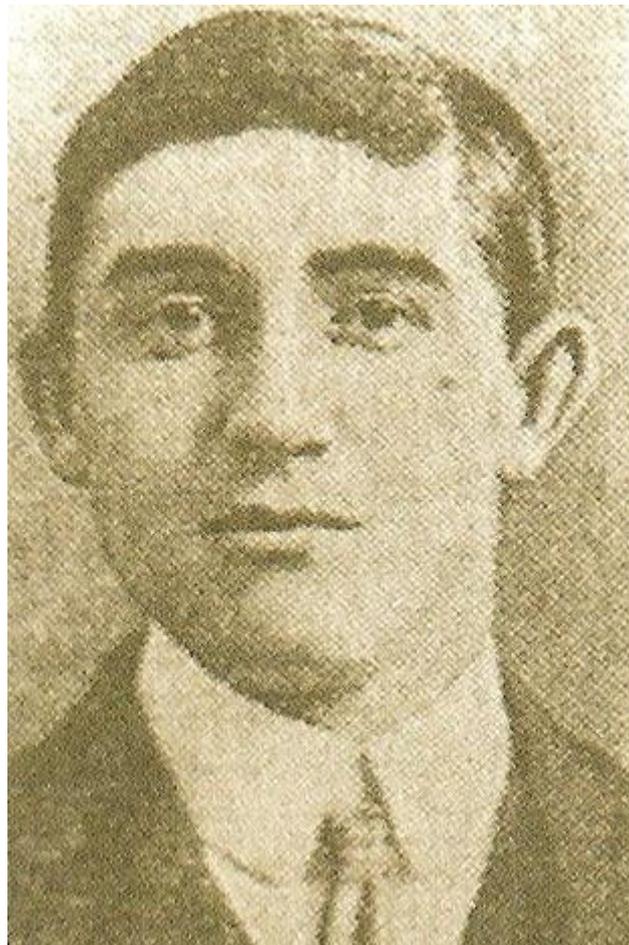
The next City player to fall was Robert Strachan. Robert Mitchell Strachan, son of James Strachan, linen factory worker, and Elizabeth Strachan (nee Mitchell) was born on 18 December 1882 at 14 Union Street. By 1891 his parents, three brothers, sister and himself had moved to a one roomed house at 86 High Street. By 1901 the family, now comprising his parents, four brothers, two sisters and Robert, were living in a two roomed house at 38 Montrose Street. Robert was noted, at that point, as a flax worker. He had married Mary Burnett in Brechin in 1908. At the time of his marriage he was resident at 13 Kinnaird Place and noted as a paper mill worker, which was also his occupation at the time of his enlistment. He was a well-known member of the City Band.

He played for Brechin Harp, Brechin City, Brechin, Dundee Hibs, Brechin City again, Dundee 1910 and finally returned for a third period with Brechin City. Robert Strachan enlisted in the 5th Black Watch in October 1914, at which point he was noted as residing in Southesk Terrace, Brechin. He had arrived initially in France, according to his medal roll, on 13 March 1915. He was wounded with the local Territorials, and invalided home in September 1915 (at which point his address was again noted as Kinnaird Place). After being wounded, he was attached to the 3rd/5th Black Watch, the 5th Battalion's training cadre.

In October 1916 the 4th/5th Black Watch, as part of the 39th Division, was engaged in the Battle of the Ancre Heights, one of the final phases of the Somme offensive of that year. Lance Corporal Robert Strachan, originally of the 5th Black Watch, Service Number, 240664, was first reported missing at the end of October 1916. His death is noted as 14 October 1916 but it was not until November 1917 that his wife, who resided at Southesk Terrace, was officially notified that her husband was by then presumed to have been killed. Robert Strachan has no known grave but is commemorated on the Black Watch's panel on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme.

Harry Hampton, cousin of Colin Hampton, and latterly a City regular, was reported wounded while serving as a private with The Black Watch in November 1916.

Corporal Gordon MacFarlane, the former Brechin Hearts player, occasional City player and Brechin and Forfarshire cricket player, was wounded in the face in November 1916 while serving with the 5th Black Watch. At the end of February *The London Gazette* carried the announcement of his award of a Distinguished Conduct Medal. "For conspicuous gallantry in action. He, with another sergeant, reorganised some men and attacked an enemy bombing post, driving the enemy out and rescuing a wounded officer who had been captured. Later, although himself wounded, he continued to remain at his post."



David Collie Martin, generally known as Collie Martin, was the next Brechin footballer to die in the war. David was born on 19 March 1890 at 8 Union Street, Brechin, the son of David Collie and Jessie Ann Martin. As an infant, in 1891, he was boarded in Market Street with the McGarrie family. As a youth he had resided in 1901 in 86 Montrose Street with his grandmother, mother and aunt. In 1913 he married Catherine Reid, at which point his residence remained 86 Montrose Street, Brechin. At the time of his marriage in 1913 he was noted as a bleachfield worker and immediately before enlisting in 1915 he was employed at the East Bleachfield in Brechin. His address at the time of his enlistment however appears to have been 26 Kinnaird Place, Brechin. He had played for Brechin Hearts, Brechin City, Dundee, Brechin City (again) and Dundee Hibs. He enlisted in the 3rd/5th Black Watch around October or November 1915. He is noted as having been killed serving as a corporal with the 5th Black Watch near Ypres on 26 March 1917, a week after his twenty seventh birthday.

The Third Battle of Ypres was still some three months away when he was killed on this section of the front over which fighting had continued almost incessantly since the early days of the war. His Service Number was 241085. He is buried in Railway Dugouts Burial Ground, on the outskirts of Ypres, Belgium.



Collie Martin's grave.

In a letter to his family, his company sergeant major said, "The Germans tried to raid us and Collie was hit by a shell. He never spoke and died in a few minutes. When I saw him he had a smile on his face. He was a good soldier and greatly respected by everyone. He was a great favourite, and Brechin today is the poorer for the loss of one of her gallant sons."

The Battle of Arras in the spring of 1917 saw enormous Scottish casualties, with three of the Scottish Divisions (the 9th Scottish, the 15th Scottish and the 51st Highland) all engaged. The Arras campaign was initiated on 9 April 1917, Easter Monday, and on that date fell one of Brechin City's best known early players, Davie Glen.

David Glen, the one-time captain of Brechin Hearts, the bustling centre forward, the veteran of City's first decade, the first Brechin City player to have been awarded a testimonial, had also played (very briefly in both cases) for Dundee and Millwall as well as for his home town team.

David Glen enlisted in December 1914. He was serving with the Service Number 16611 as a Sergeant with the 13th Royal Scots when he was killed. The 13th Royal Scots was a Service Battalion which had been raised in Edinburgh in September 1914, was attached to the 45th Brigade of the 15th Scottish Division from that point until the end of the war and which landed in France in July 1915. Glen's medal roll indicates that he arrived in France on 5 August 1915.



David Glen, early in his army service.

On Easter Sunday, 1917, in the area around Arras, for the first time that year, the sun had a touch of warmth although snow still lingered around many of the banks. The Germans shelled Arras continuously that Sunday. The Monday morning, 9 April, however was cold with a sharp wind blowing from the south-east and rain squalls. On that day the British and Imperial forces launched their offensive around Arras, sometimes referred to as the First Battle of the Scarpe. It was essentially a diversion in support of the French offensive about to be launched (on 16 April) by General Nivelle on the Aisne. David Glen was killed on the first day of that battle.

David Glen had been awarded the Military Medal for bravery (notification of which award only reached his mother a few weeks after his death) and had been recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal on several occasions. The major commanding his company wrote to Glen's mother some time after his death. "It did not take me long to see what a magnificent soldier your son was, and I always was confident that he would do his duty. He not only fulfilled the duties of a platoon Sergeant, but he took a keen interest in the welfare of the whole company. One always found him working or supervising work in the trenches to improve the bad conditions for the men. It was not necessary to tell Sergeant Glen what to do every time we went into the trenches, for he had so carefully studied how to improve existing positions to be able to carry on. He was a tower of strength and many a time I have seen him helping others to carry their loads, when they were exhausted. We played football together, worked and fought together and I always found him a most capable and fearless leader. He was killed during the taking of ----- village, in front of Arras, on 9 April 1917. Sergeant Glen was well-known outside of our Battalion. Our Brigadier-General often asked how Sergeant Glen was, and he expressed his sorrow to me when I told him of your son's glorious death. For conspicuous gallantry in a raid I recommended your son for the DCM. Accept my deepest sympathy in your loss of a very good and noble son. He has paid the great sacrifice for us all, and I am convinced that he is happy now that he has won so magnificently the last peaceful rest. Had I not been wounded two days afterwards I should have written to you before."

His mother resided at Montrose Street, later at 28 Kinnaird Place, Brechin. He is buried in Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez, France.

“Possibly only his men came to realise the complete dependability of the quarrier. Few of his contemporaries quite grasped the significance of his worth and the effect it had on the youngsters who watched him play.”

Walter Fowler, son of James Fowler, a tenter in the Denburn Works, and Margaret Ann Fowler (nee Barclay) was born on 1 January 1889 in the High Street, Brechin. He died exactly a fortnight after David Glen, and only a few miles away.

Walter Fowler played for Brechin Arnot as a juvenile. In April 1909, while noted as an Arnot player, he was selected to play inside left for a Brechin Second Class Juniors select against Brechin Hearts, his future club. The Second Class select beat Brechin Hearts four-two. By August 1910 he was noted as Brechin Hearts' expected outside left for the season ahead but was not noted among the Hearts' new signings. It is assumed therefore that he joined Brechin Hearts between April 1909 and August 1910. It is noted, at the outset of 1911-12, that Brechin Rovers were “exceedingly anxious to secure the services of... the little outside left, Walter Fowler, but (he) declined the offer and decided to stick to the maroons.” Walter Fowler was a regular in the Hearts line-up of 1911-12. He played left half for Hearts in a challenge game against a Brechin City XI in December 1911 and was among the noted Hearts players in the report of a pre-season friendly between Brechin City and Brechin Hearts in September 1912.

Like David Glen before him, Fowler had been captain of Brechin Hearts, in his case in the last pre-war season, 1913-14. In that season Brechin Hearts won the Arbroath and District Junior Cup, beating Ardenlea 3-2 in the replayed final. Walter Fowler continued to play for Brechin Hearts into the next season: he is noted as one of the scorers in a 3-3 draw with Dundee Osborne on 3 November 1914. He played for the Forfarshire Junior select and also at some point played for Brechin City. (He was likely the outside left noted as Fuller in the Brechin City team defeated by Montrose on New Year's Day 1915. He is also noted as having played a trial for Dundee Hibs, for whom he “played a good game forward, and had many dashing runs”, against Forfar Athletic on 3 April 1915 at Forfar. He in fact scored the opening goal in the first half and Dundee Hibs led 1-0 at the interval. The game in fact ended a 3-3 draw. At the end of 1914-15 Brechin Hearts were the defeated finalists in the Forfar District Junior Cup: Fowler was one of the two scorers in the replayed final.

He is noted on the Roll of Honour of D & R Duke's Denburn Works, where he was employed as a lapper, as having left Duke's in October 1915.

Walter Fowler enlisted in the 5th (Forfarshire) Battalion of The Black Watch, likely in October 1915 and trained with its depot battalion, the 3rd/5th, at Ripon in Yorkshire. While at Ripon he played for the 3rd/5th Black Watch football team. Several other member of that team, including Collie Martin (formerly of Brechin City, Dundee and Dundee Hibs), James Bushnell (formerly of Brechin Hearts and with a single game for City) and the goalkeeper, James Livie, were also from Brechin and had played junior football as well as games for Brechin City, in the town. Walter Fowler returned to Brechin from Ripon in May 1916 to marry Mary Ann Sinclair.



Walter Fowler, unknown, James Low.

He transferred at some point between June 1916 and April 1917, along with another Brechin soldier, James Low, to the 7th (Fife) Battalion of The Black Watch with the Service Number 292529. The 7th Black Watch was part of the 153rd Brigade of the 51st Highland Division. Shortly before five o'clock on the morning of 23 April 1917, British troops advanced east of Arras upon the German line between Gavrelle, Guémappe and Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. This advance marked the beginning of the Second Battle of the Scarpe. The Germans had brought up many new batteries, spread along the line, and had massed large numbers of machine guns in the villages, trenches and emplacements, from which they were able to sweep the British line of advance by direct and enfilade fire. These machine guns were thick in the ruins of Roeux. The 51st Highland Division attacked the village of Roeux and the German line which stretched from Roeux northwards past the Roeux chemical factory and the station on the road to Gavrelle. On that day, the 7th Black Watch advanced from the general direction of Fampoux, parallel to and immediately north of, the railway line, and suffered, along with the remainder of the division, severe casualties.

At first Walter Fowler was noted as missing. "Information from the front has been received that a well-known Brechin footballer, Walter Fowler, has been missing since 23 April. He was one of the best known juniors in the Centre and North of Scotland and has appeared in representative matches. He also played for Brechin City." One week later however, the same columns report his death. "Intimation has now been received that Private Walter Fowler, Black Watch, who was previously reported missing was killed in action in France on 23 April. Before the war he was a lapper at Denburn Works. He was one of the best known junior football players in the district and had played in several representative matches as well as for Brechin City. He was the only son of Mr James Fowler, 11 Montrose Street, and leaves a young widow and child who reside in Damacre Road." The same issue includes a death notice: "Deaths: for their Country. Killed in action in France on 23 April Private Walter Fowler, only son of Mr and Mrs James Fowler, 11 Montrose St, Brechin, and husband of Mary Ann Sinclair, 13 Damacre Rd, Brechin."

Tragically, two days later, his friend, James Low, who had transferred with him from the 5th to the 7th Black Watch, was also killed. Walter Fowler is buried at Brown's Copse British Cemetery, Roeux, and James Low lies less than fifty yards from him. Brown's Copse Cemetery is on the Black Watch's line of attack between Fampoux and Roeux. At the request of his widow who visited Brown's Copse in the 1920s, his grave is inscribed with the words, 'He lies in a beautiful spot'.



Walter Fowler's grave.