



FINLAY MACRAE, Inverness Asylum, caps 1, cap number 79

Finlay Macrae was born on 11th November 1887 at Knockbain, Rosshire. He was the first child of Walter Macrae and his wife Elizabeth (nee MacArthur). In the 1901 census Finlay was working as a clerk in an agent's office. By 1911 he was working as an attendant at the Inverness Asylum, the census also notes that he was a Gaelic and English speaker.

The staff at the Asylum had a hockey team and by 1911 Macrae was a fixture in goals. His reputation rose quickly and in November 1911 he featured in a district trial for the North of Scotland. Macrae was described as "fearless and gets in front of impossible shots", he was also credited as a major factor in Asylum being undefeated for 3 successive seasons. By the time of the final trial in January 1914, Macrae was selected as goalkeeper for the colours. He did enough to be selected for the first international of the season which was to be played in Aberdeen against Wales.

Finlay Macrae was the 79th man to be selected by Scotland. In his solitary cap on 21st February 1914, Scotland were favourites, having not lost to Wales in ten years. However Wales went on to win 3-1. The Welsh win was largely due to an injury to the Scottish left back Inglis, who injured his collar bone early in the game and was unable to continue. The press even mentioned that two of the goals were "unstoppable shots" that gave the keeper no chance. However when the Scotland team for Ireland match was announced Dean Farquhar of Cartha was between the sticks.

In November 1914, Sir George McCrae (no relation) started to recruit a "Sportsman's Battalion" including many professional footballers including eleven from Hearts. Finlay Macrae caught the train to Edinburgh to be part of this battalion which would officially be known as the 16th Royal Scots but is better known as McCrae's Battalion. The battalion travelled to France in January 1916 as part of the 34th Division.

On the 1st July 1916 Finlay Macrae was severely wounded in the defence of the Scots Redoubt near La Boisselle on the Somme. In recognition of his bravery that day he was awarded the Military Medal (MM). On recovering from his wounds, Macrae rejoined the battalion. He was again recognised for his bravery being gazetted for a bar to his MM on 13th July 1917 But Fin's luck was to run out, on the

26th August 1917 during the assault on Cologne Farm near Hagricourt, he was shot and killed. His body was not recovered post war and he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing, as well on the family headstone in Tomnahurich Cemetery, Inverness.

In the words of the Macrae's Battalion Trust's history, Sergeant Finlay Macrae was regarded as the finest soldier in the battalion.

Sources:

Scotland's People

Ancestry

British Newspaper Archive

Scottish Hockey Records

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

National Archives

Macrae's Battalion by Jack Alexander