

# Actors and dancers picked for first women's international team

Footballers are often accused of being play actors on the pitch. Now it seems that Scotland's first international women's football team was in fact made up of actors and dancers plucked out of Edinburgh theatres.

The first international football match between Scotland and England was played at Hibernian's original home ground at Easter Road, Edinburgh, in May 1881.

The little-known match was attended by more than 1,000 fans and resulted in a 3-0 victory for the Scots.

Now it has been revealed the Scots team, who wore blue jerseys, white knickerbockers, red stockings, a red belt and even high heeled boots, was made up of actors and dancers assembled by theatrical agents.

The historic "unofficial international" is revealed in the one-hour BBC Scotland documentary Dougray Scott: Bringing Football Home, now available on iPlayer.

Historian Professor Fiona Skillen, from Glasgow Caledonian University, said: "The first unofficial international match was held in May 1881 at Hibernian Park.

"We think the players were drawn from the local theatres so they were actresses and dancers and they were brought together by theatrical agents to put on this spectacular.

"This was very much seen as an entertainment rather than a sporting activity."

Prof Skillen said a second match between the nations, played a

week later in Glasgow, ended up with crowd violence.

She said there were threats against the players as the women were seen to challenge social norms, and had to be rescued from the pitch in a horse-drawn cart.

Prof Skillen said: "A riot breaks out (in Glasgow). It wasn't something that they thought was fun or entertaining.

"They saw it as sort of immoral that these women were on the pitch, that they were showing their ankles and going against society.

"They try to attack the women and they tear up the stakes at the side of the pitch and they're chasing them.

"Eventually they have to bring this horse drawn cart onto the pitch to load the women into it to help them get away safely."

She added: "Women's place was seen as being in the home. Their roles were nurturing so they were therefore supposed to be looking after children, looking after their menfolk.

"Their focus was on the home and those roles, it wasn't supposed to be about going out into the wider world and pursuing their own interests and passions."

Prof Skillen said women's football increased during the First World War when there was a huge rise in women in the workforce, filling jobs vacated by men on the front line.

Women's football teams came out of munitions factories and fixtures played for charity were attended by thousands.

But the women's game was suppressed again after the war ended when women were expected to return to "wifely duties".

Prof Skillen tells the programme's presenter, Hollywood actor and football fan Dougray Scott: "We don't have a formal ban until 1948 but what we have is an informal ban and there are

notes in the records of the FA where they are actively discouraging their association members from giving facilities to women's games.

"That means that women who want to play have to find spaces that are not associated with the Football Association. So they are playing in public parks and there's obviously not quite that legitimacy because you don't have officially sanctioned referees.

"UEFA sent a memo to all of the associations and asked them if the women's game was growing in their area if they would be willing to lift any sanctions that were in place and support the women's game.

"Thirty one countries came back and said absolutely we will lift any sanctions, there is interest and growth in the game and the only one that came back and said no was Scotland."

It would take almost a century after that 1881 fixture for the first official international to be played as the Scottish FA continued to resist women's football.

The SFA did not recognise women's football and when the first international match was played between Scotland and England in 1972 it was not sanctioned by the governing body.

The historic match had to be played at Ravenscraig Stadium in Greenock, which belonged to the local council.

Prof Skillen added: "I think we are quite a misogynistic country. I think that's changing but I think in that period we definitely were. I think there was an element of 'football is for men and we have to protect that space'.

"Ultimately the SFA do back down and do recognise women's football but not until 1974.

"We have this odd situation where the first international match is played in 1972, our team is not recognised, they have

no support, they have to take out provident loans to get the shirts. They tried to hire a bus, but it didn't turn up and they had to go in a furniture van.

"They had to sew the names and numbers onto their kits themselves, so it really was a very kind of home-knitted affair from our side, but it didn't hold them back, they did it."



Looking to Easter Road