

IT WAS enough to make those watching the news perform a double take: Perhaps not quite a JFK moment, but a bolt from the blue nevertheless. On the evening of Tuesday, May 23, 1978, Jock Wallace quit as manager of Rangers. Just a fortnight previously, he had led his side to a second treble in just three seasons by beating Aberdeen 2-1 in the Scottish Cup final at Hampden.

Straight away the jungle drums suggested a move to Leicester City and Filbert Street secretary John Smith did nothing to kill off the rumours when he said: "I cannot confirm that Jock Wallace is joining us as manager – but I can't deny it either!"

Rangers supporters were in shock. There was nothing to suggest Wallace had been unhappy at Ibrox and if anything, the season just ended had offered a new dawn to those who had watched the club yo-yo between success and failure in recent years.

In Cooper, Russell and Smith, Wallace had the bones of a successful side for many years to come, but had taken the decision after a "crisis" board meeting at Ibrox.

"I have quit Rangers and am now looking for a job. I have been unsettled and unhappy at Ibrox for some time and have informed the directors of my feelings," said Wallace.

"I resigned and they accepted my resignation."

It was a bitter disappointment for those left searching for answers. It looked awfully like the manager had known for some time that he was leaving, and that a deal had already been struck with the Foxes.

Within 24 hours, Rangers had appointed John Greig as manager and Wallace announced he would never reveal the reasons behind his decision to quit the hot seat.

He said, tersely: "What happened at the meeting is a secret between me and the club. I will never discuss it."

He would take his secret to the grave. Leicester were favourites to sign the manager with arguably the hottest CV in the country, although US side Tampa Bay Rowdies tried to hijack any done deal and offered Wallace the chance to manage across the pond, although he politely declined.

If Jock was to take the Leicester job, not only would his estimated annual salary of £12,000 double instantly, but so would the status of his club car.

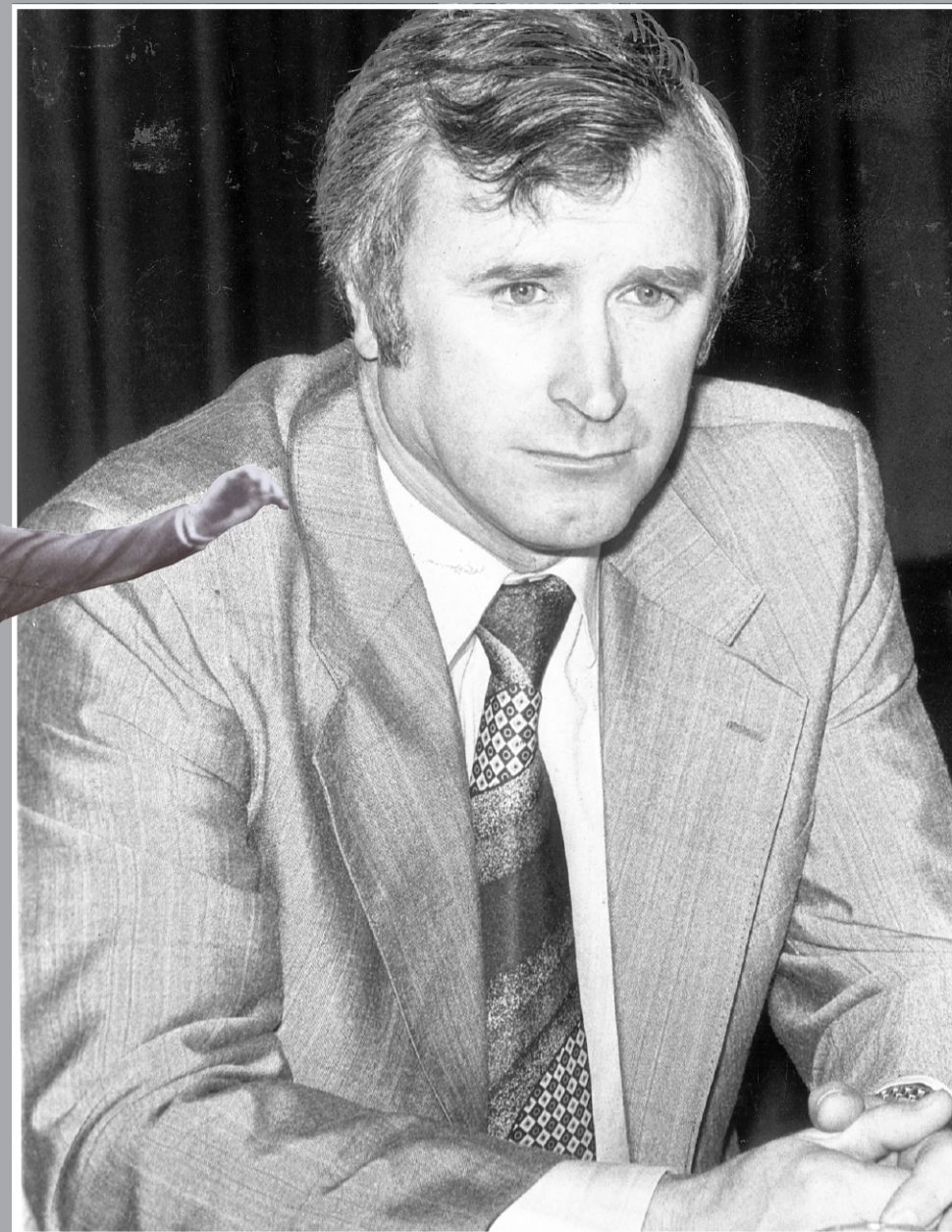
At Ibrox, he drove a modest Hillman Hunter, while the vice-chairman Willie Waddell cruised around in a luxury Mercedes.

Meanwhile, outgoing Leicester manager Frank McLintock, the former Arsenal captain, insisted Wallace would get it tough, unless the Filbert Street board gave him money to spend.

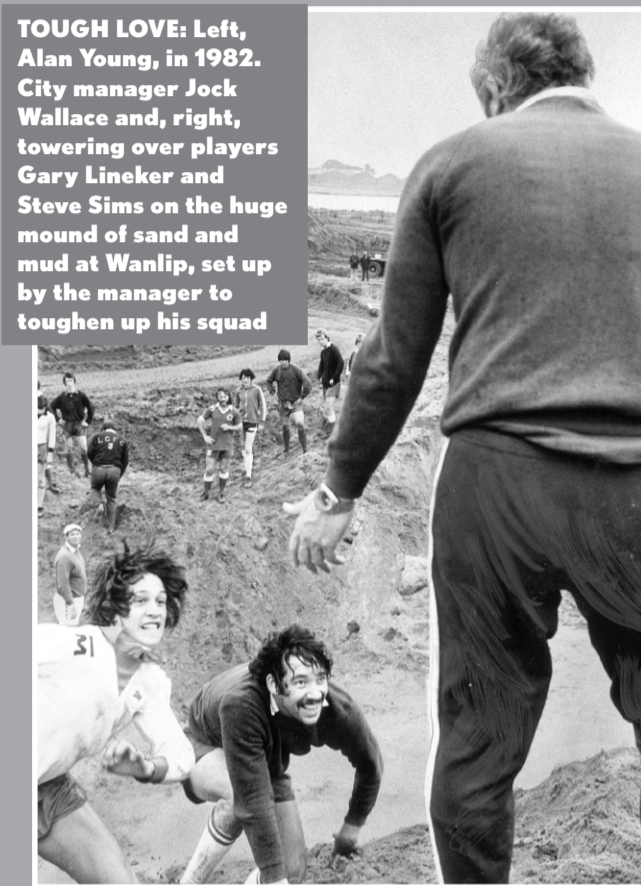
He said: "I could hardly believe it

'The Leicester City bandwagon is on the move and if I were you, I'd get on. I've got this young lad, Gary Lineker...'

It was the biggest shock in football in 1978. Jock Wallace quit as manager of Rangers and moved south to take charge of Leicester City. In an extract from a new book, former players talk about their time with the legendary hard man



TOUGH LOVE: Left, Alan Young, in 1982. City manager Jock Wallace and, right, towering over players Gary Lineker and Steve Sims on the huge mound of sand and mud at Wanlip, set up by the manager to toughen up his squad



when I heard that big Jock would be getting more than £25,000 a year.

"When I took the job for £14,000 I was perhaps too keen to get into management."

ALAN YOUNG

Striker Alan Young was born in Kirkcaldy but managed just a single reserve game for hometown team Raith Rovers. It was while playing for Scotland schoolboys against England and Wales that he impressed Oldham Athletic, and had been at Boundary Park five years when the Latics were drawn to play Leicester City in the Cup.

He recalled: "The match was cancelled seven or eight times due to the weather. When it was eventually played I was up against one of my best mates, Martin Henderson.

"We grew up together and he was best man at my wedding. It was a decent match but we won 3-1 and I scored a hat-trick.

"Next day, I got a call from Martin, who said, 'The gaffer fancies you! Can you give him a ring?' I told him I couldn't because I was contracted to Oldham.

"Next day, the phone rang and I knew right away it was Jock Wallace. He said, 'How long you got left on your contract?' I told him it was up in the summer and he told me to get my arse down to Filbert Street.

"Freedom of contract was just coming in and I almost became the first player to move under the new rules, but Gerry Gow beat me to it by a couple of hours.

"Anyway, I met Jock and Alan Bennett, the Leicester secretary, in a bedroom at the Four Seasons Hotel, as it was all very hush-hush. Jock asked how much I was on a week. 'One hundred pounds,' I said. He promised to double it and give me a good signing-on fee, and said, 'Right, sign it,' and he thrust a pen into my hand.

"I recall him saying, 'The Leicester City bandwagon is on the move and if I were you, I'd get on. I've got this young lad, Gary Lineker, he's gonna be a cracker and I need someone to look after him, and that's you'.

"I signed the contract but, to be honest, I really didn't know the exact terms. I then received a copy and it was all just as Jock had promised. The first thing I did was head off to Sweden with the squad for pre-season.

"We played nine games in three weeks and I scored eighteen goals, so that set me up nicely for the new season."

NICKY WALKER

Jock Wallace wasn't the type to use more words than were necessary. Why use a dozen when a handful will do?

He chose them carefully but had a real liking for a couple in particular. "Character" was a favourite, while "loyalty" was also high on the list.

When it came to his players, he showed them loyalty and expected nothing less in return. He got it from most and one player in particular. Nicky Walker had a habit of working with Wallace.

In demand as a teenager while playing Highland League football with Elgin City, he was aware of interest from several clubs and had just enjoyed trials with Manchester United and Derby County when Wallace and Leicester came sniffing around. He had a decision to make.

Walker said: "I was 17 and still at school and knew there were a few clubs looking at me. Leicester had a scout in the north of Scotland called Harry Dunn and he came round to the house one night to tell me City wanted me down for a trial.

"It was just the start of an incredible period in my early career.

"After a 10-day trial I went off to Sweden with the first team, which was amazing.

"I was like a wee boy in a sweet shop, mixing with all these English First Division players. I was scared to speak to some of them at times, but as a huge Match of the Day fan, I knew them all from the TV!

"I was down at Filbert Street for a few days after that and the gaffer asked me to sign.

"I was studying for my Highers at the time and he made it clear he wanted me to keep that going.

"I'd wanted to be a PE teacher and had a conditional acceptance from Jordanhill College, which was the best in Scotland at the time, but as I was soon to be resident in Leicester, the club enrolled me in the PE College at Loughborough.

"Leicester offered me a four-year deal and I accepted. This little boy from the Highlands was made up but there was a lot of work to do before I was ready for the first team."

Walker left school at 17 and started

training full-time at City. The regular keeper, Mark Wallington, was club captain and an iconic figure at Filbert Street, as well as an England Under-23 international, but when he was injured, it was time for the rookie keeper to get his gloves on.

He said: "I made my debut against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge which, you can imagine, was incredible, but the gaffer obviously had faith in me.

"I also played against the likes of Charlton and Sheffield Wednesday, both big clubs at the time. It was all a big deal but something I also managed to enjoy.

"There was an FA Cup semi-final against Spurs looming and I felt I'd done enough to be involved but Mark was just about fit and the gaffer called me in to his office and told me he was playing Mark. We lost the game and afterwards he told me he had made a mistake and that he should've stuck by me."

Jeff Holmes

MORE : *Info*

BLUE THUNDER, the biography of former City manager, Jock Wallace, was a labour of love for Scottish journalist, Jeff Holmes.

Jeff was born across the road from Firhill Park, the home of Partick Thistle. Jeff became the blue sheep of the family. He supported Rangers.

"I went to my first game aged 10, and that was me," he says.

At 16, he started work with Scottish Television. "One day in 1977, the entire Rangers team came into the studios to view a tape of a forthcoming European opponent.

"They were in the viewing room before I could get their autographs but the manager, Jock Wallace, was late and I met him at the front door."

Jock was a gent, introducing the young Jeff to all his heroes: players such as John Greig, Colin Stein, Willie Johnston. "I was absolutely made up," he remembers.

Years later, Jeff, now 53, came across a match report of Twente Enschede vs Rangers – the match Rangers were preparing for in 1977 when they came into STV.

"I thought of Jock Wallace and his kindness. That was my inspiration for writing the book."

The book took a year to write. Jeff interviewed about two dozen people – ex-players, managers, personalities and so on.

"I came across a guy called Paul Friar, who Jock had signed for Leicester from under the nose of Celtic. In fact, Friar signed his Foxes contract in the car park at Celtic Park, which I know Big Jock would have loved."

Family photographs were supplied by Jock's son, John, who lives in Malaga. John read a first draft of the book and wrote Jeff a short note. "I know Dad would have approved."

"Jock's wife, daughter and grandson have been in touch to congratulate me on the book, which means so much.

"I have been blown away by the manner in which the book has been received. It couldn't have gone any better."

INFO: Blue Thunder: The Jock Wallace Story, by Jeff Holmes is £17.99 from Pitch Publishing.

