



## History of the Club – The organising of the game

It was in England in the second half of the Nineteenth Century that football began to assume something resembling today's shape, when it became refined and organised, helped by the advent of a common set of rules and standards. The Victorian era brought with it many advances, pioneering thinkers and an urge to bring order in all things.

Football was promoted by several progressive and reforming headmasters, such as Dr Thomas Arnold at Rugby and the Reverend Edward Thring at Uppingham, who, according to Hunter Davies in *Boots, Balls and Haircuts*, saw it as "a way of installing order and discipline and also providing a healthy activity for adolescent boys, distracting them from possibly more anti-social or even disgusting personal activities. Many of these reforming headmasters were clerics, muscular Christians who believed sport was good for the soul, not just the body. The rules of their traditional school games were formalised, inter-house competitions encouraged, with victors and champions recognised and rewarded."



A Forest team group in 1863 - they later changed their name to Wanderers and became the first FA Cup winners - Charles Alcock, the father of the Cup, is the player with his knee up behind the ball

This period in English history also saw a fierce distinction between the handling codes and the dribbling game. There were major differences in values and approach between the proponents of each code, and endless soul searching and debate about which was the worthier. The separation into discrete and individual codes was messy and prolonged, but eventually football evolved into three distinct streams - Rugby Union, Rugby League and Association, the name of which gave rise to the shortened term of 'Soccer'.

The real birth of football as an organised sport came on Monday, 26 October 1863, when a meeting was convened of representatives from a dozen of the leading London and suburban football clubs of the day:

- Forest (later to become the Wanderers)
- NN Kilburn (NN stands for No Names but the club was always known by its initials)
- Barnes
- War Office

- Crusaders
- Perceval House, Blackheath
- Crystal Palace
- Blackheath
- Kensington School
- Surbiton
- Blackheath School
- Charterhouse School.

The meeting took place at the Freemasons' Tavern in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, and it was agreed that "the clubs represented at this meeting now form themselves into an association to be called The Football Association." However, it took another six meetings to formulate the rules of football.

The problem lay in co-ordinating the disparate codes of football played around the country. There was a strong body of opinion in favour of banning some of the practices allowed by the Rugby (School) code, already outlawed by the Sheffield Rules of 1857 and the Cambridge Rules of 1862 and 1863. But representatives of the Blackheath club, strong advocates of the Rugby game, were unyielding. They insisted on the inclusion of two clauses in the rules: first, that "A player may be entitled to run with the ball towards his adversaries' goal if he makes a fair catch" and, second, "If any player shall run with the ball towards his adversaries' goal, any player on the opposite side shall be at liberty to charge, hold, trip or hack him, or wrest the ball from him".

Finally, the dispute came to a head at a meeting held on 1 December, the fifth such assembly of the new Football Association. A request by the Blackheath group to adjourn the session was defeated by 13 votes to 4, and as a consequence they withdrew from the Association. The Laws of the Game, evolved from the Cambridge Rules and now agreed by the FA, were formally accepted, heralding the birth of Association Football.

These first FA Laws were as follows:

- 1 - The maximum length of the ground shall be 200 yards, the maximum breadth shall be 100 yards, the length and breadth shall be marked off with flags; and the goal shall be defined by two upright posts, eight yards apart, without any tape or bar across them.
- 2 - A toss for goals shall take place, and the game shall be commenced by a place kick from the centre of the ground by the side losing the toss for goals; the other side shall not approach within 10 yards of the ball until it is kicked off.
- 3 - After a goal is won, the losing side shall be entitled to kick off, and the two sides shall change goals after each goal is won.
- 4 - A goal shall be won when the ball passes between the goal-posts or over the space between the goal-posts (at whatever height), not being thrown, knocked on, or carried.
- 5 - When the ball is in touch, the first player who touches it shall throw it from the point on the



William Burnett, one of the founders of the Blackheath club and their first captain

boundary line where it left the ground in a direction at right angles with the boundary line, and the ball shall not be in play until it has touched the ground.

6 - When a player has kicked the ball, any one of the same side who is nearer to the opponent's goal line is out of play and may not touch the ball himself, nor in any way whatever prevent any other player from doing so, until he is in play; but no player is out of play when the ball is kicked off from behind the goal line.

7 - In case the ball goes behind the goal line, if a player on the side to whom the goal belongs first touches the ball, one of his side shall be entitled to a free kick from the goal line at the point opposite the place where the ball shall be touched. If a player of the opposite side first touches the ball, one of his side shall be entitled to a free kick at the goal only from a point 15 yards outside the goal line, opposite the place where the ball is touched, the opposing side standing within their goal line until he has had his kick.

8 - If a player makes a fair catch, he shall be entitled to a free kick, providing he claims it by making a mark with his heel at once; and in order to take such a kick he may go back as far as he pleases, and no player on the opposite side shall advance beyond his mark until he has kicked.

9 - No player shall run with the ball.

10 - Neither tripping nor hacking shall be allowed, and no player shall use his hands to hold or push his adversary.

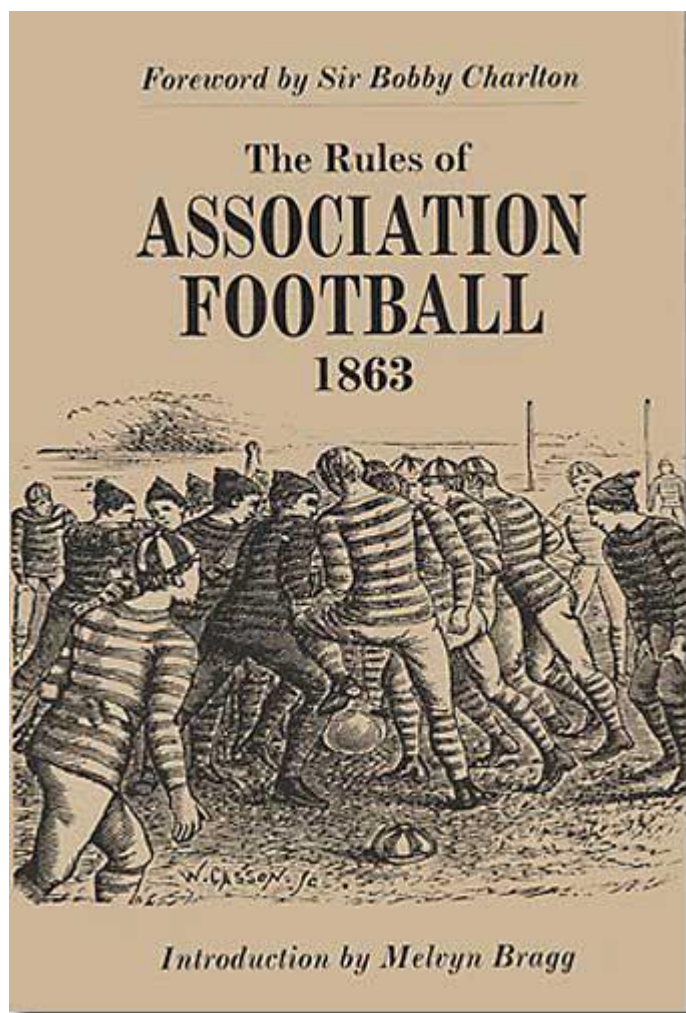
11 - A player shall not be allowed to throw the ball or pass it to another with his hands.

12 - No player shall be allowed to take the ball from the ground with his hands under any pretext whatever while it is in play.

13 - No player shall be allowed to wear projecting nails, iron plates, or gutta percha on the soles or heels of his boots.

Despite the consensus view among the FA's members regarding these rules, they were not universally accepted. For instance, both Glasgow's Queen's Park, Scotland's first club, who were formed in 1867, and most of the Sheffield clubs continued to operate with a number of variations. However, both communities came into line with the FA in 1870, allowing matches to be played to common rules between sides from all over the country.

It was about the same time that positional play and team formations started to assume importance.



A recently issued version of the original rules of the game

According to the Association of Football Statisticians: "The new generation of footballers sought a scientific side to their endeavours on the field. It was no longer sufficient merely to play football - one had to play with purpose. A step to be taken in this direction was in the deployment of forces, who should stand where, and who should do what.

"In the general run of football it had always been a case of every man for himself, each doing as he thought best. The new thinking perceived that the best way to the opponents' line, and the best way of keeping an adversary away from its own end, could be greatly assisted by the intelligent marshalling of human resources.

"Under the Association type of football, a favoured method was to employ a full-back, a half-back, and eight forwards. Using this system, the full-back was advised to 'brook no delay' in sending the ball into his opponents' half of the field, the forwards to play in a close pack, a sort of scrummage, backing up the man on the ball, and the half-back to kick or dribble at his discretion.



The Queen's Park side with the Scottish Cup in 1874

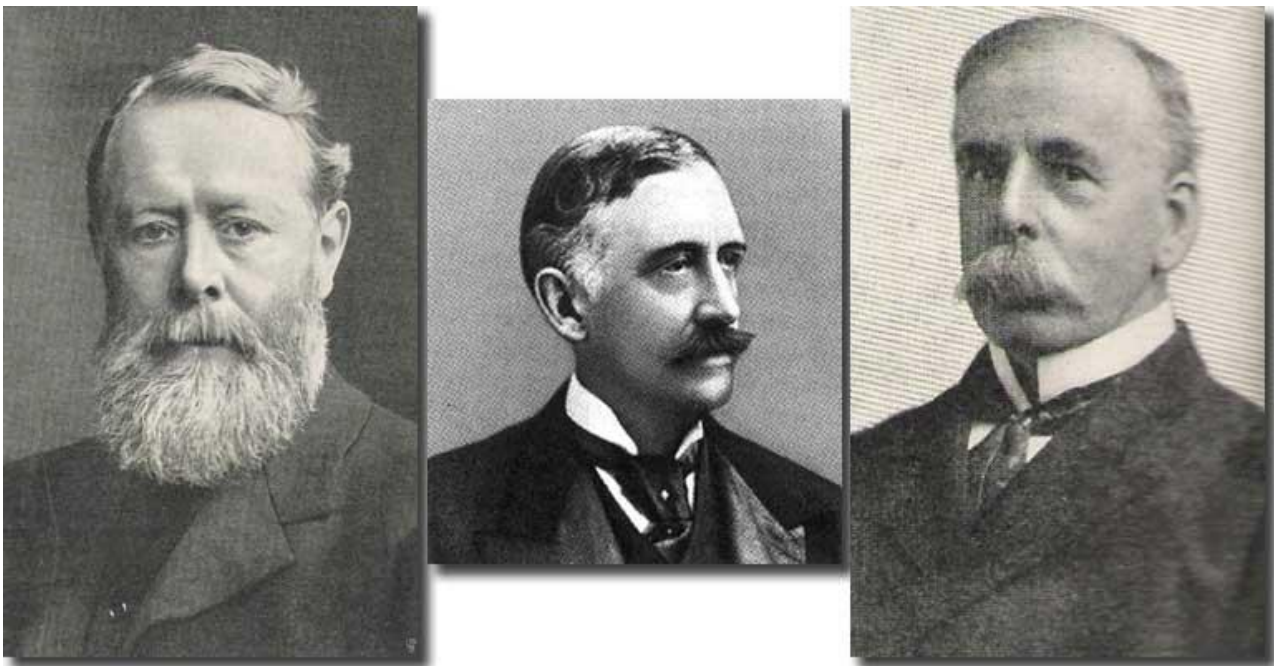
"Queen's Park, in common with most of the Scottish association clubs, deployed their men in the form of 2 full-backs, 2 half-backs, and six forwards, the forwards themselves frequently operating in pairs, two on the right wing, two on the left wing, and two in the centre. Notwithstanding the demonstration of the excellence of this formation, the English clubs preferred other means of placing ten men and a goalkeeper. The Scottish style was suitable for the short-passing game, but it found little favour south of the Tweed, and even less south of the Trent. The Englishmen were wedded to the principle of individual play, the man on the ball endeavouring to steer it by close dribbling through the ranks of his adversaries, while his colleagues were supposed to stick right behind him to back him up, as it was described, and to carry on the forward dribbling rush should he be tackled; those few players not so engaged were expected, should the ball come their way, to return it over the half way line with as little delay as possible."

It was not until the late 1880's that the classic formation of two full-backs, three half-backs and five

forwards was popularly adopted, with the new approach having less regard for the previously favoured dribble and headlong rush through the middle. The emphasis now lay on usage of the wings, where the defence was most sparse, to allow the cross into the centre and force a panic in the penalty area.

This change was prompted by alterations to the offside law in 1866. Previously, any player who was in front of the ball when it was played was deemed offside, effectively outlawing the forward pass. This rule was changed, allowing advanced players to legally receive a pass providing there were at least three opponents between themselves and the goal line. This reduced the importance of dribbling and led to a preoccupation with a passing game, both long and short, which was quickly mastered by Scottish clubs and players, giving them a distinct advantage over their English counterparts.

The Association of Football Statisticians: "The superiority of the Scottish 'combination' game over the English style of individual dribbling and 'backing-up' was amply demonstrated when Queen's Park beat Notts County by 6 goals to none at Hampden Park. When Englishmen had the ball they were dangerous, though the Scottish pair of backs were well able to deal with the menace. However, Notts had no answer to the speed and precision of the short-passing game whenever Queen's Park had possession in that match; they were running round in circles, never knowing where the ball would pop up next."



The celebrated triumvirate of Lord Kinnaird, Major Marindin and Charles Alcock,

The FA grew rapidly in importance following its formation and much of its progress was due to the direction provided by a celebrated triumvirate of leaders: Major (later Sir Francis) Marindin, RE, who became president in 1874; Charles W Alcock, captain of the Wanderers FC, a leading side from London who were composed of the best players to have graduated from the public schools and universities, who became FA secretary in 1870; and the Hon A F (later Lord) Kinnaird, captain of the Old Etonians FC, who became FA treasurer in 1878.

Geoffrey Green: "Alcock, supported by the military discipline of Marindin and the social graces of Kinnaird, was the real driving force and genius in his position as secretary, a rank that in due course was to grow to one of vast importance in the years of expansion ahead. Alcock was a lover of true

sport and sportsmanship. For a quarter of a century he held the reins of administration while the character and significance of football underwent a crucial change. The part he played in all this evolution was beyond measure. That must be repeated, for it was his idea of the Cup and international football that finally set the game on its pedestal. He was the one who set a light to what was one day to become a worldwide fire.”

The major milestone in this journey came when the Football Association finally recognised that there was a need for some form of organised competition. Alcock was the moving spirit in the inception of the Football Association Challenge Cup competition.

At a meeting held in the offices of The Sportsman in London on 20th July 1871, Alcock proposed "that it is desirable that a Challenge Cup should be established in connection with the Association, for which all clubs belonging to the Association should be invited to compete". The move received support and was finally approved three months later, on 16 October.



The Royal Engineers appeared in three of the first four FA Cup Finals, losing two and winning the third - Major Marindin is in the middle of the back row

There were 15 entrants for that first competition, but none of them were from Northern clubs, their fixture cards for the season having already been agreed. There were only two non-Southern clubs (Scotland's Queen's Park and Lincolnshire's Donington School). The other 13 clubs (Barnes, Civil Service, Clapham Rovers, Crystal Palace, Hampstead Heathens, Harrow Chequers, Hitchin, Maidenhead, Marlow, Reigate Priory, Royal Engineers, Upton Park and Wanderers) were all from London and the Home Counties.

Both Queen's Park and Donington were given byes in the first round, and then Queen's Park had a walkover in the second when Donington scratched. With five clubs left in the third round, Queen's Park received another bye, so were in the semi finals without having played a match. They were drawn against the Wanderers, and travelled to London from Glasgow with the help of public subscription. After a hard-fought goalless draw, Queen's Park, whose accurate passing style was a complete revelation in the South, could not afford to stay in London for a replay and had to scratch. So Wanderers were in the final.

The Royal Engineers were favourites to win the final at odds of 7-4 on, but the Wanderers secured a 1-0 victory to become the first holders of the Cup in front of a crowd of 2,000 on 16 March 1872 at Kennington Oval. It was fitting that Alcock should be the first captain to raise the trophy, a silver cup scarcely 18 inches high.

The following November saw the first ever international match, between England and Scotland, held at the West of Scotland Cricket Ground, Partick. The game finished in a 0-0 draw, which was something of a shock with the number of attackers on the field. The formation of the Scottish FA was still a year away, so the 'Scotland' side was organised by Queen's Park, who provided six of the

players.

At this time, football was an avowedly amateur sport, played purely for fun and exercise, with no commercial reward. The FA was founded by amateurs, and all of the original entrants for the Cup were amateur. The 'amateur era' was dominated by the Wanderers and the Royal Engineers, and other similarly Corinthian outfits like Oxford University and the Old Etonians.

In these early days, there was no thought of anyone being paid for their participation. The very idea was anathema to the gentlemen players who dominated the game and against all their ideals of sport and sportsmanship. Things began to change with the coming of competition and the Cup, which had its opponents who argued that the rivalry generated would lead to the destruction of the true spirit of the game. In some respects they were right. A direct outcome of the enthusiasm to win the "little tin idol" was the subversive growth of professionalism and the resulting transition of power from the South to the North of England. Professionalism was finally recognised in England in 1885.

The Association of Football Statisticians: "There was a feeling in Lancashire that eventually some form of professionalism would have to be made legal. In the end the Football Association would have to agree that some players had to be paid. If it would not sanction the actual payment of wages, then there would have to be a system whereby men were compensated for time lost from work.

"The business was brought up at a meeting of the national body on 25th June, 1884. The Blackburn Rovers representative said that if players could not be compensated for lost wages it would be the end of football for working people in Lancashire. Major Marindin, from the Chair, said the proposal was to alter the rules so that as well as actual out-of-pocket expenses, loss of not more than one day's pay could be claimed. He said the Committee did not like this 'wages clause', but he realised that its deletion would bear hardly on working men. Mr. Forrest (Lancashire), said he would prefer that two days' loss of pay could be claimed, whereupon Mr. Clegg argued, 'if one, why not three, or even six?'. There ought not to be a wages clause at all. Mr. Pierce Dix, of Sheffield, bitterly opposed the liberal attitude to loss of wages. They had gone over it before, he said, and decided against it; now they seemed to be trying to upset that verdict. Mr. Crump (Birmingham) said he did not consider football should be limited to one class. He failed to see how a working man, receiving a single day's pay for lost wages, could be termed a professional.

"The supporters of professional football argued lucidly and powerfully and left the door open invitingly for negotiation. Their opponents, honest men of principle though they were, could only fall back on honesty and principle and the pessimistic cries that football was being ruined. But for the most part, the true-blue amateurs of the South (and the Provinces), listened with growing sympathy to the words of the Lancashire men. However, they voted against the proposal."

Eventually the tide of professionalism swept over everything, leading to an increase in the number



Scenes from the first international match between England and Scotland

of players, and the development of more competition.

Philip Gibbons: "Towards the end of the 1887/88 season, William McGregor, a committee member of Aston Villa and a member of the Birmingham FA, sent a circular to five of the leading professional clubs in England expressing his concern at what he saw as a crisis in the Association game.

"McGregor, who had been a leading light in the Midlands when arguing for the legalisation of professionalism, felt that football was in a poor state, suggesting that a League system should be developed to keep the competition going rather than the friendly games of little importance. Fixtures were often cancelled on a Friday evening or Saturday morning for no particular reason, thus depriving thousands of spectators of their Saturday afternoon sport, while the lack of income brought about by these cancelled games forced clubs into bankruptcy, unable to pay players their wages."

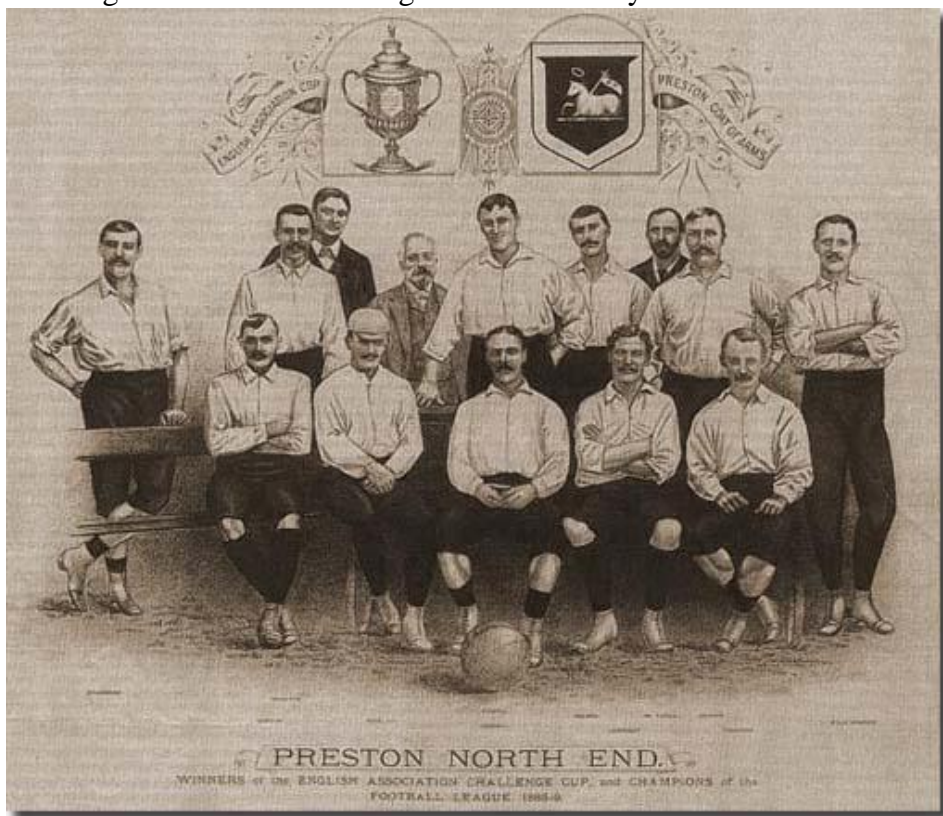
The circular, sent on March 2 1888, read as follows: "Every year it is becoming more and more difficult for football clubs of any standing to meet their friendly engagements and even arrange friendly matches. The consequence is that at the last moment, through Cup-tie interference, clubs are compelled to take on teams who will not attract the public.

"I beg to tender the following suggestion as a means of getting over the difficulty in that ten or twelve of the most prominent clubs in England combine to arrange home-and-away fixtures each season, the said fixtures to be arranged at a friendly conference about the same time as the International Conference.

"This combination might be known as the Association Football Union, and could be managed by representative from each club.

"Of course, this is in no way to interfere with the National Association; even the suggested matches might be played under cup-tie rules. However, this is a detail.

"My object in writing to you at present is merely to draw your attention to the subject, and to suggest a friendly conference to discuss the matter more fully. I would take it as a favour if you would kindly think the matter over, and make whatever suggestions you deem necessary. I am only writing to the following - Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Preston North End, West Bromwich Albion, and Aston Villa, and would like to hear what other clubs you would suggest.



The Preston North End Invincibles who won the League and Cup Double at the first attempt in 1888-89

"PS - How would Friday, 23rd March, 1888, suit for the friendly conference at Anderton's Hotel, London?"

From such humble beginnings, the Football League competition was born.

Philip Gibbons: "As Mr McGregor took his place as president of the League, it was decided to play the opening League games on 8 September 1888. However, Mr McGregor was aware of the importance of not falling out with the Football Association in London. He felt that, together, they would see the game grow into a healthier state than it had been for a while. He believed the League competition to be one of skill and consistency, while the FA Cup would be won by the team playing the most spirited football over a few games."

McGregor served as president of the League until he retired in 1894. He was succeeded by Bolton Wanderers secretary-manager JJ (John) Bentley, who held the role until 1910. Bentley's replacement was Liverpool's 'Honest' John McKenna, who was elected to the League Management Committee in 1902, became a vice president in 1908 and remained president until he died in 1936.

In total contrast to the Cup when it started, the twelve founding members of the Football League (Accrington, Aston Villa, Blackburn Rovers, Bolton Wanderers, Burnley, Derby County, Everton, Notts County, Preston North End, Stoke, West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers) were equally divided between Lancashire and the Midlands; most of them were professional or at least semi-professional outfits. In 1892, a Second Division was formed, and again it was made up almost entirely from clubs in the Northern parts of the country. Only Grimsby and Lincoln City were not from the North or the Midlands.

Blackburn Rovers were the first Northern Cup finalists in 1882, but that heralded the start of the Lancashire takeover. The plumbers and weavers of Blackburn Olympic beat the gentlemen of the Old Etonians to take the Cup up North in 1883, to be followed by their neighbours, Rovers, who won in 1884, 1885 and 1886. When Preston won the first League and Cup double in 1889 and Blackburn Rovers won the Cup again in 1890 and 1891, the balance of power had fully shifted to Lancashire.



A Blackburn Rovers team group in 1886, as they completed a hat trick of FA Cup wins

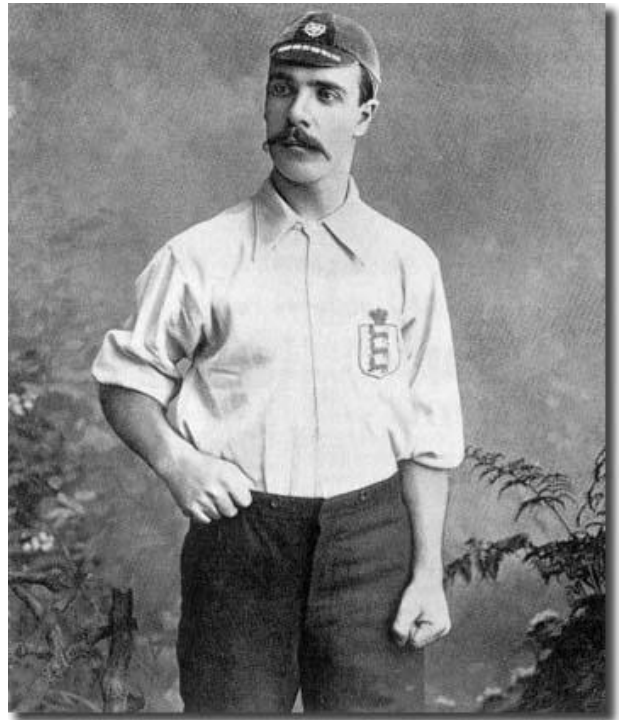
Preston North End retained their League title in 1890, but their dominance was wrested away by Aston Villa, the most successful English side of the 1890's and early 1900's; Villa were champions in 1894, 1896, 1897 (the year they also won the Double), 1899 and 1900. They won the Cup in 1887, 1895, 1897 and 1905. Their Black Country neighbours, WBA and Wolves secured the Cup in 1888, 1892 and 1893 and the beaten finalists came from these same three clubs in 1886, 1889, 1895 and 1896.

The only other side which really got a regular look in were Sunderland, the "Team of All the

Talents." Packed with Scottish footballers, they were champions in 1892,1893, 1895 and 1902. Their North East neighbours Newcastle United were champions in 1905 and lost the FA Cup Final to Villa that same year.

During this period, the new heroes of the game were substantially different from their forebears, as Hunter Davies records:

"The first football heroes were the amateurs, like Kinnaird and Alcock and G O Smith of Oxford and the Corinthians, their names becoming known to all football fans of the time. Vivian Woodward of Spurs, one of the last amateur stars to play in a professional team, became famous when he scored six goals for England against Holland in 1909. But it was the professional players who quickly became household names, in football households, such as John Goodall, inside forward for the Preston North End 'Invincibles' team of 1889. Forwards, like Billy Bassett, tended to become the stars, as they do today, attracting all the headlines, acclaimed as 'Wizards of Dribble'. Steve Bloomer of Derby was famous as a prolific goalscorer, scoring 353 League goals between 1892 and 1914. As early as 1892, one commentator, C Edwards, was writing that star players were becoming 'better known than the local member of Parliament'.



John Goodall of Preston's Double winners

"One of the earliest, most recognisable stars, was in fact a goalkeeper - Billy Foulke. He was 6ft 2ins high and weighed 15 stone at the age of 19 when he first played for Sheffield United in 1894, later reaching 22 stone, but this didn't stop him helping United win the League championship and the Cup twice and getting an England cap. In the days when goalies could still be charged into the net, his weight was clearly an advantage."

Spartacus Educational: "In the 1896/97 season Sheffield United were runners up behind the double-winning Aston Villa ... In the home game against the champions, Foulke caused a stir by bouncing the ball as far as the halfway line. This was within the rules at the time, but as players were able to barge into other players when they had the ball, goalkeepers saw that tactic as very risky. However, Foulke was fairly confident that he would be able to regain possession of the ball. C B Fry, the famous cricketer, who also played football for Southampton, remarked: 'Foulke is no small part of a mountain. You cannot bundle him.'

"Foulke won his first international cap against Wales on 29th March 1897. Although England won 4-0, surprisingly, it was the only time he played for his country ... As the Sheffield Daily Telegraph pointed out: 'It is a pity that Foulke cannot curb the habit of pulling down the crossbar, which on Saturday ended in his breaking it in two. On form, he is well in the running for international honours, but the Selection Committee are sure to prefer a man who plays the game to one who unnecessarily violates the spirit of the rules.'

"In 1895 Foulke only weighed 12st 10lb but over the next few years he put on a lot of weight and was nicknamed 'Fatty' or 'Colossus' by the fans. He once said: 'I don't mind what they call me as long as they don't call me late for my lunch.' ... Foulke was 6ft 2ins tall. At the time the average

height for an adult male was only 5 ft 5 ins and therefore he towered over most of the players. This can be seen in the team photographs taken at the time.

“In a game against Liverpool in November, 1898, George Allan tried to intimidate Foulke. The Liverpool Post reported that ‘Allan charged Foulke in the goalmouth, and the big man, losing his temper, seized him by the leg and turned him upside down.’ As the Athletic News pointed out, when this happened: ‘He doesn't claim a foul, but simply places that paw of his on the shoulder of the charging gentleman in a most fatherly manner, and pushed him aside with an expression of get on one side, little boy’.

“On another occasion he fell on Laurie Bell of Sheffield Wednesday. As he later recalled: ‘It was really all an accident. Just as I was reaching for a high ball Bell came at me, and the result of the collision was that we both tumbled down, but it was his bad luck to be underneath, and I could not prevent myself from falling with both knees in his back. When I saw his face I got about the worst shock I ever have had on the football field. He looked as if he was dead.’

“Foulke was also a talented cricketer and played for Blackwell Colliery in the Derbyshire League. One journalist joked that every time Foulke went into bat ‘there is an appeal against the light’.

“Foulke's main sport was football and he was also a member of the Sheffield United team that played Southampton in the 1902 FA Cup Final. Sheffield took an early lead but Southampton scored a controversial equalizer and the game was drawn 1-1 ... Foulke was furious that the equalizing goal had been given after the game he went searching for the referee. The linesman, J T

Howcroft, described how Frederick Wall, secretary of the Football Association, tried to placate the goalkeeper: ‘Foulke was exasperated by the goal and claimed it was in his birthday suit outside the dressing room, and I saw F J Wall, secretary of the FA, pleading with him to rejoin his colleagues. But Bill was out for blood, and I shouted to Mr. Kirkham to lock his cubicle door. He didn't need telling twice. But what a sight! The thing I'll never forget is Foulke, so tremendous in size, striding along the corridor, without a stitch of clothing.’

“After playing in over 350 games for Sheffield United Foulke decided to leave the club when he refused to take a pay cut. In May 1905 Foulke was sold to Chelsea for a transfer fee of £50 ... Chelsea had just joined the Football League and in his first season he helped them to finish in 3rd place in the Second Division ... However, he continued to put on weight. According to one report, Foulke was known to arrive early for breakfast, set for the entire Chelsea team, and eat the lot.

“Foulke only played 35 games for Chelsea before moving to Bradford City ... The Bradford Daily



The legendary Fatty Foulke, a renowned goalkeeper

Argus reported that 'there is no doubt that the mighty goalkeeper is doing a great deal in the direction of inspiring confidence in the team.' This did not stop the newspaper making fun of their large goalkeeper. On 29th September, 1906, it reported that a cab horse had a narrow escape when it nearly collided with Foulke when he was crossing the Strand. Foulke was quoted as saying: 'I would have jumped on the beggar's back before I would have let him come into me.'

"William 'Fatty' Foulke died on 1st May 1916. The death certificate gives 'cirrhosis' as a major cause of death. There is no truth in the claim that Foulke ended his life in poverty working at a sideshow on Blackpool beach."

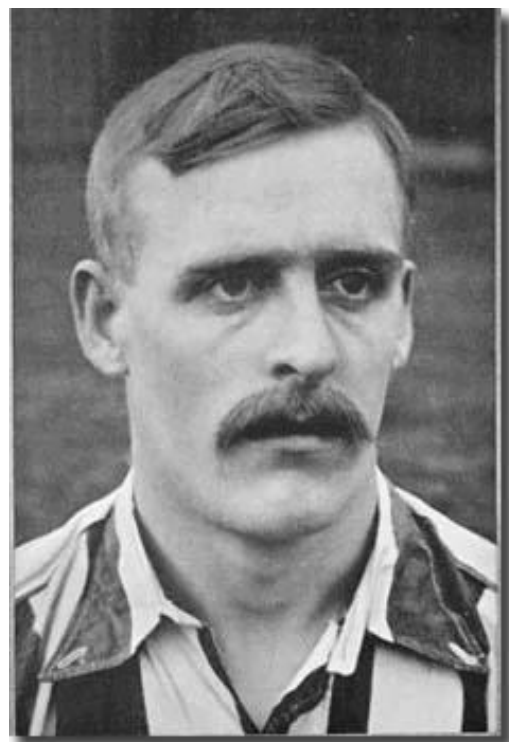
Hunter Davies: "Fatty Foulke was a legend in his time, but probably the best remembered from that pre-First World War period, in the sense that he still appears in all the record books, is Alf Common. What a sensation he created in February 1905 when he was transferred from Sunderland to Middlesbrough for the then astronomical sum of £1,000, the first ever four-figure transfer fee.

"The FA and the League, having imposed a maximum wage, had contemplated a maximum transfer fee, and in 1899 the FA suggested the limit should be £10, but they felt unable to impose it, so over the next few years it slowly crept up to around £400 for the best players. A sudden jump to £1,000 amazed everyone. An investigation was set up to find out if anything unlawful had been done. The transfer was all above board, but when they went through the Boro books, it was revealed they'd paid illegal Cup bonuses to players in the previous season.

"Football purists were aghast, saying it was the end of football as they had known it. Money was ruining the game, players had become mercenaries with no loyalties, a new form of white slave trade had now been introduced, where will it end - will we soon have £2,000 transfers or even, perish the thought, will there one of these days be a £10,000 transfer fee?

"Part of the surprise was the fact that it was Middlesbrough, a relatively new club, only six years old. But Boro that season were desperate, struggling near the bottom of the First Division and badly in need of a goalscorer. Some things never change. They had tried for one, who turned them down, and so decided to lash out on Sunderland's bustling, 5ft-8ins-high, 13-stone Alf Common.

"Sunderland had bought him from Sheffield United just a year previously for £350, so naturally Sheffield United were pretty livid that Sunderland had made such a huge profit in a short time. Charles Clegg, chairman of the FA, who was also a Sheffield United man, was particularly upset.



Alf Common, whose move to Middlesbrough sparked a major controversy

"As so often happens in football, with almost predictable irony, Common's first game for Boro, on February 25, 1905, was away to Sheffield United. They won 1-0, with Common scoring from a penalty. It was Boro's first away win for nearly two years and they stayed up, with Common taking over as captain. So, this first ever shock-horror mega transfer deal was considered money well spent.

"Common was a jovial, ruddy-faced, rather tubby player, famous for his attempts to lose weight.

Sounds like another well-known North-Easterner, P Gascoigne. At the age of 30, Common was transferred to Woolwich Arsenal who devised all sorts of physical exercises and strenuous walks to get him slim, without much success. When he retired he became a publican, running the Alma Hotel at Cockerton for 11 years. 'A footballer behind the bar is as great an attraction as a long-legged giant or a fat woman,' reported the Athletic Journal as early as 1890.

"The tradition of players becoming publicans lived on for almost the next 100 years, at least for those who had managed to save a few pounds. Even as late as 1974, it was what Sir Alex Ferguson first did when his career with Rangers and Ayr United was coming to an end. At the time, he wasn't quite sure what to do with the rest of his life.

"Alf Common was known as a practical joker, but alas none of his wheezes have survived. Footballers have always been known for their amusing as well as riotous behaviour, as Billy Basset indicated.

"A writer in the *Book of Football* in 1905 described one of the tricks which the Newcastle United players got up to while travelling by train. They had a special saloon provided by the North Eastern Railway Company, divided into two compartments by a sliding door, where the players passed the time playing whist. If a bossy ticket collector interrupted their games by laboriously checking the tickets and counting all the players, they deliberately set out to confuse him. When the ticket inspector announced that there were 22 players, yet only 16 tickets, he naturally suspected some fiddle was going on, and he proceeded to call for the station master. Only later did he discover that some players had been sliding between the two doors and had been counted twice. What japes!"