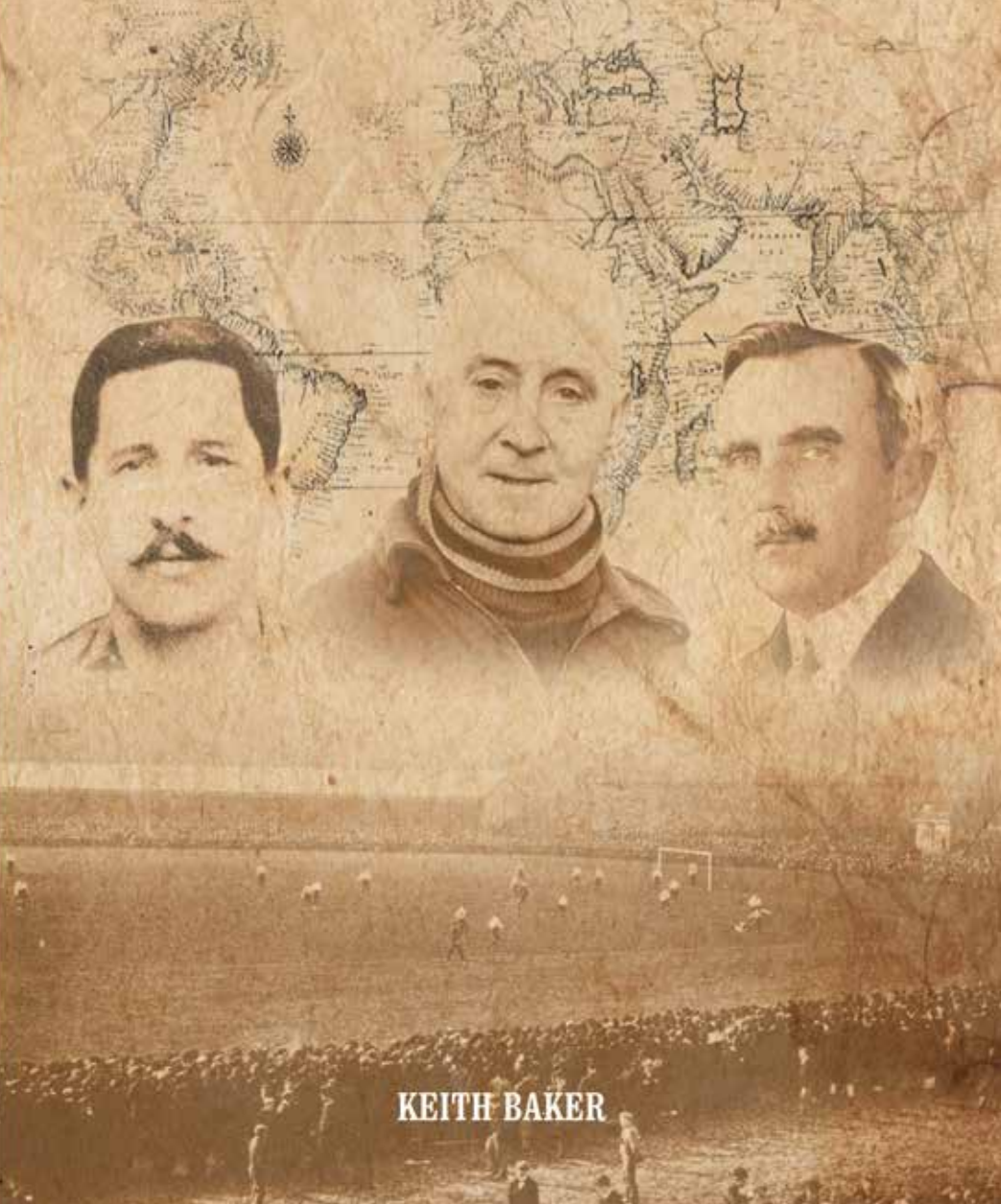
FATHERS OF FOOTBALL

GREAT BRITONS WHO TOOK THE GAME TO THE WORLD



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INTRODUCTION

FOOTBALL is the world's most popular team sport. It attracts colossal audiences, huge media attention and enormous sums of money. It is a universal sport played in many different lands by millions of men, women and children on village greens and waste land, in the slums of city streets and in cathedral-like stadiums.

Many countries have been eager to claim that the origins of the game belong to them. In Britain, some say that the game has Anglo-Saxon origins, and the story goes that the game was played for the very first time with the severed head of a vanquished Danish prince. And there is an even earlier claim that it was part of a victory celebration in Derby in the third century following a battle against the Romans [http://www.footy4kids.co.uk/history_of_football.htm]. Worldwide, there are early accounts of games involving the kicking of a ball whether in Greece, Rome, China, Japan or elsewhere. However, they were invariably localised customs, made primarily for personal amusement, and often short-lived pursuits which differed widely from place to place.

What is beyond doubt is that the modern game of football so popular today was fashioned and forged in Britain during the last half of the 19th century, where it became the nation's game before becoming a world game. It was the Victorians who had brought order out of chaos and produced a game which was easily transferable and would follow the British wherever they went in search of trade, commerce or conquest.

In a remarkably short period of time, just the two decades before the First World War, football took root overseas and was being played to an increasingly skilled standard in countries in Europe and South America. At a basic level, the spread of football was undoubtedly helped by its practical appeal – a sport simple to learn, can be played on different surfaces, not expensive to start and exciting to play. Popular accounts tend to place the British Empire at the heart of the global spread of football. However, it has now become accepted that the reasons behind the spread of the game are a more complex process, often involving a mix of economic, social and cultural factors, as well as the heroic efforts of a few pioneers.

The Fathers

It is assuredly the case that wherever a British community was established overseas for whatever reason there would be a very good chance that football would soon follow. However, there is a group of British individuals whose contribution to the development of football overseas mark them out as truly exceptional. All had a passion for the game but their contribution took many forms. Some were responsible for the founding of clubs that would later become world famous. Others brought revolutionary changes as to how the modern game should be played, and again others laid the foundations crucial to organised football – its governing bodies, leagues and cup competitions.

Importantly, all the men who appear in the following pages have become celebrated as Fathers of Football by the clubs and the countries where they lived, worked, and in some cases, died. In stark contrast, in Britain their achievements, apart from a very few exceptions, have been largely ignored, and indeed sometimes disparaged. Sadly, they are indeed prophets more honoured abroad than at home. By following their lives overseas, their careers and achievements, this book tries to rectify the balance.

Bringing Order From Chaos

Before considering more about the growth of football overseas, it is worth tracing how the modern game in Britain evolved and the influence it had on the individuals portrayed in this book.

Virtually all of them grew up soon after the game of football had undergone significant changes from its earlier forms. In medieval Britain, football, or what more accurately came to be branded as 'mob football', was a popular activity for annual carnival days, notably on Shrove Tuesday, traditionally a half-day holiday. Games took place in the streets between what were effectively marauding bands of young men from neighbouring towns and villages. There was no limit on the number of players – games could be made up of hundreds of players – and any rules, such as they were, differed from place to place.

The earliest references frequently highlight the sport's physical toughness and violence. Tripping and kicking of shins was allowed and there were many broken legs and other injuries, and even fatalities. The games often ended in riotous scenes which inevitably attracted the attention of the authorities. It was condemned as a game for the peasants, in that it was inciting violence and was harming the practice of archery and other military skills.

From the 14th century onwards constant efforts were made by the authorities to suppress the game in villages and the provincial towns such as Manchester, Nottingham, Derby, Liverpool, Leicester and Halifax, and on several occasions edicts were issued by English kings to restrict or ban it. In 1314 a proclamation of Edward II complained of 'great uproar in the City, through certain tumults arising from great footballs in the fields of the public, from which many evils may arise.' [James Walvin, *The People's Game*. Mainstream Publishing. Edinburgh. 1994. p.14]

Yet all the attempts to stamp the game out had little or no effect, and the people went on playing it. By the 18th

century football was emerging from its mob-rule roots to becoming a more accepted part of the sporting culture in Britain, although still relatively small in comparison with the field sports of the landed elites, and with the more popular pastimes of cricket, tennis and boxing. The game remained under close control by the authorities since they were still suspicious that it carried the threat of unleashing forces which could cause damage and social unrest. Indeed a number of incidents occurred which confirmed fears that political agitators were using football to rally a crowd for political ends.

Here is an example. In 1764 at West Haddon, Northamptonshire, 2,000 acres of land were enclosed. The local community made the usual formal objections, but these were ignored. So they decided to play football on the enclosed land. 'Within moments of kick-off, the football match degenerated into an overtly political mob which tore up and burned the enclosure fences. Dragoons, specially drafted from Northampton, could do nothing in the face of such resistance and the damage amounted to some £1,500.' [http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/football.htm]. The Charnock brothers were to come up against the same problem when pioneering football in Tsarist Russia – see chapter three.

Opposition came also from another influential quarter, church leaders, on the grounds that by playing on a Sunday (and on other religious days) it violated the Sabbath and distracted men from their godly duties.[Walvin. p. 27]

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, football came under more pressures. Industrialisation and urbanisation changed the leisure habits and recreations of working people, especially in the booming towns of the Midlands and north of England. The 1835 Highways Act allowed the banning of football in urban areas and was enforced by new policing systems and local bylaws. In the countryside, changes in the rural economy such as the enclosure of waste

and common land, had restricted space and opportunities to play the game, even at Shrovetime.

Consequently, by the early 19th century, football was declining as a popular recreational sport. Joseph Strutt, an early historian of sport, noted in 1801 this of football, 'It was formerly much in vogue among the common people in England, though of late it seems to have fallen into disrepute, and is but little practised.' [Walvin. p.30]

The Public Schools

The saviour of football as a popular sport was to come from an unlikely source – the public schools. At the beginning of the 19th century these schools existed to educate the sons of the country's upper class and of its emerging and more prosperous middle class. The early headmasters of the time were far from enamoured with football. On the contrary, most shared the upper class view that it was a plebian rough and ready street pastime. It was, said Samuel Butler, the head of Shrewsbury School, a game, 'fit only for butchers boys… more fit for farm boys and labourers than young gentlemen.' [Gavin Mortimer, *A History of Football in 100 Objects*. Profile Books. London. 2012. p.7]

But they were faced with a big problem – their pupils showed very little interest in learning and were often ill-disciplined, boisterous and out of control. Fighting was endemic both in and outside the school. 'Harrovians were known to enjoy a good punch up with the railway navies that cut the embankment nearby, while Etonians were often scrapping with the Windsor butcher boys.' [David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, Penguin Books. London, 2007. p.25.]

Pupils regularly revolted against school discipline since the teachers could exercise little control, and the ensuing anarchy could often be put down only by the intervention of the militia. In 1831 a running battle between schoolboys from Merchant Taylor's and St Pauls in the Cheapside district

of London could only be quelled by soldiers. Although games of all sorts, including football, were popular among the boys, they often degenerated into just the type of mob football condemned by those who had sent their sons to the schools in the first place.

The indiscipline in the public schools of the early 19th century had become notorious and profoundly disturbing to the more progressive headteachers who were being appointed. They were faced with increasing demands from the business and professional classes to exercise more control over pupils and provide a better education for them. The most famous reformer of them was Thomas Arnold, headmaster at Rugby School between 1828 and 1848, and the pivotal figure behind the reforms of the public schools and their ethos. He, and his like-minded contemporaries, recognised the fact that properly supervised and organised team games had the capacity to harness the natural enthusiasm and energy of young boys into something much more positive. They appreciated that sport had other benefits too. It could be a good way of encouraging senior boys to take on responsibility on behalf of the teacher.

And perhaps most important of all, football – like other sports – could provide a formidable vehicle for character building, especially those virtues, such as fair play, respect for authority, sportsmanship, manliness and self-control, much valued by the rising Victorian middle class. Finally, they had the practical advantages of being easy to organise and play, and flexible enough to keep large numbers of boys fully occupied.

By the middle part of the century, football was being played in a much more orderly fashion in most of the leading public schools. However, it needed to overcome another problem. Each school conducted the game according to different rules to meet their particular needs, especially the size of the playing area available. For example, at Eton and Winchester, the game was based around charging, whereas

at Charterhouse and Westminster where space at the time was limited, it depended on close control and dribbling.

The lack of common rules inevitably restricted the opportunity for matches between schools. Similarly, when former public school men moved on to the universities, or to their army regiments or other institutions, they wanted to play against one another but came up against the same problem. It was left to them to sort out the confusion.

At Cambridge in 1848 the first serious attempt was made to agree a set of standard football rules. Catching the ball was allowed, but running with it was not. Dribbling was encouraged, but tripping, pushing and holding were outlawed. The Cambridge rules proved popular in some localities but there remained several different versions.

As more and more football clubs were founded across the country there clearly remained a need to get agreement to a single code of rules as to how the game should be played. The decisive moment came on 26 October 1863 when captains and representatives of the London and suburban clubs met together to form the Football Association (FA) and to draw up and agree the laws of the game. The carrying of the ball was outlawed, and football and rugby went their own separate ways.

Although it was some time before those clubs using other rules, notably the Sheffield Rules, finally reconciled their differences with those of the FA, the practice of modern football playing to a common set of rules was now effectively in place. This was a crucial landmark for the development of the game, not only in Britain but wherever it came to be played. They brought order and fairness into the game and formed the basis upon which new clubs, teams and leagues could be formed. Significantly, when several of the Fathers of Football left Britain for overseas, they made sure that they carried a copy of the FA rules and regulations in their pockets.

In 1871, Wanderers, a team composed mainly of former public school men resident in London, won the first FA

Cup when they beat Oxford University 2-1. For the next seven years the final was dominated by university old boys and students or the military sides. However, football was breaking free from its public school, middle-class enclave and reaching other areas and classes of society. Economic and social developments helped to promote the game's popularity, especially in working-class communities. The Factory Act of 1850 gave workers time off on Saturday afternoons so for the first time people had some free time on their hands for recreation. Improvements in railways and the urban trams enabled spectators to travel easily to football games. Real wages rose in late Victorian times, and there was increasing press coverage of football and other sports as adult literacy improved.

A significant contribution, too, now came from churches and philanthropic institutions, with their direct links with the poor and working-class communities. They often provided the base from which those earnest young men, fresh from public schools and colleges, could spread the gospel of football. Many not only wanted to continue to play the game but had left their schools imbued with a strong sense of social responsibility and concern to help those less fortunate than themselves. It is estimated that in the 1880s over a quarter of the football and cricket clubs had their roots in the churches. [Goldblatt.p.40] It is worthy of note that several of the Fathers spent their formative years playing football for church teams, for example both Jimmy Hogan and Charlie Miller played for church teams named after St Mary.

Working-class football grew strongly in the urban areas of Yorkshire and Nottingham, the Lancashire cotton belt, the West Midlands and the Scottish Lowlands. These were the breeding grounds where several Fathers of Football were brought up learning the game.

The growth of working-class Scottish football around the two major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh proved to

be highly important. By the mid-1870s the central belt of Scotland could boast a density of working-class football clubs as great as anywhere in Britain. [Goldblatt. p. 40] Around half of the Fathers making up this book were born in Scotland or had played for a Scottish club at one time or another. And virtually all of them were deeply influenced by the high level of skill shown by Scottish players, and the emphasis placed on close control and swift and accurate passing.

The Scottish style of play was in sharp contrast with the early years of English football where the game was much more dependent on strength and stamina, dribbling and long kicks upfield in the hope that a defender would make an error. The passing of the ball, cooperation and defending were regarded as somehow inferior. The preference the Fathers had for the Scottish game would make a lasting influence on the development of football in Europe and South America, but for many years it remained a style of football rejected in England.

Towards the end of the 19th century there was a growing divide between amateur teams and the professional and semi-professional ones who paid their players. The professional players were virtually all working class and belonged to clubs in the northern half of England and in Scotland, whereas in southern England the middle class predominated and supported the 'Corinthian' values of amateurism.

At first, the FA fought hard to retain a policy of amateurism which would protect upper- and middle-class control over the game, but the issue of professionalism reached crisis point in 1884. The FA expelled two clubs for using professional players, prompting the top clubs to threaten to break away. By then, however, the payment of players had become commonplace and fortunately there were officials at the FA intelligent enough to see that some form of compromise was necessary and persuaded the Association to concede the idea of professional players. 'I object', declared Charles Alcock, a renowned Victorian

sportsman and secretary to the FA for 25 years, 'to the argument that it is immoral to work for a living, and I cannot see why men should not, with that object, labour at football as at cricket.' [Walvin. p.85]

Three years later, a further important development took place. Following an invitation from William McGregor, the chairman of the Birmingham Aston Villa Church team, 12 leading professional clubs, six from the north and six from the Midlands, agreed to take part in a season-long competition with home and away fixtures. This, they reasoned, would guarantee their clubs a regular income, promote public support and improve standards of play. It took the simple name of the Football League, the first such one in the world. Some initial problems occurred, such as the late arrival of teams delaying the start of games, but overall the clubs considered it a great success. A lower second division was set up 1893 and the total number of teams increased to 28. In 1890 the Scottish and Irish formed their own leagues. The British league system provided the model which foreign clubs and administrators followed as the game took root in Europe and South America.

Thus, in little more than 30 years, football had emerged from an undisciplined and rambunctious folk-game event, with practically no rules, into a disciplined, regulated and widely popular national pastime. Rescued at first by the public schools, various forces transformed the game into the main recreational pursuit of working-class communities. As the commercial potential of the game became apparent, more and more grounds and stadiums were built in nearly every village, town and city in Britain. And importantly, football for the masses had come to mean more than just a game or form of entertainment. It tugged deeply at their emotions and became a source of meaning and identity in their lives.

In a sense, it had become, once more, the people's game. Moreover, the British had established a game which would

eventually become the world's most popular team sport. Some say that it has to be considered as the greatest export in Britain's long history. Just how that happened, especially in Europe and South America, needs now to be explored.

Football Abroad

During the first half of the 19th century there are many references to British sailors, soldiers and traders playing a version of football in the course of their travels around the world. It appears that many such instances were little more than isolated kickabouts on the docksides of distant ports, on a bit of wasteland or perhaps a parade ground. However, they were mostly of passing significance and their importance frequently exaggerated. As the century drew on however, there is plenty of evidence to confirm that football had established itself in continental Europe and in South America in a far more durable way.

It happened astonishingly quickly. Denmark, Holland and Belgium all founded football clubs in the 1880s. Hamburg, Germany's oldest club, grew out of an Anglo-American club and were formed in 1887. The first Parisian team was founded also in 1887. In Spain during the 1890s clubs were formed in Andalusia, in the Basque country and in Catalonia. In Switzerland, Swiss and English students were playing football against one another as early as the 1850s and by 1898 sufficient clubs had been formed to create a national championship based on regional leagues (the Swiss played an important role in the spread of football in the western part of Europe, second only to Britain). In Argentina, by 1890 there were enough clubs to compete in a mini league, and shortly after Charles Miller brought the game to Brazil.

As mentioned earlier, the popular explanation for the initial expansion of football overseas places the influence of Britain's Empire at the forefront of the development. There can be no doubting its influence on the initial spread of the

game. Britain was at the height of its imperial power and the sheer size of the Empire with its formal and informal connections, and its huge merchant fleet and Royal Navy, meant that British citizens were well placed to introduce the game wherever they visited or settled. And many did so. As one commentator has written, it seemed as if 'the feet of the English were everywhere, playing the game in schools, playing it among themselves in the adult world outside… and playing it in factories and railway yards. British soldiers carried footballs in their knapsacks and British sailors tucked them in their kitbags.' [*Off The Ball*. Ed. Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel. Pluto Press. London. 1986. p.68]

However, football historians such as Lanfranchi and Taylor have argued that the emergence of the game beyond British shores was a more complex process and at the formal level Britain as an imperial power played a marginal role in the development of the world game. [Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving With the Ball*. Berg. Oxford. 2001. p37]

The British export of football did not always take root in countries where the British had a high level of influence or direct political and social control. Rather than in India and the dominions of Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the British colonies, it was those countries in Europe and South America with close commercial, as well as educational and cultural links with Britain, which first adopted football. It was the British expatriate communities that grew up around the thriving ports and major cities, which frequently proved to be a more significant factor than Britain's imperial links.

Those communities in their early days were mainly made up of Britons with an aristocratic or middle-class background, and often educated at the public schools and Oxbridge. However, as British overseas interests grew in the latter part of the 18th century, they were joined by a wave of well-educated commercial and technical specialists such as

bankers, engineers, factory managers, railway technicians and teachers. When these people settled abroad, they were naturally keen to continue to enjoy the customs and the recreations they had come to love at home. The setting up of the ubiquitous social and sports club always had a high priority for British communities.

In the 1860s to 1880s cricket was the most popular team club game but it gradually gave way to football. Once the expatriate clubs had loosened their original British exclusivity and started to welcome talented young players from outside their own circle, the game took off in a serious way. Several of today's most famous European and South American football clubs in cities featured in the book, such as Genoa, Milan, Moscow, Barcelona, Prague, Buenos Aires, and Sao Paulo, can trace the origins to those early expatriate communities and their sports clubs. This is a constant theme throughout the book.

Consolidation

As the 19th century drew on, it was apparent that the enthusiasm for football was not confined just to the British settlers. It gathered strength in particular from members of the urbanised middle classes and youthful elites resident in European cities, rather than from the working classes. Their support and participation proved critical to the growth of the game. Predominantly male, they were often well educated, anglicised, and eager to try out new pastimes and ideas. They saw football as an adventurous and manly game to play. They liked the opportunity it offered for teamwork and individual skill, the simplicity of its rules, and its unpredictability. And compared with other ball games like rugby, there was a lower likelihood of serious injury.

Moreover, Britain was at the height of its power and prestige, and the members of the local bourgeoisie – and those intellectually-minded – thought it modern and progressive to be associated with the country in some way or

other. Joining a football club and playing the game became a fashionable thing to do, just like other things British such as wearing British clothes, giving British names to their sons, or sporting an eye-catching Victorian moustache. New clubs took British names such as the Grasshoppers of Zurich or Corinthians, and the use of English terms such as a corner, penalty, and free kick became standard among the players and spectators. Similarly, there was prestige to be had from employing a British professional player or coach. And if they had some foible or eccentricity that could be caricatured, so much the better. Several of the Fathers either unwittingly or willingly played their part. Thus we have, for example, the intellectual Spensley taking a book with him while in goal, Pentland at Bilbao sporting his bowler hats and large cigars, and Hogan blessing his players before they took to the field.

Education, too, had an important influence on the spread of football. As a result of the educational links that Britain had established abroad during the second half of the 19th century, British teachers, administrators, and educational ideologies were much in demand among the elite groups of Europe and South America. When working in schools and colleges abroad, British teaching staff frequently took their games with them. British teachers employed in the leading schools of Brussels, Antwerp and Bruges created a hotbed of football in the 1870s and 80s.[Goldblatt. p.120] The first European clubs in Switzerland were established by British students attending private schools. In the 1880s football was being played in the English schools and colleges of St Petersburg. And in South America, Alexander Hutton, the Father of Argentine football, ensured sport and particularly football, were at the heart of the curriculum when setting up his own school in Buenos Aires.

Britain's reputation as the workshop of the world was attracting large numbers of students to come here to study. Many were caught up in the growing popularity of football,

and returned home eager to have it played in their native land. The origins of several leading Spanish clubs owe much to enthusiastic young men who had studied in Britain. Perhaps the most famous example of all is Charlie Miller, the Father of Brazilian football, who fell in love with the game while attending an English public school.

By the turn of the 19th century, football was well on the way in many overseas countries to being a popular amateur sport and, increasingly, with a profitable spectator appeal. This was a factor which attracted British professional and amateur clubs to embark on foreign tours in both Europe and South America. Cambridge University FC made a tour of Hungary as early as 1902. The 1910 tour of Brazil and Argentina by the leading British amateur club – Corinthians – was enormously successful and caught the imagination of the local people, as did Glasgow Rangers when they toured Austria in 1904. Such tours played an important role in the expansion of football as they still do today.

Not surprisingly, as the popularity of football spread in overseas countries, the indigenous population wanted to assume the leading role in the development of the sport. However, the prestige of the British game was still high, and at both club and national level, countries remained eager to learn from the experience and expertise of British coaches and players. This opened up opportunities for professional footballers in Britain to take the plunge and leave home, either to play as a professional in newly-formed foreign clubs, like Herbert Kilpin at Milan, or to coach the game abroad. The Fathers Jimmy Hogan, Johnny Madden and Fred Pentland, all seasoned British professionals, were to achieve outstanding careers as coaches in the clubs and football associations of central Europe and Spain.

Of course it was not always the British who had the greatest influence on the spread of football. Some British nationals living overseas, especially in the colonies, remained insular, and had no intention of seeing their clubs and games

shared with others. They were quite content to preserve their exclusivity and to let others take the lead. There were also some countries, notably in Scandinavia and the Low Countries, who did not rely on British expatriates and their sports and social clubs to establish football. [Goldblatt. p.120] Much as they admired the British game, they went ahead with their own development and only brought in foreign players, managers and coaches as and when they needed.

Nor was Britain the only nation behind the international expansion of the modern game. Football enthusiasts from other European countries were also active, such as the great Austrian coach Hugo Meisl, the German football pioneer Walther Bensemann, and the Swiss footballer Hans Gamper who helped found Zurich FC in 1897, and then FC Barcelona in 1899.

Nonetheless, in many overseas countries the British must be regarded as central to the development of the game. In the words of one authority, 'The pace, style and very fibre of the game's development was British.' [Walvin. p.117]

At the risk of over-simplification, their involvement at various critical phases can be broadly illustrated in the following way. First, British immigrants, particularly bankers, engineers, and managers, as well as teachers and students, form their own exclusive football club and play matches against one another. Secondly, in time, such clubs become more cosmopolitan as other expatriates and the indigenous urban elite are drawn into them to make up the numbers.

Other groups of people copy the British model to form their own clubs so as to compete in organised competitions, often under the influence of British coaches and managers. Thirdly, the cosmopolitan and indigenous clubs come to constitute the most important part of the game. National football associations and professional leagues are established, famous clubs emerge and the British influence declines. And

finally, the working class becomes heavily involved in the game. The indigenous nation assumes full control and clubs compete for coaches and players on the world stage.

In one or more of the above phases, the contribution of the individuals who make up this book was pivotal, whether as founder, manager, player or coach. Some had no wish to leave their homeland and were driven abroad to earn a living from their footballing skills and knowledge. Others just loved the game for its own sake, simply wanted others to enjoy it and provided the spark to make it happen.

Probably none of them set out with the heroic intention of taking football to the world, nor would they have foreseen the accolade of Father of Football deservedly bestowed upon them by the countries in which they worked. It is time now to look at their lives and achievements.

1

JAMES SPENSLEY – THE ENGLISH DOCTOR AND *MISTER* GARBUTT

IN 2013 the people of Genoa proudly celebrated the 120th anniversary of the birth of the founding of Italy's oldest active football club, the Genoa Cricket and Football Club, commonly simply referred to as Genoa. As part of the celebrations, a memorial Mass was held on Sunday 11 August to commemorate an Englishman, James Richardson Spensley, at the beautiful church of Santa Maria dell Vigne in the centre of the city. This was a somewhat unusual tribute as Spensley had been brought up by evangelical congregational parents in Britain and there is no evidence that he had become a Catholic. But the occasion shows how high is the esteem that Genoa has for the Englishman. At the end of the 19th century, no one did more to bring football to the city, to lay its foundations and ignite that passion Italians have for the game.

In fact, the initiative to hold the Mass had come from a group of Genoan football supporters led by Franco Savelli and Maria Riggio. As students, both had revered the memory of Spensley and had made a study of his achievements. But they had been puzzled by the account of where and

the circumstances in which Spensley had lost his life as a British medical doctor in 1915 in the First World War. For a long time it had been recorded in the newspapers that he had died fighting the Turks in Gallipoli. Savelli and Riggio became convinced that this was inaccurate and they set themselves the task of establishing the truth. After several years of research they discovered Spensley's grave in August 1993, just 100 years after the founding of Genoa FC. They established that his remains rest in the British military cemetery of Niederzwehren, near Kassel in Germany, together with about 1,700 fallen British soldiers.

Italy does not easily forget its sporting heroes and the visitor to Genoa today will come across several examples of just how well Spensley is remembered in the city. Near the football stadium runs the Via J Spensley. On the house in which he lived at the Civic Square Campetto there is a plaque bearing the following Italian inscription, 'Here lived the English doctor James R Spensley, sportsman – a great friend of Italy – football pioneer with the Genoa Cricket and Football club, founder of Genoese scouting.'

Just outside the city is Spensley Park which is now an important international scouting centre. And each year the city plays host to the world when it organises its international junior tournament for the James Spensley Cup, dedicated to children from many countries.

Spensley's Early Years

It was a sequence of fortunate events that first brought James Spensley to Italy. He was born on 17 May 1867 in Stoke Newington, London, to William Spensley and Elizabeth Alice Richardson. His father was a congregationalist minister in Stoke Newington which in late Victorian time was a relatively affluent area of the city. Spensley had a comfortable upbringing and a good education. He liked

sport from an early age and practised boxing and football, and his father instilled in him a sense of discipline and respect for others. He also inherited from his father a deep interest in social and philanthropic affairs.

Both his parents were keen that he should become a doctor and perhaps devote at least part of his life to becoming a medical missionary. This was often the case within religious denominations in late Victorian times and his father was a deputy chairman of the London Missionary Society. In October 1884 Spensley entered the London Hospital to study medicine. In 1891 he qualified for Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons (MRCS) and the Royal College of Physicians (LRCP). He spent a few months working as a house surgeon in London with Professor Down (the discoverer of the syndrome that bears his name) but he decided not to pursue a career purely as a medical specialist or as a general practitioner.

By the end of 1892 he decided to leave London and to live near his parents in Sunderland, a city where his mother had previously lived and where his father had been recently appointed as the minister of Grange Congregational Church. Spensley took up a post as a medical adviser for a marine insurance company based in Sunderland with worldwide commercial interests. This was a very fortuitous appointment for him. It allowed him plenty of opportunity for travel and to indulge in his developing intellectual interests in studying oriental religions and philosophy, and languages, including Sanskrit.

Nor did he neglect the chance the appointment gave him to enjoy the sports he liked at school, notably football and boxing. Local press reports in the north-east after his arrival were soon carrying reports of his sporting interests and organising ability. In November 1892 he took the initiative to get together, and captain, a scratch football team drawn up from members of his father's church in Sunderland, to play against the Durham College of Science, Newcastle.

Spensley played in goal and his side ran out 3-1 winners. By the following year he had also qualified as a referee and was soon refereeing fairly senior games in the north-east. His medical training was also coming in useful on the sports field. When the cricket professional of Sunderland Cricket Club sustained a very severe cut beneath his right eye after being struck by a rising ball, the press reported that it was fortunate that Dr Spensley was on hand to put three stitches in his wound. Some say that he also played some football for Blackburn Rovers before he left England, though this seems highly unlikely. His footballing skills certainly did not reach that level and there is no official record.

His work for his company was to take him to many parts of the world and in 1896 he was sent to Genoa to provide medical care for the sailors of British coal ships passing through the Mediterranean. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had made Genoa a key stopping place for vessels on the route to and from India. It was an appointment that would have major repercussions for him and for Italian football.

The Genoa Athletic and Cricket Club

By the late 19th century Genoa was not only a major seaport but had also become a thriving steelmaking and shipbuilding centre. This had brought many British workers and professional men to the city. Just three years before Spensley's arrival around a dozen expatriate Britons were observed arriving in dribs and drabs at the door of a local trattoria in the Via Palestro, a newly developed part of Genoa.

A meeting had been convened by the British consul general of Genoa, Charles Alfred Payton, to discuss the formation of a sports club. Those attending the meeting, and many others of the British community in Genoa,

missed cricket in particular, the game they loved to play back home, and Charles Payton and his friends had decided to do something about it. So on 7 September 1893 Genoa Cricket and Athletic Club was founded.

It was decided that it would be a private club which would represent England abroad and its shirts would be all white (like England's own) with the city's badge on the left – a red cross over a black field. The club strip was changed again in 1901 when Genoa FC adopted their famous red–navy halves and therefore became known as the *rossoblu* – the colours used even to this day.

Italians and foreign expatriates were not allowed into the teams of the club from 1893–95 and cricket was played against the crews of various visiting British ships which docked in the port from time to time. A pitch had been made available by two Scottish factory managers – Mr Wilson and Mr Mclaren – who owned a field in the Piazza d'Armi of the Compasso. Although cricket and athletics were popular, the younger and more active members of the club, aware of the growing recognition of soccer in England, were soon pressing for a team to be formed.

The arrival of Spensley in 1896 was crucial. He joined the club and participated enthusiastically in some of its activities but soon made it clear that he was very keen on football and would like to see it introduced. His first challenge was to change attitudes towards the game among some of the more conservative members who considered the sport as more for the lower classes. He also argued strongly that the club was too narrowly based by restricting its membership only to British expatriates.

His enthusiasm, commitment and high intellectual ability gradually won the members round. Since he knew more about the rules of the game and its tactics than anyone else, it was natural that he would take the lead in organising the soccer branch. By 1897 Spensley had succeeded in getting the club's committee to change the rules to allow up to 50

Italian, Swiss and Austrian members to join. It was not long before even that limit was removed.

Spensley took the opportunity to build up a cosmopolitan team of English, Italian and Swiss footballers, drawn for the most part from well-educated, anglicised and talented sportsmen from members of the city's upper-middle-class society. Among the first Italian players to join was Eduardo Pasteur – a relative of the famous scientist – followed by his brother Enrico. Not that there was anything snobbish about Spensley's attitude, and he was quite happy to enlist the crews of British ships at anchor in the harbour for Saturday matches, and workers from the nearby Bruzzo ironworks. Another of his priorities was to secure a better playing field and a new one was found in another part of the town – Ponte Carrega – along the banks of the river Bisagno.

Competition

By 1897 a useful and enthusiastic group of players had been recruited who enjoyed a kickaround among themselves but were now to test their mettle against tougher opposition in matches outside the city. Thus on 6 January 1898 the Genoa football side challenged a mixed team made up of members of International Torino and FBC Torinese to a game at the Ponte Carrega. In a tight game they lost 0-1. This is a historic match as it is the first football fixture officially documented in the history of Italian football. We know that 154 tickets were sold at the full price of one lira and 23 at half price, and that overall the event made a profit of over 100 lire. [John Foot, Calcio. *A History of Italian Football.* Harper Perennial. London.1907. pp. 4-5] Other friendly games for Genoa were soon arranged, including those against the crew of the British warship HMS *Clementine* and the famous battleship, HMS *Revenge*.

Under Spensley's leadership the club continued to prosper and was now attracting interest elsewhere in Italy, especially in the northern towns of Turin and Milan. In

March 1898 Genoa led the way in promoting the foundation of FIF (Federation Italienne du Football). And shortly after on 8 May 1898 what is termed the first official Italian football championship was held in Turin as part of the festivities at the International Exhibition to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Albertine Statute (a constitutional charter granted to the kingdoms of Piedmont and Sardinia by the liberal King Charles Albert in 1848).

In fact it could hardly be termed a championship as there were only four teams participating, three of whom were from Turin together with Genoa. The final was played in the afternoon between Genoa and Turin International before a crowd of over 100 spectators. Genoa fielded a mixture of English, Italian and Swiss players. Spensley as captain played as a defender at the heart of Genoa's defence but ended up in goal after an injury to the goalkeeper. At full time the score was 1-1. Extra time was played and the English left-winger Robert Leaver scored the goal that won the game for Genoa.

Interestingly, as well as the referee there were two seated line judges whose role was to judge whether the ball had crossed the line as there were no goal nets. Apparently although the crowd was small, they cheered their teams loudly, even fought among themselves and booed the referee – a habit that one commentator Antonio Ghirelli, noted sarcastically, would unhappily continue. [Foot. p.6] Genoa took home the trophy, a gold medal and the distinction of being the country's first ever Italian champions. The basis of what was to become Italy's famous Serie A League had been laid.

The victory in 1898 was followed by a period of outstanding success for Genoa. It is difficult to be precise about the exact managerial role played by Spensley in matters such as selecting and training the team and tactics, but as the founder and captain he was highly respected and it is likely that his influence was considerable in all

aspects of the running of the club. Some Italian observers in fact list him as the first modern football coach. And the youth nursery he set up in 1902, the first of its kind in Italy, helped to ensure a steady supply of talented newcomers to the team.

Although in the modern era Genoa have difficulty in competing with the great football clubs in Milan and Turin, they dominated Italian football in the early stages. Spensley's team went on to win the championships of 1889, 1900, 1902, 1903 and 1904. He retired as a player in 1906 when he was almost 40. He stepped down with a huge reputation and a large collection of medals. But his love for the game was still strong and after managing Genoa for a further season he became a very competent referee, as well as helping with the development of local football clubs and other sporting associations.

Character

Away from his sporting achievements, what sort of man was James Spensley? As his photograph shows he was a wiry, handsome and not particularly tall man but he had an imposing stature and flowing black beard. He was a meticulous organiser, intelligent and someone who naturally commanded respect.

A visionary man, he quickly saw the potential for the game in Italy but was not starry eyed, and had the willpower and organisational skills to bring about success. He could appear detached at times and somewhat intimidating; indeed his presence and composure seemed to instil a fear into the opposition when he played. Even his team admitted they were in awe of him.

But not only did he create a team, he was an enthusiastic playing member too. For the first two seasons he played at left-back before settling into his regular position of

goalkeeper for the rest of his career. Spensley was the archetypal amateur and insisted that the game should be played in the true Corinthian spirit – that is, playing for love and moral values, and not money or trifling things such as winning. Together with his fellow players he would often pay the cost of the one-lira match tickets of the personal guests invited to games.

A former editor of Italy's *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Emilio Colombo, has left us with what is the best contemporary description of him in action, 'Spensley played in goal – a handsome man who hid his English origin behind a flowing black beard. We were respectful, almost fearful, of that man in goal, who never spoke, never lost his calm and never lost his temper. I lost count of the number of times before a game he would sit with his broad back against a goal post reading some book we wouldn't dare to pick up. He looked like an old man, slow in his movement, but in fact he was very agile and strong. Good vision, strong hands and real courage. He was the first man to teach our goalkeeper how to punch the ball clear with both fists – especially in a melee. He guided his squad, trained it, and captained it.' [Emilio Colombo. Sport Illustrated, 1 November.1915.]

He was clearly a man of widespread intellectual interests. Well educated, he was a very good linguist and had a sound knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. He particularly enjoyed studying the history of religion and travelled widely. While in Genoa he became a foreign journalist for the *Daily Mail*, writing about Italian politics and affairs. Driven by his philanthropic ideals, outside sport he made other important contributions to public life. He set up an evening school in Genoa. He helped develop support for foundlings in the city.

He regarded youth work as very important and he is remembered in particular for the efforts he made in 1910 to establish the Italian section of the Boy Scouts. His interest in the movement had been brought about in the summer

of that year by his study of an autographed copy of Baden-Powell's book – *Scouting for Boys* – which deeply impressed him. He started to think seriously about how it could be introduced in Italy.

After a brief stay in England where he met Baden-Powell, he returned to Genoa and together with a Genovese Catholic educator called Mario Mazza founded a section of the Italian Boy Scouts (REI) for Genoa. Spensley was appointed as its first commissioner and played an active role in developing locally the scouting movement. The large and impressive Spensley Park near Genoa, which hosts international youth football and scouting events, is a fitting testament to his work and the values Spensley held during his time in Genoa.

War

Given his sense of duty and his medical background, it is not surprising that Spensley at the age of 47 decided to join the British Army as a medical officer in the Royal Army Medical Corps when war was declared in 1914. He had been offered a commission in the Italian Army but preferred to serve under the British flag. He was sent to France in 1915 as the medical officer of an infantry battalion of the 8th Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment). He was badly wounded at the end of September 1915 and died from his wounds in a German hospital in November.

His official citation includes this account, 'Fellow officers reported that it appeared he had been shot dead as he was helping back a wounded officer after "rushing about attending to the wounded under most appalling fire," and being twice "pulled down under cover against his will."…It was discovered later that James had been taken as a prisoner of war and was lying seriously wounded in the officers' prison at Mainz. He did not recover from his wounds. Following the

news of his death, one of his playing rivals from his playing days the journalist Colombo, wrote that: He died, as he had lived, dedicating himself to an act of great faith and humanity.' [Colombo. Sport Illustrated]

William Garbutt Takes Over

The early history of the club would not be complete without a reference to another Briton, William Thomas Garbutt, who is also much revered in Italian football history and who played a major part in carrying Spensley's work forward.

Soon after Spensley had retired, Genoa went into decline and lost their hold on the Italian championship to other up and coming clubs such as Juventus and Milan. Among other things, Genoa were hit hard by the decision of the Italian Football Federation in 1908 forbidding the use of foreign players (another famous Italian club, AC Milan, and its British founders, suffered also from this decision – see chapter two).

But once that decision had been reversed, the future of the club looked more secure. Its directors were ambitious and stronger players, especially Swiss, began to be recruited. A new ground in the Marassi area of Genoa was completed in 1911, comparable to the best British stadiums of the time. In the following year, the decision was taken by the directors to appoint William Garbutt as the first truly professional European manager/coach and a major figure behind the development of professional football in Italy.

Born in January 1883, Garbutt came from a working-class background quite different from that of Spensley. He joined the Royal Artillery when he was 19. Reading Football Club, then in the Southern League, spotted his potential as a footballer and he later went on to play for Woolwich Arsenal and Blackburn. He was a skilful and clever forward but his playing career was blighted by injury and he was forced to retire from playing at the end of 1911 when he was only 29.

Recently married and with a baby son to support, he had little chance of a coaching job in England and his employment prospects looked bleak. Just how exactly he came about the Genoa appointment is unclear. Some say that he was recommended by the future national coach Vittorio Pozzo who had witnessed him playing. But his recent biographer, Paul Edgerton, concludes that the most likely version is that Garbutt was recommended by the brother of Genoa's youth coach at that time, an Irishman named Thomas Coggins. [Paul Edgerton, *William Garbutt.* Sportsbooks. Cheltenham. 2009. p.28] What is certain is that Garbutt accepted the post without hesitation and became manager of what had been the most successful club in Italian football to date. He later went on to have an impressive career with other Italian clubs.

Undaunted by the fact he had very little previous managerial experience, Garbutt set about the task of improving morale at Genoa and of revolutionising its training methods. He soon proved to be a coach of the highest quality, the first to arrive at training in the morning and the last to leave. Prior to his arrival, training sessions had been haphazard and without clear objectives. He abolished desultory kickabouts. He quickly identified that improvement was badly required in all important aspects of the game from tackling to heading. He introduced some of the more modern training techniques he had picked up as a player in England. There would be structured warm-ups. He supervised running and jumping sessions, and poles would be planted around the playing field for dribbling practice and ball control.

He belongs to that first group of British coaches, such as Johnny Madden and Jimmy Hogan, to recognise the importance of the physical fitness of the players and the need to be more tactically aware. Much of his success derived from his own character and personality. Of quiet manner and not one to waste words, he was nonetheless an impressive and charismatic figure, constantly smoking his tobacco pipe. He

insisted that he should have complete control over all aspects of team affairs on and off the field. He took great care of his players and built an excellent relationship with them without losing anything of his authority. He introduced hot showers in the dressing rooms. He became known to his players as *Il Mister,* the name still given to managers in Italy to this day.

In other ways too he was the prototype modern manager. He conducted Italy's first player transfers for fees when he tempted (illegally it seems) two players from local rivals Andrea Doria FC, and signed another from Milan. He also used his contacts to bring over various players from England and invited his first professional club, Reading, to tour northern Italy at the end of the 1912/13 season.

Genoa had not won an Italian national championship since 1904. Garbutt restored their fortunes. Under his leadership, from 1912 until 1927, Genoa won the championship three times, in 1915, 1923 and 1924, and came close to a fourth title in 1925. Genoa have not won an Italian championship since.

After leaving Genoa in 1927, Garbutt went on to enjoy a long management career in Europe which included fairly brief spells back at Genoa before and after the Second World War. He died in February 1964 in Warwick. No obituaries of him were published in England. In contrast, in the Italian press glowing tributes were paid to his life, character and achievements. [Egerton pp.198-204]

Spensley and Garbutt, in their respective ways, both made immense contributions to the growth of Italian football. Unfortunately since Garbutt left Genoa in 1927, they have not been able to repeat the same run of success – 'the glories of old Genoa' – which they had enjoyed during the times of the two Britons. But the memories of the two men, one as the inspirational founder, and the other as a modern football manager/coach, still hold a special place in the history of Italian football.