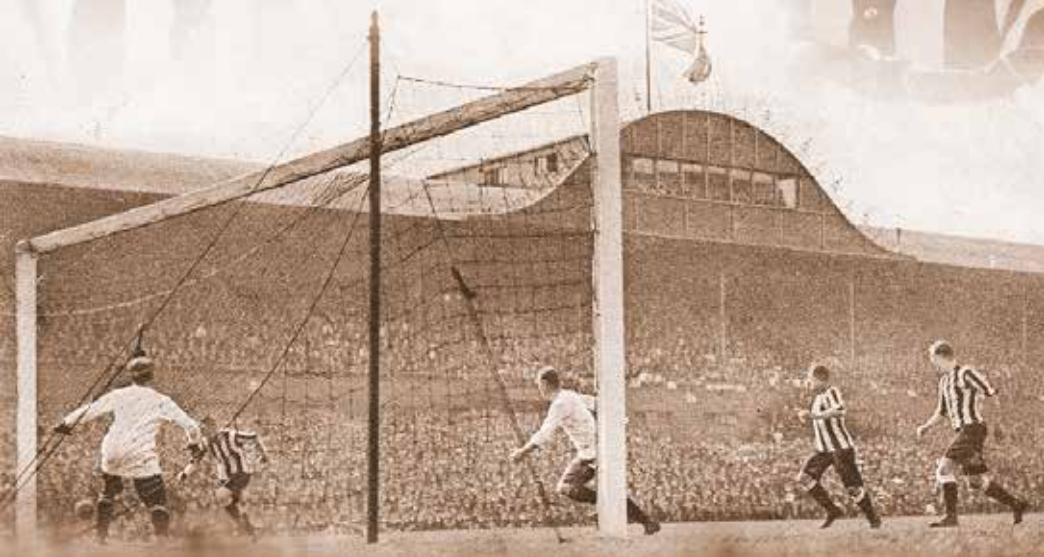
David Potter

Newcastle United

The Great Days
1904 to 1911



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Contents

Acknowledgements 7

Introduction 9

1. An Honour at Last! 19

2. So Near And Yet So Far 54

3. Another Championship 81

4. More Frustration 105

5. Champions Again, But … 129

6. The FA Cup – At Last! 154

7. Decline But Not Fall 185

Postlude 205

Appendix 1: The Other Great Days 210

Appendix 2: Fixtures And Results 247

Bibliography 256

1

An Honour At Last!

1904/05

THE 21,897 who made their way to St James' Park on 3 September 1904 could hardly have imagined just what they were at the start of. They saw a fine game, as it turned out, when the home team beat Woolwich Arsenal (as they were then called) 3-0, two of the goals scored by Scotland international Ronnie Orr, and the other by local boy Jackie Rutherford. Making his debut at full-back that day was an Ulsterman from Belfast called Bill McCracken, his broad Irish accent being heard all over the ground as he barked instructions to his other defenders.

It was a satisfactory start to the season, and results continued to be good with home form particularly impressive. Everton, Manchester City, Middlesbrough, Bury, Blackburn and The Wednesday all fell before the new year, and poor results were few, although there were three narrow and possibly unlucky away defeats to Small Heath (now better known as Birmingham City), Stoke and

Preston North End all by the odd goal. There were many pleasing aspects to the play. One was the plethora of goals and indeed scorers for there was no over-dependence on the one striker. Big Bill Appleyard, a burly character who excelled in the then legal act of 'charging' the goalkeeper (trying to bundle him over the line with a shoulder charge – a shameful piece of thuggery which was still allowed and even encouraged and loved by fans until well into the 1950s), was the main scorer but Jimmy Howie, Ronnie Orr and Jackie Rutherford were all regular 'netters' as the local press put it.

On the left wing Bobby Templeton had played a few games but had now left because of temperamental problems. He had been called the 'Blue Streak' when he played for Scotland because of his speed, and he was always popular with spectators because of his daredevil approach to the game and to life, his character being exemplified by his willingness, for a bet, to enter a lion's cage at a circus menagerie when he had returned to Scotland, long after his Newcastle days were over.

He was a man, however, who never really settled anywhere he went, but he left a huge amount of fans on Tyneside, and indeed in Glasgow where he won the Scottish league and cup double with Celtic in 1907. He survived his contact with the lion but died suddenly of the after-effects of the 1919 flu epidemic when he was in partnership in a hotel with his Celtic colleague 'Sunny' Jim Young. Like so many great players, he died young, only 39.

Templeton dropped out of the Newcastle side in the autumn of 1904 and was transferred to Woolwich Arsenal in December. His replacement Albert Gosnell could never

understand why, no matter how well he played, he was never loved by the Geordies. There were probably two reasons for this. One was that he was a southerner from Essex. This was, of course, no handicap to other great Newcastle players both before and since, but southerners were often perceived as effeminate and soft. There was never any problem with Scotsmen, Yorkshiremen or even Sunderland Mackems, but southerners had to work hard to be accepted by the locals. The other reason, of course, was that Gosnell simply was not Bobby Templeton.

Templeton had been flamboyant, extroverted and ever in the news. Gosnell on the other hand was a more thoughtful kind of player. He may not have been the most popular man on the terraces but he would have been far better appreciated in the dressing room where the other good players of the team coped with him far better than they could have with the maverick Templeton.

It is, of course, always true that a player (or manager) must at all times retain the support of the fans. They do pay the wages. It is greatly to the credit of Gosnell that he overcame the irrational dislike of those who called him 'goosey' and 'gosling' for his perceived timidity, and gradually won them round. He would stay at Newcastle until 1910, and even won an international cap for England in 1906, earning good reviews for his part in the 5-0 defeat of Ireland.

In Edwardian football the defining point of a team was the half-back line, and by the end of 1904 there was an excellent troika in place, or at least there would have been if Andy Aitken had not been temporarily out of the team through injury. They were all Scotsmen.

At right-half was Alec Gardner, an Edinburgh man, whom many felt was good enough to be capped for Scotland. Arguably he suffered from being an Anglo-Scot – although that never hindered men like McWilliam and Higgins – but the real reason possibly lies in the absolute plethora of talented Scotsmen who played at the time, particularly in the right-half position. Gardner rejoiced in the unlikely nickname of 'Punky', and had been with the club since the turn of the century. Like most great right-halves he was a wonderful passer of a ball, and could distribute both to the right and to the left.

At centre-half was Gardner's brother-in-law, Andy 'the Daddler' Aitken. What the word 'daddler' means we cannot say – in some parts of the UK it meant a farthing, a quarter of a penny – but we do know that Aitken was a wonderful servant of the Newcastle club. Like Gardner, he had been around for a long time, and had played in many positions for the team. It was odd, in some ways, to find him at centre-half, for he was neither tall, nor particularly broad. He had the build that we would normally associate with an inside-forward perhaps – and indeed he could play in that position – but at this stage he was showing his versatility by playing at centre-half. He came from Ayrshire, the land of Robert Burns, and like many men from that part of the world had a sound knowledge of the poet's works. He had also had the misfortune to be the captain of Scotland on that terrible day in April 1902 when loud creaking suddenly gave way to a resounding crack and part of a wooden stand behind the goal collapsed and more than 20 supporters perished in what became known as the first Ibrox disaster.

Indeed, it was said by the opponents of Newcastle that it was two Toon players who caused it. This was grossly unfair for several reasons. Evidence is scarce and contradictory but, it was claimed, a long ball from Andy Aitken to Bobby Templeton caused the crowd to sway. Templeton was still with Aston Villa and had not yet joined Newcastle. The fault indeed lay with no one other than Rangers FC and the designers of Ibrox, but Aitken would often admit in later life (which included a career in football journalism) that he never really got over the Ibrox disaster, even though the superb nature of his play for many years after it would give one scant grounds for thinking that he ever had any problem with it.

And at left-half we had Peter McWilliam. In later years he would be called 'Peter the Great' after the 17th-century Russian czar of that name, and he wasn't called that for nothing. He was simply the best player around. He was like Jim Baxter of the 1960s, but without the arrogance or the personality disorders of Jim. Peter was (most unusually for a football player in those days) born in Inverness and when he arrived in Newcastle shortly after the turn of the century, he incredibly couldn't decide whether to be a football player or a clerk. His mind was soon made up when he saw the passion and love of the game that all Geordies seemed to have, and although he took time to settle, by December 1904 he had made the left-half position his own.

We have said that Peter lacked the outward arrogance of Jim Baxter. Yet he possessed a different kind of arrogance, which we may perhaps call 'confidence' or 'conviction'. He was, within himself, convinced that he was as good as anyone else in the game – and he would prove it on many

occasions when playing for Newcastle and Scotland – and he knew just how to pass a ball with the correct weight on it. He also had a wonderful body swerve. But there was more to him than that. He understood the psychology of the game, and could twig, almost instantly, which of his team-mates (or even opponents) was having a good or a bad game. Like most of Watt's men, he was an ideal team man, and his cheerful self-confidence never allowed him to feel that he was in any way better or more important than any other member of the team. McWilliam would in time become a great manager for Tottenham Hotspur and Middlesbrough. It was claimed that he, Bill McCracken and Colin Veitch were the cabal who dreamed up Newcastle's offside trap. Legend has it that it was concocted on a train journey home after a defeat, the three of them having decided that such things were not going to be allowed to happen again.

Offside traps are fairly common now, but they don't always work. They depend on several things. The game, as far as the offside law was concerned, was different in two respects in the Edwardian era. One was that neutral linesmen were a rarity, usually only in international matches and cup finals, so everything hinged on the referee, and anyone who has ever refereed any football match without neutral linesmen will tell you how difficult it is to judge offside. The other major difference was that until 1925 the offside law was different.

In the modern game, a player to be onside needs to have two defenders closer to the goal line than himself. One of them is normally the goalkeeper. Prior to 1925, a player needed THREE players to be closer to the goal line than himself to be onside. It followed therefore that if one defender

moved up before a ball was played forward, the man could be offside – and even if the referee did not give the offside, there was still a goalkeeper and a defender in position.

Newcastle could not really claim to be unique in having worked that out. Where they were superior to other teams lay in their ability to co-ordinate and operate this scheme. They did it with ruthless efficiency to the constant frustration of other teams' players and supporters, earning national praise and even notoriety for their expertise in this necessarily negative aspect of the game. There was a music hall joke about teams arriving from the south at Newcastle station in order to play a game at St James' Park. At the station, a whistle blew. 'Good heavens, we can't be offside already!' said the centre-forward to his inside-right.

Aitken was out of the team for a spell in December 1904. He was replaced by a man who was scarcely his inferior in any respect. This was Colin Veitch, who was 'allowed' (according to many cartoons and comments in the local press) to join the 'Scottish half-back line'. Veitch was a local man, but was hardly a typical Geordie football player.

He was by no means a 'horny handed son of industrial toil'. He was, in fact, decidedly middle-class and his parents still held on to the sheer horror (more common on the cricket field than on the football one, it must be said) of someone actually earning his living by playing sport on a professional basis. There was no harm in sport as long as one was an amateur. Although professional football had been legalised in England as early as 1886 (somewhat later in Scotland) this did not mean that it was acceptable in polite society. Veitch, apparently, began by telling lies, including playing under a pseudonym before he eventually

had the courage to tell his family that he was indeed Colin Veitch of Newcastle United.

The good aspect of Veitch's background was that he grew up to be an urbane, charming, well-read and well-educated young man, and also with the social conscience to be able to look around and see at a glance what was wrong with contemporary society – and there was a lot. This led him, long after his playing career was over, to stand as a parliamentary candidate for Labour. His socialism would also lead him to being involved in the early years of the Players' Union, for he realised that though many football players could be regarded as having some sort of 'privileged' position in society, one never knew when injury was going to strike. Not all clubs had enlightened men like Frank Watt and a supportive group of directors at the helm.

Veitch was also an excellent example of the term 'renaissance man'. Indeed, he almost transcended that term. He was heavily involved in drama and opera, founding the Newcastle People's Theatre in Heaton, acting on stage and performing for the Newcastle Operatic Society. He married an actress called Greta Burke and was a friend of no less a person than that other great socialist visionary George Bernard Shaw. Granted, most of this side of him came to the fore after his footballing career, but while he played for Newcastle and England (he won six caps for his country), he also studied music, practised public speaking and read widely, as well as playing a few other sports. Utterly charming and approachable, like so many of this fine side, Veitch was an obvious choice for captain.

He was also one of the many examples of footballers of all ages who were, putting it simply and crudely, intelligent.

There are, of course, many cases of great players who lack native intelligence as any glance of the daily tabloid press will clearly indicate. But anyone who has ever organised sport at any level will say that if it ever comes to a choice between two players for a key position, then, other things being equal, the intelligent person is always the better bet, because they realise that things like game management, keeping calm and having a proper attitude are just as important as ability. Football usually does act as a microcosm of life.

As a player, Veitch's key attribute was versatility. Sometimes a 'versatile' player is a euphemism employed to describe a man who is a permanent reserve, often simply employed as a cover for injuries. Nowadays he would be on the team sheet as a 'Jack of all trades' substitute. This was hardly true of Colin Campbell McKechnie Veitch, who joined the club in 1899 and was there until 1915 when he went off to fight in a war which he did not really believe in, but nevertheless saw it as being a stepping stone to a better society. He even reached the rank of second Lieutenant. At this point in time, Veitch was the centre-half (and that indeed was his best position, as he himself thought, although he was a surprisingly small man at 5ft 6in for that position) but he was also capable of playing at right-half and even in several places in the forward line where he could take a fine goal.

In whatever position he played he was a tactician, analysing the opposition, taking into account things like the state of the pitch, the nature of the opposition and even the character of the referee. He was a great believer in keeping the ball moving, and that the most effective pass was often the short stab to a man in a better position than he was. Not for Veitch was the long, accurate, visionary ball across the

field to a man standing on his own. McWilliam could do that, as indeed could Gardner and Aitken to a lesser extent. Veitch's strength lay in the close, quick pass followed by a quick dart up the field taking an opponent with him.

In the dark midwinter days of December 1904, a bright gleam lit up Tyneside as everyone enthused about the play of their great side. A narrow 1-0 defeat of Blackburn Rovers in early December was enough to put them to the top of the league, and this was then confirmed by an excellent 3-1 away win over Nottingham Forest, but it was the 6-2 defeat of The Wednesday (as they were called because they had started off playing only on Wednesdays, which was the Sheffield half-day) that really set the city alight. It is often claimed that Newcastle fans on occasion suffer from misplaced naivety, thinking that their players are a great deal better than what they actually are. This was not the case on 17 December when The Wednesday, who had won the First Division for the last two years, were so mercilessly put to the sword.

The goals were scored by five separate players. Rutherford, variously referred to as John, Jock, Jockie or Jackie, got two and Bob Appleyard, Ronnie Orr, Jimmy Howie and Peter McWilliam got one each to the delight of the 18,000 spectators who spilled out of the ground in the dark at about 4pm (the game had to kick off early so as to finish in daylight as floodlights were still another 50 years in the future) all tripping over each other, shouting, cheering at the well-dressed ladies doing their Christmas shopping in Granger Street who sometimes smiled back tolerantly, even encouragingly, and other times glared at them with snobby hostility. Ale houses were open and did a roaring trade, and

then in would come about an hour after the full-time whistle the one-armed man who sold the evening newspapers. He had lost his left arm at Bloemfontein or someplace a few years ago, but now earned his trade by being able to sell newspapers with his right arm, being able to whip out a newspaper and take the coin with amazing dexterity.

Songs were sung: the patriotic ones about Dolly Gray, a few incongruous ones about 'Two Lovely Black Eyes', (obtained as a result of a misguided dalliance with the wife of a local bully) the occasional Scottish or Yorkshire one about Loch Lomond or Ilkley Moor, a few Irish ones about Killarney, and, of course, the song which had now become the anthem of all Tyneside –'Blaydon Races'. And it was also Christmas the following week.

Christmas was much looked forward to in 1904, although it was nothing like the grotesque spending extravaganza that it was to become a century later. It had been much popularised in the 19th century by people like Prince Albert and Charles Dickens, and in an age long before electric light became universal in every house, the lighting of a Christmas tree with candles was a great attraction. Presents would be exchanged, although on a fairly limited basis compared to today, and, of course, there would be a feast on Christmas Day. But before we could get to Christmas Day, we had Christmas Eve.

And where were Newcastle United that day? At no less a place than Roker Park, the recently developed and now fairly commodious stadium of Sunderland, the great rivals. The figure for the attendance that day was given as just less than 30,000. It was obvious to most writers that there were a great deal more than that with youngsters being

helped over the turnstiles (and in some cases, thrown over the boundary wall) and hundreds simply climbing over the somewhat inadequate defences of the ground, which had been opened in 1898 and, although well used to large crowds, had seldom had to cope with anything as large and persistent as Newcastle's determined army.

The shilling to get in was about as much as most supporters could spare. In fact it was extortionate for the normal charge was sixpence, or half of a shilling. Many Newcastle supporters could not afford the train, so they simply walked, setting out at first light (about 8am) to walk the ten miles or so to the ground. En route they could try to hitch a lift from a horse and cart, and just occasionally one of these new noisy things called a motor car would pass them by at outrageous speeds like 20 or even 30 miles per hour. Some enterprising supporters clubbed together to hire a horse and cart and could spend the journey time working out how far they had travelled as they hurled insults at people in Boldon whom they suspected of being Sunderland supporters or made lewd suggestions to any young girl (and even an older one) who crossed their path. But all the time they were singing the praises of Lawrence, McCombie and Carr; Gardner, Veitch and McWilliam; Rutherford, Howie, Appleyard, Orr and Gosnell. They were the men who had taken them to the top of the First Division, and there was even talk of the double with the FA Cup as well. Preston had done it in 1889 and Aston Villa in 1897. Could Newcastle match that?

One of the differences between the Edwardian game and that of today is that, although each club had its own dedicated and committed support, a great many of the fans

would simply be there to see the football and would applaud the good play of both teams. There was no segregation. Football scarves were a thing of the future although, goodness knows, some of the fans looked as if they could have done with any kind of neckware that chilly Christmas Eve and only occasionally would one see a rich supporter wearing a rosette in the colour of his team. Very seldom (and it was rare enough to attract the attention of newspapers) did anyone appear in outlandish garments like black-and-white-striped trousers, for example. Violence and crowd trouble did happen from time to time but was comparatively rare and usually dealt with rather severely by the law courts on the Monday, usually by 'seven days of bread and water' as the euphemism of the time was.

Sunderland had started out better than Newcastle had and won the Football League four times – in 1892, 1893, 1895 and 1902. They had also had many great players, not least their legendary Scottish goalkeeper Ned Doig, and they had rivalled Aston Villa for the title of the best team in England. But in terms of trophies won, Villa had the edge. Surprisingly, given the manic obsession with the game in the north-east, neither Sunderland nor Newcastle United had ever won the FA Cup, nor even appeared in a final.

It turned out to be a rather unhappy Christmas Eve for Newcastle, for they went down 3-1 to their rivals, their only goal coming from McWilliam as their talented forward line, for once, failed to function. The run of seven wins in a row came to an end as Newcastle had 'a stopper put on their petrol' in the words of a local journalist who was clearly enjoying the metaphors of the new dawning age of motor transport. It was simply a game in which Sunderland rose to

the occasion a little better than Newcastle did, and thus the Christmas celebrations were somewhat muted in Newcastle.

But a good team can get over a defeat quickly, and the following week saw 1904 come to an end with a 2-0 win at Woolwich Arsenal's Manor Ground. The crowd was also a good 30,000 but would have contained, one imagines, a lot fewer Geordies than those who had made the shorter trip to Sunderland the previous week. Yet it was New Year's Eve, and those who were visiting friends in London would have been happy to see Rutherford and Veitch score the second-half goals which put Newcastle back into the race for the championship at the turn of the year. A team doesn't necessarily have to be on the top of the table by New Year's Day if they want to win the league, but they really have to be in touch with the top. And while 1904 had been good to Newcastle supporters, as the turn of the year was toasted that night the hope was expressed that 1905 would turn out to be even better.

The year dawned with King Edward VII still on the throne, where he had been since his mother's death in 1901. He had recovered from his appendicitis of 1902 and had returned to his hedonistic lifestyle, while his dutiful wife Queen Alexandra, now herself 60 and increasingly deaf, sighed and endured his sexual excesses in a way that subsequent royal ladies wouldn't. Being Danish, she nourished a hatred of the Germans and had a particularly ill-concealed distrust and dislike of her husband's nephew, the kaiser. Edward VII probably did not really appreciate the dire state of poverty that existed in many cities like Newcastle, and the impression given was that he did not care either. This may not have been true. Perhaps if he had seen

for himself some of the poverty at first hand then he might have wanted to do something about it. There was certainly something cheerful and jovial about him. He was the subject of much lewd conversation about his various ladies, but it was often claimed that he was at least human and likeable.

That could not be said about the prime minister, the dour Scotsman Arthur Balfour, whose government was riven by arguments about free trade v protection. Protection involved tariffs on foreign food and thus made such goods more expensive to buy in the shops, and the Conservatives inclined to that approach. There were other reasons for his unpopularity as well – a scandal about Chinese slave labour being used in South Africa, and the disturbing case (for working-class people) at Taff Vale where a railway company had successfully prosecuted the trade union for losses and damages during a strike, something that seemed to emasculate trade unions. At least Europe was at peace, but far away a war was going on between Russia and Japan which might have affected Britain with her various interests in the Far East. But the British government wisely stayed neutral, although sympathies clearly lay with the Japanese.

None of this was of any great concern to the large crowd of Geordies who turned up at St James' Park on the holiday Monday of 2 January 1905 to see Newcastle beat Notts County 1-0 thanks to a goal from Ronnie Orr. The news was dominated that day by the fall of Port Arthur to the Japanese in the Far East war, but for Newcastle it was a hard-fought win. McWilliam had scored earlier but it had been ruled out 'for reasons not apparent' to the press, and then with time running away, Orr scored in a 'scrummage'

outside the Notts County goal which had been besieged 'rather like the Russians in Port Arthur'.

A good win followed over a strong Derby County at St James' Park with defenders being given a great deal of praise for 'putting a lid' on the prodigiously talented Steve Bloomer, commonly referred to as 'the ghost' because of his pale complexion, as Veitch and Gardner scored the goals at the other end. Bloomer was the current England centre-forward and had a phenomenal ability to score goals with his turn of speed and almost uncanny ability to time a ball. He specialised in the 'daisy cutter' or the 'along the carpet' goal, but not on this day, for he was well policed by Peter McWilliam.

Things were looking very good for Newcastle but then, as happens with the best of teams, they hit a bad patch and lost three games in a row. There does not seem to have been any obvious reason for this loss of form in terms of injuries or bad pitches or anything like that, but the result was that Newcastle by the end of January had slid from first in the table to fourth. Admittedly, two of the games had been away against difficult opposition in Everton and Manchester City, but the loss of a home game to Small Heath caused distress.

This completed a double for the 'Heathens', and it was now beginning to look as if Newcastle's good form of before Christmas was to be nothing other than an illusion. As February was the month that the FA Cup started in 1905, this impression was confirmed when the team had a prolonged struggle to get the better of Western League side Plymouth Argyle, who had not yet joined the Football League and who were a very long way away, in every sense, from Newcastle.

The drawing of the first game at St James' Park on 4 February 1905, before a crowd of 28,385, attracted, no doubt, by the novelty of seeing Plymouth was a disappointment to the home fans, very few of whom would have been able, one imagines, to travel to Plymouth to see the replay on the Wednesday afternoon. Any who did so would have been rewarded by unseasonally good weather in the south-west, but a record crowd of 20,000 at the Devonport ground was frustrated by another draw, even after extra time, all the more annoying for Newcastle because they had scored first through Albert Gosnell (or Goswell as the *Western Times* calls him) before McLuckie headed an eequaliser for Plymouth who then finished strongly.

Eventually at the third attempt, on Monday, 13 February, the tie was settled at the Manor Ground, Plumstead, the home of Woolwich Arsenal, Newcastle winning 2-0 with two goals from Ronnie Orr – one of which was described as 'grand' and the other one a penalty. The weather remained good and the crowd was given as 11,000 and this time they saw a 'no nonsense' Newcastle who quite simply took a grip of the game from the start. Plymouth had done well for themselves however and Frank Watt and his men departed with a new respect for football in the south-west where rugby and cricket were traditionally stronger than football.

Allegations were often made in this era of FA Cup ties that were drawn to the effect that it was all arranged for another big gate. Now and again, one suspects there may have been some truth in these allegations, but it was hardly likely to have been the case here. Plymouth is a long way away from Newcastle, indeed they are the most southern and westerly of all professional clubs in England, and the whole

thing was a major embarrassment to Newcastle and a cause of frustration to the supporters. And travelling to Plymouth and then London was hardly likely to have been cheap.

But it was as if the struggle to beat Plymouth breathed fresh air into the team, because form immediately improved as the days began to lengthen. An important and impressive league victory was achieved at Bramall Lane, the home of Sheffield United, with Gosnell finding the net once again, as indeed did a young local reserve called Joe McClarence, and then came a rather less impressive victory over Preston North End at home when only one goal separated the teams.

But it was the FA Cup which really interested everyone, in particular when the team were drawn against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane. Spurs (as they were called by those who found Tottenham Hotspur a bit of a mouthful) were an interesting side. They were not yet in the Football League, but many people felt that they should be, for they had a massive support as had been proved in 1901 when they became the first London professional team to win the FA Cup by beating Sheffield United 3-1 in a replay at Bolton, after the first game at the Crystal Palace had amazed the world by attracting a crowd given as 110,820 in some accounts, and even more in others.

Since their FA Cup triumph, Tottenham had been half-hearted in their attempts to join the Football League (in 1905 only Woolwich Arsenal of all the London teams were in the Football League – very much a northern and Midlands preserve), and remained in the Southern League where their form since their great day of 1901 had dipped ever so slightly. Yet they were still a hugely prestigious side with a large support and 19,000 were at White Hart

Lane that rainy day of 18 February to see Newcastle. They witnessed a rather dull game which ended in a 1-1 draw.

But if there was ever any doubt that the north of England was where the real interest in football was in those days, proof was furnished in the replay at St James' Park where a massive crowd of 26,755 (and how did they manage to all get off work on a Wednesday afternoon?) on a cold, unpleasant but dry day, saw Newcastle win 4-0 with Orr scoring in each half, and Howie, who was having a great season, and Appleyard scoring the other two.

Ronnie Orr was a Scotsman from Ayrshire who had joined Newcastle from St Mirren at the turn of the century, and had now won two Scottish caps. He was a small, sturdy man with a powerful shot, and scored about 70 goals for Newcastle. He managed to score quite a few with his head but he was mainly a predatory sort of striker with the ability to be in the right place at the right time. He was a great reader of the game. He was in 1905 aged 19 at the doorway of his career and he would be with Newcastle for a few years until 1908 when he went to Liverpool, claiming unconvincingly that he was being picked on by the St James' Park supporters for the failings of others in the team. Like quite a lot of players, he died young at the age of 48, but he was well loved by most of the Newcastle supporters, certainly in 1905.

The next round paired Newcastle with Bolton Wanderers at Burnden Park, Bolton. Bolton were a Second Division side but they were the previous year's beaten finalists in the FA Cup, going down narrowly to Tom Maley's Manchester City in a poor final, only made memorable by Billy Meredith's goal. A terrifyingly large crowd of 35,574 came to see this

game. The sheer amount of people there caused dangerous congestion both outside and inside the ground, but the Geordies who had made the trip – about 10,000, it was claimed – enjoyed watching their team play a great game and winning 2-0 with goals from Appleyard and Howie.

This was Newcastle's first FA Cup semi-final – indeed up to now they had exited the FA Cup distressingly often at the first time of asking, a melancholy tradition that has lasted well into the 21st century – and they were pitted against The Wednesday at Hyde Road, Manchester, the home of Manchester City. The Wednesday had the undeniable advantage of having been to two FA Cup finals before. They had beaten Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1896 and had previously lost to Blackburn Rovers in 1890. Their FA Cup record was marginally inferior to their city rivals Sheffield United, but they also had the advantage of having won the Football League for the last two seasons. Yet Newcastle had given them a 6-2 hammering the week before Christmas – the result that had made the whole country sit up and take notice – and experts believed that, on current form, Newcastle were the better side.

Saturday, 25 March 1905 was a miserable rainy day but that did not deter a 40,000 crowd from going to Manchester to watch. It was The Wednesday who started off the brighter of the two, but once Newcastle overcame their nerves they proved the stronger. They were without the influential Orr but his place was taken by the ever versatile Colin Veitch, and the play of Veitch and McWilliam proved the decisive factor. A splendid move after about quarter of an hour in which Newcastle passed to each other 'a myriad of times' saw the ball given to Jimmy Howie who put the Magpies one up.

The rain had lessened at the start of the second half as The Wednesday threw everything into the attack, but the Scottish half-back line held firm, and also newspapers singled out Jack Carr, the left-back for special praise. Carr had started life as a half-back, but he lacked the finesse required for a midfielder, and full-back was a better place for him. He tackled hard, was generally fast enough to beat an opponent to the ball and had the wits to know that, in spite of what some coaches might have said, there are times when a big hoof of the ball was no bad idea. He did this repeatedly that day, earning cheers from the anxious Newcastle fans, all too aware that their lead was a slender 1-0.

A big day out at the Crystal Palace to see the final was getting ever closer and indeed almost seeming to beckon to the Geordies, as Carr repeatedly intervened and broke up incipient Wednesday attacks. Newcastle, with McWilliam outstanding, gradually exerted more control over the game, and although The Wednesday had a half-hearted appeal for a penalty Newcastle finished the better side, piling loads of pressure on Wednesday goalkeeper Lyall. Twice Newcastle hit the woodwork through the energetic Appleyard and the excellent Gosnell, and the full-time whistle came with the Geordies well on top and their supporters in uproar.

The news was immediately telegraphed back home to the office of the *Newcastle Chronicle* which obligingly put a board in its ground-floor window with the score and the legend underneath of 'United at the Palace', and when the trains came back a few hours later even the supporters were given a great cheer, which was nothing in comparison to the noise when Frank Watt and his men disembarked. Indeed,

Watt's job would now be one of keeping everyone's feet on the ground, given that their final opponents in three weeks' time were to be three-time winners Aston Villa, who had also won the Football League five times, including that famous time in 1897 when they had won the league and cup on the same day. Under the leadership of Scotsman George Ramsay, the Villans were a formidable side indeed.

But as Newcastle had also won a couple of league games against Wolverhampton Wanderers and Bury in March 1905, they were now second behind Everton with a game in hand. Hopes were therefore high of a league and cup double – achieved only twice before by Preston and Aston Villa – but eight games remained to be played in that fateful month of April. Seven were in the First Division, plus the FA Cup Final. For the first time (but certainly not the last) in the history of the city and its immediate district, football began to take over with polite and genteel matrons in their tea room conversations (in 1905, very few middle-class women did anything vaguely approaching what we would, even euphemistically, call 'work') beginning to say that it would be a great thing for the city if the 'lads' could do it, and sometimes an even more shocking remark could be heard along the lines of, 'Herbert is thinking of taking the boys to London to see the final – and I might go along too to do some shopping.' Or even, 'You know, it's really a harmless game, that football. And it does keep them away from the bottle!' For the working classes on the other hand, it was quite simply a matter of seeing if they could afford a trip to London.

The railway companies, particularly the North British and the North Eastern Railways, were not slow to spot

the possibilities here. 'Football Specials' could even take supporters there and back in the one day, and the chance even to see London where the king and queen lived was an attractive one, not often experienced by people in the north-east. The railway companies were also sensible enough not to over price for they were bright enough to realise that if one family decided to go, they could persuade their neighbours to do likewise and they could fill all their trains. A few intrepid supporters even tried to sail down, although train was the preferred choice. Road however was not really an option. There were very few cars in 1905, and they were not really built for long distances. The journey was clearly too long for horses and stage coaches, and motorised omnibuses or charabancs were still a few years in the future.

But there was also a league to be won. First though, something strange was allowed to happen on 1 April. Four Newcastle men were chosen to play for Scotland against England at the Crystal Palace. In modern times this would, of course, have justified a postponement of Newcastle's fixture at Ewood Park against Blackburn Rovers, but for some reason this was never allowed or even contemplated, and as a result Newcastle travelled to Lancashire without right-back Andrew McCombie, right-half Andrew Aitken, left-half Peter McWilliam and inside-right Jimmy Howie – arguably their best men – and to no one's great surprise lost 2-0.

This result, and Manchester City's 0-0 draw at Roker Park, allowed City to creep into second place, and resulted in a certain amount of criticism from Newcastle supporters at the authorities not allowing the game to be postponed,

and also at the Newcastle directors for not making more of a fuss. Had the players chosen been playing for England then it might have been a different story, but as they were all playing for Scotland, the Football League did not feel obliged to cancel any fixtures. In the event it was misery all round for McCombie, Aitken, McWilliam and Howie, because England won 1-0. The game was played at the Crystal Palace, and in later years, these Newcastle Scotsmen would have even more reason to hate that venue. Another piece of irony was that the only goal of the game was scored by Aston Villa's Joe Bache – and they would meet him again at the same venue in a fortnight's time.

The Newcastle players would meet him again a lot sooner, however, for Aston Villa came to Newcastle on the next Wednesday afternoon. The 'cup final rehearsal' was well attended by 25,000 in spite of the cold, blustery and showery weather, the crowd visibly swelling in the second half as more and more men were able to get to the ground, having finished their work and being seen arriving with piece bags and in dungarees – something that might have caused offence in Victorian times, but was now becoming more acceptable. Colin Veitch scored from the inside-left position before half-time, and following a prolonged Villa offensive in the early part of the second half ('but the Newcastle backs and half-backs were not to be beaten'), Bill Appleyard scored a second when Newcastle re-asserted themselves. Two good league points and a pointer for the FA Cup Final.

Buoyed up with this, Newcastle then really turned it on to beat Nottingham Forest 5-1 before another big crowd on the Saturday at St James' Park. The weather was a great deal

colder than of late with snow not seeming to be all that far away, even though it was 8 April, but the fans were soon warmed and cheered by the performance of their heroes. Jimmy Howie scored twice and Albert Gosnell, Andy Aitken and Joe McClarence once each to send the large crowd home in raptures and to fill them with enthusiasm and optimism about the trip to London. All the lucky people who were going told everyone (usually in a loud voice) what time their train left, how they were going to get through London to the Crystal Palace, and how they were taking their rosettes and 'corncrakes' with them to cheer on the Geordies.

Results elsewhere meant that Newcastle regained their second spot in the table, and with a game in hand over leaders Everton they were only one point behind. This meant that both the league and FA Cup were there for the winning. All that Newcastle had to do was win their games. The final came next, then there was the Easter weekend against Stoke and Sunderland at home, followed by a trip to The Wednesday before the season finished off on 29 April with a derby fixture at nearby Middlesbrough.

But for now it was a trip to London. Although no one now believed that the streets of London were paved with gold, as Dick Whittington once thought, there was still a mystique about this city, quite clearly in 1905 the centre of the world. It was huge, still growing and contained everything that anyone would want – Covent Garden, the Albert Hall, Westminster, Buckingham Palace, a sophisticated underground network, Lord's, The Oval, Henley, the River Thames, Big Ben and, of course, the Crystal Palace.

The Crystal Palace was the Wembley of its day. Situated in Sydenham in south London, it was a confident, almost arrogant statement of Victorian and Edwardian imperialism. The 'crystal palace' itself had been a huge glasshouse, built to contain the Great Exhibition of 1851, an idea inspired by Prince Albert. It had then been dismantled from its original location in Hyde Park and moved to Sydenham. Every FA Cup Final since 1895 had been played at the nearby football ground. Not everyone liked it, some thought it was vulgar and plebeian, but no one could deny that it was huge and impressive. Every team wanted the opportunity to play there – but for some reason it seemed to take a dislike to Newcastle. Newcastle supporters would soon coin the phrase 'the Palace of Doom' to describe it.

Press reports of the FA Cup Final on 15 April are all uniformly amazed at the crowd of 101,117. It did not beat the record set by Tottenham Hotspur and Sheffield United in 1901, but that was because one of the teams was a London one, and this game between Newcastle United and Aston Villa was without doubt 'the most travelled crowd' ever to have seen a football match. All morning, visitors marvelled at the sights of London – the usual ones of Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament – and travelled on the London Underground, a novel and indeed distinctly scary experience for those who were not used to it. And then the stadium itself – huge and well structured to allow large crowds, the sheer amount of supporters in their teams' colours, black and white for the Geordies and claret and sky blue for the Villans, all mingling happily and exchanging banter, mainly of the good-natured kind.

Most Newcastle supporters had travelled down by train on the Friday night, had slept on the train and thus had the opportunity to see London in the morning. Some however left very early on Saturday morning, and it was a tribute to the efficiency of the railway system in 1905 that it was able to transport such a huge crowd without any apparent problem.

Although the Palace was the 'largest stadium in the kingdom' in 1905 – Hampden Park and Celtic Park in Glasgow were also big, but nothing like capable as yet of holding a six-figure crowd although Hampden would do so by the following year – it was not always a comfortable ground. For one thing, it occupied a huge area of land, and in some areas the standing sections were some distance from the touchline. The tiered terracing was still rather primitive, relying on mounds of earth rather than concrete steps to allow those at the back a chance to see the game. The stands, or 'pavilions' as they were called, were however very comfortable, and the latest telegraphic equipment was available to allow reports of the game to be flashed to all parts of the country in particular to Newcastle where crowds, presumably of those too old, too young or too poor to travel to London, were gathering outside the newspaper offices even before the game started.

There was however a dark side as well for the masses as they made their way to the ground. In spite of widespread notices telling people to beware about the dangers of pickpockets, gangs of well-organised criminals were having a great day with their well-rehearsed technique of whipping out a wallet from someone's pocket then slipping it to an accomplice who was walking in another direction

so that even if the original perpetrator was apprehended, no incriminating evidence was found even if he were thoroughly searched. Fagan and Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist* would have been proud of such practices.

This being London in 1905 with everyone having a paranoia about anarchists and Fenians, police were on the lookout for bombs being thrown in a large crowd. There was none of that, but there were several thousands of fans who had travelled all the way from Newcastle or Birmingham and did not quite make it to the pay boxes, having sadly sampled rather too much of the cheap ale that was on sale in public houses and even simple stalls at the side of the road. A few ladies were standing at the side of the pathways as well and making it clear by winks and nods that there were, for a small fee, other ways of spending the afternoon in preference to the football. And the opportunity would be there for after the game as well! Beggars too plied their trade, asking 'Geordie' or 'Brummie' if he had any spare cash. There were other more respectable hucksters as well, selling oranges, scarves, hats, cheap jewellery and sweets. It was a sight that very few of the Newcastle fans had ever seen before.

The nerves of the players can well be imagined as their horse-drawn carriages pushed their way through the heaving, jostling crowds with everyone struggling to get a look at Peter McWilliam or Jimmy Howie on one side and Alex Leake and Joe Bache on the other. The Newcastle party of 60 had been staying at the Thackeray Hotel since Thursday, had done some light training on Friday, then had been at the Hippodrome Theatre on Friday night. Three of the Villans had played for England in the game a couple of weeks before, when Scotland, with the four Newcastle men

on board, were downed 1-0 and this may or may not have given Aston Villa some kind of psychological advantage. On the other hand, Newcastle had beaten them the previous week. One thing was certain however and that was that no one would be able to use weather conditions as any kind of an excuse, for the game was played on a good pitch in pleasant spring sunshine.

The teams were:

> Newcastle United: Lawrence; McCombie, Carr; Gardner, Aitken, McWilliam; Rutherford, Howie, Appleyard, Veitch, Gosnell.
>
> Aston Villa: George; Spencer, Miles; Pearson, Leake, Windmill; Brawn, Garraty, Hampton, Bache, Hall.
>
> Referee: Mr P.R. Harrower.

It was noted that Aston Villa were all wearing black armbands in memory of the lord mayor of Birmingham, who had died a few days before the event, but it was the second-city men who were soon celebrating. Little more than three minutes had gone when 'Happy' Harry Hampton finished off a great move involving Albert Hall and Joe Bache down the left wing. This happened before many of the massive crowd had managed to get inside the ground and they were only informed by the huge roar. It was only when they got in that the cheerful demeanour of the Villans and the downcast expressions of the Geordies indicated who had scored.

Possibly this goal was lost by Newcastle being nervous in front of the huge crowd, but Newcastle still had the better players, it was felt, and this reverse need be nothing other than a temporary one, the supporters told each other. But

Aston Villa retained the initiative for the rest of the first half, preferring to use the long-ball approach and feeding their wingers from midfield rather than the close passing and dribbling approach of Newcastle.

At half-time as Newcastle supporters watched the brass bands and the displays from various army organisations who performed their military drill, swung Indian clubs and fired cannons over the heads of the crowd, they consoled themselves with the thought that their team would come back. Appleyard and Howie had hardly kicked a ball yet. They were keeping themselves, one hoped, for the second half.

Indeed the second half started as if that were the case with McWilliam and Gardner taking a hold of midfield and beginning to spray passes all over the forward line. About ten minutes in came the pivotal moment of the game when Bill Appleyard was through on goal after some fine play from Newcastle, and shot. He beat goalkeeper George but the ball hit the post and was scrambled clear. The image of Appleyard collapsing with his head in his hands was an iconic one in the minds of many Newcastle supporters for decades afterwards.

It was as if the fates had decreed that Newcastle were going to lose, and the Newcastle complex of the Crystal Palace being the 'Palace of Doom' seems to have dated from this moment. Villa took a grip of the game, scored again through Hampton and long before the full-time whistle and the mad dash of the crowd across the field to see the trophy and medals being presented, Newcastle were a beaten team. A few Newcastle fans stayed to clap Villa off the field but more simply turned and trudged in morose,

sullen, disconsolate silence to the exits to get their way across London and find their train to take them home.

Yet those who stayed in London to have some sort of party that night, trying valiantly to be happy, could comfort themselves with the thought that they had at least been to an FA Cup Final and that the league championship had not yet gone. Most would get a late-night train home, arriving to a deserted Newcastle station at about 5am, deserted other than for the other fans, some of them half-asleep and hungover and all of them devastated. But life had to go on. It was not the end of the world. Far from it. There was still a title to be won.

Easter now approached. Newcastle were due to play two home games, one on Good Friday against Stoke and then on Black Saturday (as it was then called) the derby against Sunderland. A healthy attendance on Good Friday saw Newcastle easily beat Stoke 4-1. They never looked back after Orr scored with a penalty, further good news coming their way when they heard that Manchester City had beaten Everton 2-0, a result that more or less put Everton out of contention.

But with Newcastle in all ages, it often seems as if you are built up only to be knocked down again. Black Saturday is so called in the Christian calendar because it is the only day in the year in which Christ is dead because it was the Sabbath between the crucifixion and the resurrection (chillingly, Adolf Hitler was born on Black Saturday in 1889). But for Newcastle fans it was black in another sense, for in front of a large crowd of over 30,000 people they went down 3-1 to Sunderland, exactly the same score that the Mackems had beaten them by on Christmas Eve. Clearly Christian

festivals and derbies against Sunderland did not go very well together in 1904/05.

The reality was however that Newcastle had not played very well that day. Indeed, they played as if they had a death wish hanging over them, and George Holley's two goals plus one from Arthur Bridgett were enough to send the Geordies into the deepest despair. It was the second devastating Saturday in a row, and it now began to look as if a season that had seemed so promising was going to end up with nothing at all to show for all the hard work and the many games of attractive football which had been played.

On Wednesday at Owlerton, the home of The Wednesday, things looked even bleaker at half-time with the team 1-0 down and 'weak in front of goal'. The second half was well advanced, and the season teetered on the edge of glory on one side and ignominy on the other. But then Howie equalised by 'bending through from a corner', whatever that may mean. Does it mean 'scoring direct from a corner kick'? Or was it simply a ball that he curled in from a distance? It matters not, but then a few minutes later, Howie scored again (although some sources give the second goal to McWilliam) and then with time running out Orr converted a penalty. All this meant that as long as Newcastle beat Middlesbrough at Ayresome Park on the Saturday, the last day of the season, they would win the Football League, albeit possibly just on goal average if Manchester City beat Aston Villa.

Everton had completed all their games and had 47 points. Newcastle and Manchester City each had 46 points and one match to play, so if both teams lost, Everton

could be champions. Newcastle simply had to win, but their fighting performance in Sheffield gave hope to their supporters (1,639 was the somewhat exact figure given by the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, which presumably based its calculations on the amount of rail tickets sold) on the short trip to Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough had not had the best of seasons and would finish fifth from the bottom. They were local rivals, but games between Newcastle and the Boro lacked the emotional intensity of clashes against Sunderland.

Middlesbrough had been around since 1876 but had not enjoyed the success that Sunderland, for example, had. They had had a series of grounds but had moved to their new ground at Ayresome Park in 1903, a year after they had joined the First Division of the Football League. Newcastle remained uncomfortably aware that Boro had removed them from the FA Cup in 1901 while still a Second Division team.

Newcastle had a few worries for this game. One was sheer nerves. The trauma of the last two weeks – losing in the FA Cup Final and then to Sunderland – was still with them, and there were a few injury absentees as well, notably right-back McCombie (although he had an adequate replacement in Irishman Bill McCracken) but even more crucially both wing-halves in Gardner and McWilliam. Colin Veitch, even though himself slightly struggling with a knee injury, could cover for McWilliam but in Gardner's place, Watt was compelled to draft in a reserve called Edward McIntyre, who had only played one previous game for the first team.

But 'cometh the hour, cometh the man' and McIntyre was superb that day. Veitch too 'gave a masterly display in the middle line'. Orr scored in the first ten minutes and the

Newcastle supporters in the crowd waved their 'bonnets, handkerchiefs and sticks', according to a newspaper report. Nerves then seemed to disappear but without the reassuring presence of McWilliam, one could never be certain. Half-time came and went without Boro seeming likely to get back in the game, and then early in the second half Jackie Rutherford scored from the right-wing before Bill Appleyard immediately settled the issue.

Almost as a sign that a divine power welcomed the arrival of Newcastle United as champions, the rain clouds vanished and the game finished in bright sunshine with 'the Geordie contingent welcoming the league championship with cheers and song' and even the Boro supporters clapping Newcastle off the field.

The team, having had a meal in Middlesbrough, arrived back in Newcastle at 8pm on a special train, and the huge crowd at the station cheered them for a good ten minutes before they then embarked on a horse-drawn brake cart to be taken to the Palace Theatre for a variety performance, thereby confusing a large crowd who expected them to go to St James' Park. But they had been invited by no less a person than the lord mayor, who also laid on a dinner for them the following Thursday. It was 'such a remarkable demonstration of enthusiasm on the occasion of the victory of a football team that was unprecedented in our City'.

The *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* gave some indication of what it was like in the Palace Theatre that night: 'Inside the theatre the front two rows of the dress circle had been reserved for the players and the Directors, and as they appeared and took their seats, there was another wild scene of enthusiasm. The orchestra struck up "See The Conquering

Hero Comes" and people stood up in their seats and cheered frantically. Fortunately the curtain was down at the time otherwise the players in the affecting drama which was being produced must have been seriously disturbed. They would have been unable to compete against staid directors who danged [sic] over the balcony, footballs encircled with black and white ribbons or have touched the sympathy of the audience more spontaneously than did Aitken the captain of the team who espying his wife and children in the circle, insisted that they should come and sit beside him and share in his triumph.'

Such was the euphoric, almost orgasmic madness that seized the city that night. It was indeed unprecedented, but it laid down a marker for the future. Those of the supporters who thought that this was the start of something good were correct. From now on, Newcastle could hold up its head whenever football was mentioned in England and Scotland. The Geordies were the champions of England, but it would have been a lot better if the FA Cup had been there as well.