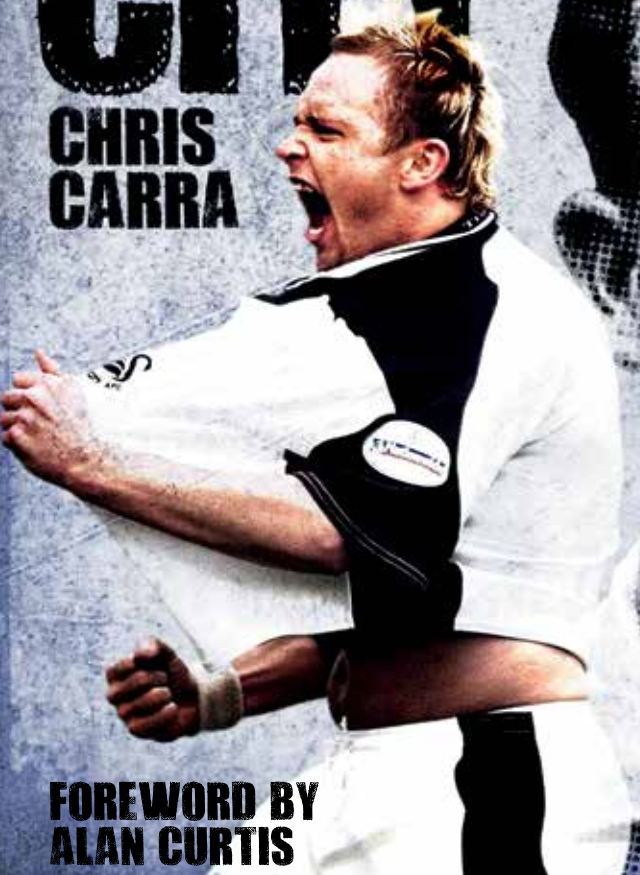




GREATEST GAMES SWANSEA CITY

**CHRIS
CARRA**



**FOREWORD BY
ALAN CURTIS**

Contents

Acknowledgements, Introduction and Foreword.	4
1. v Cardiff City 1912 (1-1)	8
2. v Pontypridd 1913 (1-0)	12
3. v Exeter City 1925 (2-1)	16
4. v Arsenal 1926 (2-1)	20
5. v Bury 1932 (2-0)	24
6. v Newport County 1949 (2-1)	28
7. v Cardiff City 1949 (5-1)	32
8. v Coventry City 1951 (7-1)	36
9. v Leicester City 1956 (6-1)	40
10. v Sunderland 1958 (5-0)	44
11. v Cardiff City 1960 (3-3)	48
12. v Liverpool 1964 (2-1)	52
13. v Preston North End 1964 (1-2)	56
14. v Newport County 1970 (2-1)	60
15. v Tottenham Hotspur 1978 (3-1)	64
16. v Rotherham United 1978 (4-4)	68
17. v Chesterfield 1979 (2-1)	72
18. v Preston North End 1981 (3-1)	76
19. v Leeds United 1981 (5-1)	80
20. v Stoke City 1981 (2-1)	84
21. v Manchester United 1982 (2-0)	88
22. v Liverpool 1982 (2-0)	92
23. v Cardiff City 1982 (2-1)	96
24. v Sliema Wanderers 1982 (12-0)	100
25. v Huddersfield 1994 (1-1)	104
26. v Cardiff City 1998 (2-1)	108
27. v West Ham 1999 (1-0)	112
28. v Rotherham United 2000 (1-1)	116
29. v Hull City 2003 (4-2)	120
30. v Cheltenham Town 2003 (4-3)	124
31. v Yeovil 2003 (3-2)	128
32. v Bristol City 2005 (7-1)	132
33. v Carlisle United 2006 (2-1)	136
34. v Leeds United 2007 (3-2)	140
35. v Cardiff City 2008 (1-0)	144
36. v Cardiff City 2009 (3-2)	148
37. v Norwich City 2011 (3-0)	152
38. v Nottingham Forest 2011 (3-1)	156
39. v Reading 2011 (4-2)	160
40. v Arsenal 2012 (3-2)	164
41. v Manchester City 2012 (1-0)	168
42. v Liverpool 2012 (1-0)	172
43. v Queens Park Rangers 2012 (5-0)	176
44. v West Bromwich Albion 2012 (3-1)	180
45. v Chelsea 2013 (2-0)	184
46. v Bradford City 2013 (5-0)	188
47. v Valencia 2013 (3-0)	192
48. v Cardiff City 2014 (3-0)	196
49. v Napoli 2014 (1-3)	200
50. v Aston Villa 2014 (4-1)	204
Bibliography	208

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great books that I used during my research (all of which have been outlined in the bibliography).

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Finally, the most important thanks of all go to my long-suffering girlfriend Becci. She has put up with my bad jokes, mood swings and general insanity for the past nine years and for that I am truly thankful.

Chris Carra

Foreword

I'VE been a part of Swansea City since 1972 and my love for this great club has grown ever since. The fans, the players and the games I've seen during my time have been incredible.

I mention the games because the book you hold in your hand is full of some wonderful matches from the past 102 years, many of which I've been a part of, either as a player or a coach.

When people ask me what my favourite game as a player with Swansea was, a few spring to mind but I'll always remember the clash with Preston North End at Deepdale in May 1981, when we won promotion to the First Division in a tense and exciting match that must have been incredible to watch as a fan.

During the summer of 1981 I thought, 'It doesn't get much better than this', but then came the following season and our first game against Leeds United managed to top it! My former team left the Vetch that day having been hammered 5-1 thanks to a wonderful hat-trick from Bob Latchford, capped off with one of the greatest goals that I ever scored. It's a moment I will cherish forever.

It has also been lovely to reflect on some of the more recent Swansea games, of which I've been part of as a coach. I've witnessed some amazing matches from the dugout – from that crucial game against Hull City in 2003 right up to our most recent European adventure, and it really is difficult to pick a favourite.

But our two trips to Wembley were outstanding; first the fantastic day in 2011 when we achieved our dreams of Premier League football in that excellent play-

Swansea City's Greatest Games

off final. Then two years later, we were back again for the League Cup Final, which surpassed everyone's expectations with our forwards causing havoc for poor Bradford.

The Premier League years have been wonderful, especially our wins against the top clubs in the country, but it was also nice to read about the older games, long before I was born, which is when you are reminded of how rich this club's history really is.

Chris has covered all these games and many, many more throughout this excellent book in great detail, which I am sure you will enjoy as much as I have. Here's to another 50 great games in the near future for our beloved club!

Alan Curtis

Swansea City

Introduction

ONE of the toughest tasks I came across when working on the book you are about to read (apart from trying to decipher the almost cryptic match reports from the early 20th century) was deciding on which games to include.

I first had to define what makes a great game. Of course several monumental matches in Swansea City's history jumped out at me instantly, but I had to delve a little deeper and head a little further back to ensure I wasn't missing anything.

Bypassing the dictionary for definitions of 'great', I decided to sift through an array of books and websites, as well as chatting to lifelong fans who were instantly able to reel off a plethora of incredible matches that were mandatory inclusions. Then, with half a list, I reasoned that I needed to loosely formulate a criteria to stick to for the rest of the games.

So I decided that games worthy of a place in this book would be those that were superb to watch (v Bristol City 2005, v Rotherham United 1974); games that meant a great deal to win (v Stoke City 1981, v West Ham 1999); or games where both the game was astounding *and* the result meant the world to Swans fans (v Hull City 2003, v Reading 2011).

Of course I've included some of the enormous victories (the 12-0 demolition of Sliema Wanderers in 1982) and I've even featured a loss or two (the FA Cup semi-final against Preston North End in 1964) to celebrate the achievements of the team, even if they didn't get the result they wanted.

There are games that took place at the Mestalla, Anfield, Stamford Bridge, Wembley and, of course, many from the Liberty Stadium and the Vetch. There are matches from the old Fourth Division right up to the Premier League, with a handful of domestic cups and European adventures along the way.

Ultimately what we end up with is a journey through Swansea's history in 50 great games, that makes for gripping, entertaining and emotional reading.

I have tried to include matches from as many different eras as I could, although some periods in the club's history demand more coverage, such as John Toshack's incredible rise through the divisions, as well as the Premier League era. I like to think the finished product reflects these well.

Another thing I've tried to do is make each chapter stand alone, for those who – like me – enjoy dipping in and out. I didn't write the book in order and I won't hold it against you for not reading it in order (even if that's the most sensible way to do it!).

It is difficult to pick my favourite era. Naturally I've loved writing about the big games from the past ten years, but the complete contrast of the older, pre-war games is amazing (mandatory golf games for all players always made me smile).

I guess I probably found the Toshack period the most fun to write about. Not just the awesome achievement of his team of stars, but for the manager's bullish determination and the way he would hold nothing back when talking to the media – a journalist's dream.

I have thoroughly enjoyed writing about the wonderful players from the past 102 years – Alan Curtis, Joe Sykes, Jack Fowler, Leon Britton, Noel Dwyer, Ivor Allchurch, Alan Tate, Garry Monk, Lee Trundle, Robbie James, Wilf Milne and Roger Freestone to name just a few.

Whether you have been a die-hard supporter since the 1950s or someone who has just started following the club, I'm certain that you will enjoy reminiscing or learning about Swansea City's rich past (even the times when they weren't that rich).

Although there have been some awkward chapters and moments when I've had to restrain myself from hurling my laptop out of the window, I've ultimately had a great time researching and writing this book.

This sounds like a cliché (probably because it is a cliché), but I really do hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I've enjoyed writing it.

Chris Carra



v Cardiff City 1-1

Southern League Second Division
The Vetch
7 September 1912
Attendance: 8,000

SWANSEA TOWN

Whittaker
Cleverly
Nicholas
Duffy
Hamilton
Jepp
Messer
Swarbrick
Coleman
Grierson
Ball

Referee: W. E. Russell

CARDIFF CITY

Kneeshaw
Croft
Leah
Harvey
Cassidy
Hardy
Tracey
Evans
Burton
Keggans
Featherstone

THE year 1912 is remembered in history for several moments of great significance. The *Titanic* sunk on its maiden voyage, Scott of the Antarctic made his iconic journey to the South Pole and Woodrow Wilson became the 28th president of the United States of America.

But we don't really care about all that (and if we do there's no place for it in this book). No, the most monumental thing that occurred in 1912 was the creation of a small football club in the heart of South Wales – Swansea Town AFC.

At the turn of the century, in such a rugby-obsessed country, the egg-shaped ball naturally reigned supreme in Swansea. And although football had been growing in popularity since its first appearance in the area in the 1860s, rugby continued to be the sport that defined the town.

But this wasn't enough for the rugby supporters who continued to feel uneasy with the threat of a new code encroaching their territory.

They noticed that, albeit gradually, local football teams had begun to sprout up, playing in an array of amateur leagues around the area. But despite efforts from early teams such as Swansea United and Swansea Villa, a professional football club failed to emerge.

That is, until 1912 when demand grew strong enough to justify it. At the start of the summer, a series of meetings took place with the aim of establishing a team. One man championing the cause was Swansea-based solicitor John William Thorpe – an Englishman with a keen interest in football, having played as a youngster before becoming an avid supporter of the amateur leagues.

On 14 June 1912, Thorpe was present for the meeting in The Royal Hotel on High Street where it was agreed that a new club would be created. Then, on 25 July, Swansea Town AFC were officially registered as a limited company. The Swans had been born.

With Thorpe elected as chairman of the new club, the task of overseeing the day-to-day operations fell to the newly appointed player-manager, 34-year-old former

Exeter goalkeeper Walter Whittaker. In addition to his administrative duties, the burly Whittaker would also continue his role between the sticks for the newly created Swans.

As the summer sun beat down over the dusty town, the first important steps had been taken – the next thing on the list was to find a home.

The new club moved quickly in their search for somewhere to play, eventually settling on an area in central Swansea known locally as the Vetch Field. Despite initially being used as a field to grow ‘vetch’ (a type of plant from the legume family), in 1912 it bore more resemblance to a landfill than a football arena, after the town council had used it as a dumping ground to discard tons of ash, bricks and rubbish.

Nevertheless the field seemed to fulfil their requirements and, although heavy work would have to be done to make it usable, Swansea Town leased the Vetch from the owners, the Swansea Gaslight Company.

Whittaker would oversee the development of the new ground, with the rubbish removed and the surface levelled as flat as the primitive groundsmen could make it (it goes without saying that a grass surface was well out of the question by that stage).

Banks were formed from railway sleepers and packed ash, giving the new supporters a platform on which to watch the matches, while changing rooms, fences and other basic facilities were created. The Vetch was finally starting to resemble a football ground.

On the playing side, the new club were invited to immediately join an already established league. In 1909 the Southern League had formed a second division, primarily made up with Welsh clubs such as Cardiff City, Mid-Rhondda and Newport County. It would be in this league that Swansea would begin their competitive life.

With everything falling into place, the only thing missing was a team. Within eight weeks, the hard-working Whittaker was tasked with scouting out a squad of players on a thrifty budget of just £250.

Finding a team brimming with local talent just wasn’t an option with such little time, so, just like today, much of Swansea’s starting 11 was made up of ‘international’ talent. A selection of English players, with their roots in the First and Second Division, were acquired to play for the new team from South Wales.

Having fulfilled his management duties, the experienced Whittaker – who had plied his trade for over a dozen teams in his time – would naturally take his place in goal for the first game.

In front of him stood an experienced and physical defence, unafraid of a tough tackle or two: the solid pairing of full-backs Arthur Cleverly and Jack Nicholas, popular and mighty centre-back Jock Hamilton (who would proudly take the role of captain for the debut match) and the physical midfield presence of Sam Jepp and John Duffy.

In attack Swansea could boast the impressive pace of former Stoke centre-forward Billy Ball, with new comrades Jimmy Swarbrick, John Coleman and Robert ‘Bob’ Grierson working to feed him the ball. The only Swansea-born talent in Whittaker’s initial starting 11 was outside-right Willie Messer – an amateur who had signed after a trial match at Morriston.

As the summer cooled down, Swansea had already played several warm-up matches with the easy-on-the-eye football on offer in the early stages pleasing Whittaker, the directors and new fans alike, who were all optimistic for the year ahead.

Swansea Town's Greatest Games

All eyes were soon fixed on the opening match of the league season, where Swansea's first real test would come against Cardiff City on Saturday 7 September.

Cardiff weren't exactly old pros themselves, though they had over a decade of history compared to the Swans, having formed in 1899 before joining the Southern League Second Division in 1910. They had finished the previous season third place in the league and would go on to win the division in 1913.

But Swansea didn't set the bar low and refused to settle for mid-table mediocrity at the end of their debut season. As outlined in the 'notes' section on the final page of the first match programme, 'We assure our supporters that we have every confidence that the Town will not be far from the top when the League Table is completed.'

As the Saturday approached the excitement ahead of the tie had certainly captured the enthusiasm of a good section of the town, with droves of 'Soccerites' coming out to support their new team. Over 2,000 spectators turned up for the Swans' training session at the Rec on the Monday before the game.

Then, on the day of the match, around 8,000 supporters from Swansea and surrounding areas like Llanelli (whose team were playing away at Pontypridd) turned up to the Vetch to occupy the newly-built banks and watch Swansea Town in action. This proved to be many more than were originally expected with the gate receipts totalling £153 to the delight of the club directors.

Preceding the breathable, lightweight kits we know today, the Swans walked out in heavy-cotton white shirts, white shorts and black socks, also sporting an addition you don't see in the modern game – knee pads. These were sensibly worn by the brave players who would be galloping around on the lethal packed cinder surface.

And so kicked off the first ever South Wales derby; the first professional league match featuring Swansea's beloved football club.

The game had plenty of drama from the off and just ten minutes in Cardiff were reduced to ten men when their right-back Crofts was forced off with a knee injury.

With a strong wind behind them and playing on a hard, fast surface, Swansea made a go of it through their attacking quintet and were clearly the more aggressive team, although their shooting left a little to be desired.

At the other end, resolute defending from Cleverly and Nicholas quelled the danger of Evans and Keggan, which gave the hosts a solid platform from which to attack. And, by 20 minutes, they had put their first league goal into the back of the net.

It was Coleman who had taken the initial shot for Swansea, though he watched his effort rebound off the post allowing 'the opportunist' Billy Ball to smash his shot past Kneeshaw who was still on all fours after an attempted save.

With their team ahead, the crowd – most of whom were still unsure of the rules of the new game – were enjoying the periods of bright football and became very vocal as the afternoon went on. Then Cardiff responded with a goal of their own. Tracey had darted up the right wing, sent the ball across to Evans who in turn passed it back in to Jack Burton who adeptly placed it past Whittaker.

Both teams continued to push for the winning goal, though it was Swansea with the edge in the final ten minutes. Ball, Grierson and Hamilton all flashed the woodwork but no one could slot a second past Kneeshaw – undoubtedly Cardiff's man of the match after a string of fine saves – and the game eventually ended 1-1.

Swansea's squad, which eight weeks previously did not exist, had quickly gelled and put in a proud performance to secure their first point for the league table.

Local boy Willie Messer had enjoyed a decent 90 minutes, with the outside-right sending several good passes into the central attackers, as well as taking a superb shot himself from a tight angle. Though he missed passes towards the end of the match and still had the air of an amateur at times, his potential for development was clear for everyone to see.

Elsewhere, Cleverly and Nicholas had impressed, Whittaker had been solid enough in goal, Swarbrick was 'safe without being brilliant', while the skipper Hamilton was lauded in the local media as the driving force of the side, highly commended for his efforts in the crucial first game.

In all, the end-to-end match had been a terrific free-flowing display of football and had done wonders in advertising the game to the curious spectators. As 'The Rambler', a reporter for the *Swansea and Glamorgan Herald*, summed up after the match, 'It gave Swansea folk a splendid idea of the real beauty of the dribbling code.'

The same mysterious reporter also accurately hinted, '[Cardiff] did not anticipate that Abertawe would be so prepared for them in this – the new focus of rivalry that has now sprung up between City and Town.'

Of course the rugby fans in the town were gutted. Enthusiasm for the round ball had been stoked and, in the days where enjoying both sports was deemed blasphemous, they would find it difficult to accept.

'Rugby men must have opened their eyes at seeing the huge crowd present,' wrote an anonymous reporter in the *South Wales Daily Post*. 'Rugby in Swansea has had a good run without opposition, but henceforward it will have a serious rival, for the new ground is easily accessible, and people will pay to see good soccer as well as rugby. Swansea should soon become a side which the town can feel proud of.'

There was no denying that football in Swansea was there to stay.