

JONATHAN NORTHALL  
FOREWORD BY CLARE TAYLOR MBE



THE LIFE AND DEATH OF  
ANDY  
DUCAT

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Early Years

## 1886–1905

BRIXTON WAS a vibrant place in the 1880s. Trains and trams had made Brixton accessible to central London and it was growing rapidly. The construction of Electric Avenue in 1888, named after the new form of lighting used to illuminate the ornate canopies enveloping the streets, epitomised the development of the area. Long before Eddy Grant sung about violence on the streets of Brixton, it was a place of prosperity rather than unemployment and racial tension.

Andy Ducat was born on 15 February 1886 at 4 Rattray Road, Brixton. Andy's parents, Andrew and Florence, were both over 30 and had been married for less than two years. Andrew was a Scotsman, born in Arbroath in 1853, but had moved to London where he met Florence. The pair married in Wandsworth in the summer of 1884 and set up home at Rattray Road.

Andrew was the third-born child of James and Louisa. Most of Andrew's siblings, of which there were nine, stayed in Scotland. Florence came from a smaller family with four siblings, all of whom stayed in the London area. Florence was closest to elder sister Gertrude, who would live with the Ducats for many years after Andy's birth. Not long after Andy was born, Florence's father James died. Two months later, her sister Eleanor died at the age of 43.

Although Brixton was vibrant, it was not immune from violence and the shadow of London's most famous serial killer, Jack the Ripper, was cast there for a short while. Edwin Colocitt was arrested in 1891 for several stabbings of women in Lambeth and Brixton. Although some newspapers speculated that Colocitt might be the famous murderer, The Macnaghten Memoranda, penned by leading investigator Sir Melville Macnaghten, ruled him out as a credible suspect. Colocitt lived in Ducie Street, less than a mile from where the Ducats were living when he was arrested.

Much of the housing catered for the middle classes, but a continuous influx of working-class people started to change the dynamic of Brixton. At some point after 1891, the Ducats decided that they were going to move to Southend. We know from the 1891 Census that they were in Brixton but had moved to Southend by the 1901 Census, although we cannot be exact as to when the move took place. What we do know is that Andrew started a building company in Southend and that Andy's schooling commenced at Brewery Road School in Southend.

The school was opened in 1892, therefore it was still relatively new when Andy joined, and is still around today. It is now called Porters Grange Primary School & Nursery, but many of the original buildings are still in use. According to the Southend-on-Sea School Board in 1901, Brewery Road 'maintains its reputation for very good order, with thoroughness and intelligence in the instruction'. The school was the first real outlet for Andy's sporting talents, and it was football where we first see him excelling.

In an interview with *Illustrated Police News* in 1913, Andy looked back fondly on his days at Brewery Road. 'As far as I can remember, football was my first love in the way of games, and I was about ten years of age when I became a full-fledged member of my school team at Brewery Road.'

By 1900, he was captaining Brewery Road's football team and he led them to the schools' championship. Needing to avoid defeat in their final game against rivals Technical School, Andy marshalled

the defence to keep out the opposition and secured a draw to win the shield. The *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser* reported that Andy's play 'was uniformly good'.

\* \* \*

The Ducat family suffered an awful tragedy at Christmas time in 1900. Andrew's brother James was a lighthouse keeper for the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB) and was posted at Eilean Mòr, one of the Flannan Isles off the coast of western Scotland. The isles are a desolate archipelago, 20 miles west of the Isle of Lewis and subject to harsh weather and heavy sea swells of the North Atlantic Ocean.

James Ducat, Thomas Marshall, and Donald McArthur were stationed at Eilean Mòr with another keeper rotating, so three men were always stationed to operate the lighthouse. On 15 December, a ship passed the lighthouse in poor conditions, but the light was not in operation. On reaching Leith, the port area of Edinburgh, three days later they reported the occurrence. A relief ship, the *Hesperus*, was unable to sail due to poor weather until 20 December.

*Hesperus* reached Eilean Mòr by Boxing Day and signalled to the island, but no one responded. The relief keeper went ashore and discovered that beds were unmade, clocks had stopped working (due to not being wound) and the fire was long burned out. He returned to the ship to get help and the island was searched thoroughly, but all three men had vanished.

An investigation was undertaken, and it was explained that two keepers had gone to secure a box containing ropes and a wild sea had swept them away. The third keeper had gone to try and help them, breaching NLB protocol by leaving the lighthouse unattended, and had also been swept out to sea.

The Flannan Isles mystery, as this tragic event has come to be known, has been told many times in popular culture. It featured most recently in a 2018 film, starring Hollywood actor Gerard Butler playing James, called *The Vanishing*. Much supposition as to

what happened has been made over the years but it fails to capture the human cost of the three lost lives.

\* \* \*

Andy's schooling was finished at Crompton House School which would later become Southend Grammar School. Crompton House was situated at Warrior Square in Southend and was styled as 'a high class school for the sons of gentlemen'. It was run by the Rev. George Henley Manbey M.A. Oxon. It would be the influence of Manbey, arguably, that impacted on Andy throughout the rest of his life, including his attitude to sport.

Manbey was a graduate from Oxford University, and had spent time as the vicar of St Alban's Church in Acton Green before moving to Southend. Manbey's family motto was 'Ne tentes aut perface', meaning roughly 'All or nothing', 'do not attempt, or carry it out thoroughly', a concept we see time and time again in Andy's life. Manbey was also a huge believer in abstinence from alcohol and was president of the Southend Temperance League. One can imagine the headmaster epitomising Victorian values, almost scolding his charges about what they put into their bodies. We will see later how, as a professional sportsman, Andy was fastidious in his approach to diet.

Although Manbey had interests in chess and horticulture, he was clearly a fan of sport. Football featured prominently in his advertisements for the school. He was also a lover of cricket – how could a gentleman who had studied at Oxford not be? With Crompton House so positive about football and cricket, Andy had an outlet for his sporting prowess, and it would not take long for him to show how much talent he possessed. Fortunately, many of the scorecards from matches were published in the *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*.

In May 1901, Crompton House played Minima and Andy took five wickets in their first innings. He then followed up with 23 with the bat, not impressive until you see that the team were bowled

out for 32, which was Bannerman-like<sup>1</sup> in its proportions. The following week, at Leigh Hall, Andy took another five wickets as the home team were dismissed for 32 in their second innings. Against Technical School, nine wickets in the match plus 28 runs in a team total of 64 secured a draw. Later in the season, Andy took another six wickets against Technical School.

In June, Rev. Manbey featured in a match against Leigh Hall and shared a small partnership with Andy as Crompton won: there was another six-wicket haul for Andy as well as top-scoring again. Against Lindisfarne, Andy batted and bowled superbly. In the first innings, Andy took nine wickets. He took two more in the second before Lindisfarne declared to leave Crompton House needing 73 to win in 35 minutes. Andy batted at No.3 and thrashed 35 not out to win the match.

The 1902 season for Crompton House started against a newly formed team from Westcliff, and Andy took eight wickets. The *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser* commented that Andy had ‘found his spot’. Against Technical School, he took another eight wickets for 16 runs. Later in the season, he took nine in an innings against the same opponents. Against Lindisfarne, he took another five-for as well as scoring 25 of the team’s 51 runs. By the end of the season, Andy represented Prittlewell in the Southend and District League, despite being just 16. He top-scored with 23 and picked up two wickets to underline his ability. A week later, he represented the rest of the league against the champions, Benfleet, and made the second-highest score of the match.

In 1903, Andy’s batting came to the fore. Representing Crompton House, he scored 96. A schoolmaster, Mr Whalley, had the next highest, as Crompton House posted 156. In response, Southend mustered just 32, with no batsman getting into double figures. Andy took three wickets while two of Manbey’s sons, Bernard and Basil,

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1 In the inaugural Australia–England Test match in 1877, Charles Bannerman scored 165 of Australia’s first-innings 245. It remains the highest percentage of a team’s total by one batsman in Test history.



were among the wickets. Andy hit a century for Crompton House, probably his first recorded one, against Hadleigh Wednesday.

It was not just cricket where Andy excelled for Crompton House. His football skills developed too. Having moved from being a full-back to a forward, Andy could not stop scoring. In 1901, he had a remarkable game. Against St Mark's, he scored a goal after ten minutes. The ball was returned to the centre spot for the game to restart. St Mark's kicked off, Andy gained possession of the ball and ran through the defence to score again. At the end of the match, he had six goals in an 11-1 thrashing. In the following season, Andy scored all six in a 6-2 win at St George's. The *Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser* commented that Andy had a 'magnificent game' and was 'easily the best forward on the field'.

\* \* \*

His footballing exploits were not limited to school football, and he played for Westcliff Athletic. In the 1902/03 season, Andy won a runners-up medal with Westcliff in the Mara League, a junior competition.

Before long, Andy had moved to Southend Athletic where he was playing in a men's league rather than in junior football. He played in some friendly matches, getting goals as a forward, before being selected for the first team in the Southend and District League. Despite being just 17 in late 1903, Andy was excelling. He was scoring regularly for Southend Athletic and was getting noticed.

One of the misnomers about Andy's life is that he played for Southend United. Peter Miles has researched the early years of Southend United, and written books on the subject, and has provided clarity. Andy had already signed for Woolwich Arsenal, and played for them for a year, when Southend United were founded in 1906. However, there is a Ducat connection to the club because Andy's father was part of the group that decided to form a new football club at a meeting at the Blue Boar public house. Once Southend United had started playing, Andrew Ducat's building

business constructed a 200-seat timber stand on the east side of their Roots Hall ground.

Just before Christmas 1904, Woolwich Arsenal manager Phil Kelso watched Andy play for Southend Athletic at South West Ham. At the end of the match, Kelso approached the Southend officials and notified them of his intention of speaking with Andy about signing for Woolwich Arsenal. Athletic were desperate to hold on to Andy, at least to see out the season, as he already had 12 goals in the South Essex League.

By the beginning of January, Andy had spoken with Kelso but had not signed for Woolwich Arsenal. However, that changed at the end of the FA Amateur Cup game at Cheshunt. The *Daily News (London)* confirmed that Andy had signed for Woolwich Arsenal as an amateur.