

Sunderland A.F.C. Formation – The Grayston Memoirs

The following articles are a direct transcript of John Grayston's memoirs, published in the Sunderland Weekly News in the Autumn of 1931. The Sunderland Weekly News was a short-lived publication introduced to Sunderland in the run up to the 1931 General Election. The paper folded within a few weeks, hence Grayston never got to publish his 7th or subsequent instalments. These memoirs have certainly been a primary source for many Sunderland A.F.C. historians over the years; they reside on a small and almost disintegrated piece of microfilm in the local history section of Sunderland Library.

Whilst it is certain that Grayston was around when the club was formed – he played in the club's second game – he may be overplaying his role in the actual formation of the club. He was born on 21st March 1862 in Halifax, making him only 17½ years old in October 1879, and nearly 70 when he was writing these memoirs.

Grayston was quite the self-publicist during the 1930s, and there wasn't really anyone around to dispute his version of events. The only other person who had a role in the formation who was still alive at the time was Ted Watson, who by then had emigrated to Canada. Grayston appears at many a function as a speaker during these years – he even makes the radio in December 1935 - talking about the club's formation and his role. Argus of the Sunderland Echo certainly did not seem to have much time for him; he disputed some of Grayston's memories in one of his daily pieces in October 1931 when the memoirs were being published. In the Cup Final Football Echo of 1937, Argus wrote a big article about the club's formation, not mentioning Grayston at all. Grayston (now 75) indignantly wrote to the Echo about his "omission" from the article, but there was no retraction from Argus; there certainly seemed to be no love lost between the two of them.

There are many inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Grayston's account, but this is hardly surprising given that he was by then an old man trying to remember events that happened when he was a teenager and in his early twenties. The main points of contention are superscripted and covered in the footnotes.

Article 1 - Sunderland Weekly News 4th September 1931

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY

By John Grayston

FOUNDER OF CLUB WRITES MEMOIRS

"NEWS" SCOOP

This article is the first of a series exclusively written for the "News" by Mr. John Grayston, the only member of the original Club who is still living in this country. His witty, informative and amusing writings have never before been published, and are exclusive to our readers.

BORN 1879 – 1931 STILL GOING STRONG!

IT IS A FAR CRY to 1879 – 52 years – and reminiscences are to a certain extent largely dependent on memory. I was a chief participant in the facts which I am going to record, and I hope I may once and for all clear the air as to many points of conjecture in the history of Sunderland Football Club.

THE BEGINNING

I left the Crossley School, Halifax, in 1877, and came to Sunderland as a pupil teacher at the Hendon Board School.

The school was then under the headmastership of Mr. John Ramsey, who died only this year at the age of 79. Almost at the same time as my arrival, Mr. James Allan came from Glasgow University as

second assistant master of the school¹. My first impression was that Jimmy was a “wee ‘un,” and I soon discovered that he was a “good ‘un.”

At that time the only football being played was Rugby football. I was a playing member of the Sunderland Rovers Club, and Allan joined the club as a spectator member². Our ground was where the oil tanks are now at Hendon.

“JIMMY” BRINGS SOCCER

Jimmy must be “blamed” for the inauguration of the Association game in Sunderland. He returned from a holiday at home with a round football³. He began to play with the ball, and our interest was soon aroused. Several of us joined in, and schoolboys and some young men got their “baptism” in “soccer” in the area of Hendon Board School yard. This is the actual and spiritual home of Sunderland Association Football, and though all the memories of later and more scintillating years may come between, my clearest memory is of my first game in the play yard.

Of course, Jimmy conceived the idea of forming a football team, and I became secretary and convener. A good meeting was held in Cameron’s School, Norfolk St. As far as I remember there were present Robert Singleton, master of Gray School, and Councillor J. Sewell, head of the Wesleyan School in Robinson Street who was later drowned in New Zealand, and J. Coates, assistant at Rectory Park and later tutor in College; Lynn Marr and his brothers; Ted Watson, master of Monkwearmouth National Schl., now living in Montreal; Walter Chappell, assistant at Hendon Board School; W. Elliott, J. Anderson, J. Jardine, James Allan and J.Grayston.⁴

The result was the establishment of the Sunderland Teachers’ Association Football Club.⁵

OUR FIRST GROUND.

We chose the “Blue House” ground at Hendon, where the Allotments are. The rent of the field was fixed at £10 a year. I may say this took a great deal of finding, as it was impossible to take a “gate” owing to the low height of the surrounding wall. The old wall still exists on the east side.

There have been many debates, arguments and conjectures as to the original venue of the club, and I think these notes will settle this matter for all time.

¹ James Allan was actually appointed on 1st April 1879, so in reality 18 months to 2 years after Grayston arrived. Hardly “almost at the same time”.

² Given that Allan arrived at the end of the 1878-79 rugby season, if he did become a spectator member this would be in 1879-80. If he was watching rugby on his Saturday afternoons that season, it’s unlikely he had also formed and was playing in a football team at the same time.

³ The earliest this can be is September 1879, after his first summer school holidays.

⁴ Grayston retracts the presence of the Marrs at the beginning of the 4th instalment. At this point in time, Allan would barely know the other teachers in the district; their association met quarterly and 7 new members were added in the September 1879 meeting, Allan probably being one of them. This meeting probably occurred, but whether the club was formed is debateable; it may be that Allan was simply expanding the knowledge of Association Football beyond Hendon Board School at this point in time.

⁵ Sunderland and District Teachers’ Association Football Club was the actual original name.

We played there for two years⁶ and found great difficulty in getting fixtures, many of our Saturdays being spent in practices. I must confess that we needed these Saturday practices very much, but we were very conscientious in our training.

I was made centre-forward, but unfortunately we could never get a goalkeeper, and I went to this position on the advice (or order?) of Jimmy Allan, who saw me playing one night and said "Ah! We've got a goalkeeper at last." We had, but I did it only from a sense of duty. My spell in this position ended disastrously in the final tie of the Northumberland and Durham Cup, which was played on the ground now called "St. James's Park," Newcastle.⁷

It was a cold day, and we were drawing 1-1 as "time" drew on. The temperature was 24° Fahrenheit – 8 degrees of frost! I was almost frozen in our goal, when a surprise raid ended by Phillips, a Newcastle teacher, scoring.⁸

I was so numb that I could not hold the ball, and we lost. I then resigned my custodianship and went back to my original position as centre-forward.

20 GOAL WINS!

The team, I believe, on that day was:- J. Grayston; Walker and Chappell, J. Elliott, J. Anderson and J. Sewell; Jas. Allan, John Coates, Ted Watson, James Jardine and Elliott (Thomas St. School).⁹

We won nearly all our matches against the colliery teams, which sprung up very quickly round about. It is amusing in these days of highly trained professional football to remember 20 goal victories and defeats!

Out of the team above only two members are now alive. These are myself and Watson.

The upkeep of the team was considerable, and with due credit to the Irish sweepstake authorities I may say that we ran a sweepstake to help our funds. Times were different then, and the police lent a splendid hand. At any rate, we cleared our rent and managed to pay our debts.

A rapidly growing list of responsibilities and the fact that we had difficulty in getting together a strong team of teachers, for many reasons, chief of which was the small salary of the teachers, resulted in the change of name of the club.¹⁰

It was changed to "The Sunderland Association Football Club" which it remains to-day.

(To be continued.)

⁶ They left Blue House Field at the start of the 1882-83 season. If they formed and rented the ground in October 1879 this would be three years residence, not two. Prior to Autumn 1880, the Blue House Field only seems to be in use for the occasional fair or sports day, and there is evidence that it was used by Sunderland Rovers Rugby Club in 1879-80 and by Hendon Church Institute Cricket Club during the summer of 1879.

⁷ This was actually the Semi-Final of the 1880-81 competition.

⁸ It was a lot more disastrous for John than he's saying, they lost 5-0!

⁹ Eight out of eleven are correct.

¹⁰ They had become Sunderland A.F.C. before they ever played a match, chronology a little out here.

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY - II

By John Grayston

FOUNDER OF CLUB WRITES MEMOIRS

This article is the second of a series exclusively written for the "News" by Mr. John Grayston, the only member of the original Club who is still living in this country. His witty, informative and amusing writings have never before been published, and are exclusive to our readers.

EXCITING DAYS when Sunderland F.C. charged threepence admission and had twenty spectators are recalled by Mr. Grayston in to-day's instalment of his memoirs. On one occasion the club's trainer, a boxer, rushed on the field and knocked out a spectator who interfered with a player. To-day Mr. Grayston describes first games under the club's newly-chosen name:

"SUNDERLAND A.F.C."

This move enabled us to bring outsiders into the team. We advertised our practice matches, and no matter what their creed, profession or financial position, all aspirants to football fame were tried out.¹¹ We certainly picked up some good chaps, though many a time we had to pay players' fares and even take them home with us. "The play's the thing" was our motto, and we stuck to it!

These practice games were very amusing to many of us who professed to be players.

ALL AT SEA.

Sailors home from sea having a penchant for football came straight from their ships – in high boots at that – and tried their feet. Fishermen were often well represented. I know Mr. J. Tindell Green will forgive me for relating this little incident concerning his brother. He came down to our ground on horseback and joined us in practice. He made a terrific rush at the ball. Just then the ball twisted and he missed the ball altogether, going up in the air in a half somersault. He never came back! Allan was a good trainer, and he made everyone practice kicking backwards and heading the ball.

I still have a report of one of our early matches. It is little different to the reports of to-day except that it does not criticise individual play. It was a match against Ovingham in 1880, which we won by four goals to nil, the game ending in darkness.¹² There are only two of that team alive to-day. Ted Watson is now 74 years old – my own age does not need stating – and I wonder if any of our opponents of that day are still alive.

We then had an average attendance of 20 spectators, while the Sunderland Rugby Club had hundreds! What a difference now!

PLAYING THE 'SPURS.

¹¹ This certainly was the case, but in Autumn 1880. Many advertisements for players appeared in the Sunderland Echo at that time.

¹² This is verified as the second reported match ever, played 27th November 1880. If, as Grayston says, it was an early match, it is a long time after October 1879.

Just at this time I left the team and went to St. Mark's College, Chelsea, London.¹³ There I played against Tottenham Hotspurs.

Our Sunderland team removed their playing pitch to Percy Terrace. From thence they went to another field. It was too small and spoilt all football activities.¹⁴ The next move was to The Grove, part of Ashbrooke. Personally, I had nothing to do with the team for those two years.

In 1883, December 20th, I left St. Mark's College for good and came to Sunderland as first assistant at Stansfield Street, Monkwearmouth, arriving home on Friday evening after a strenuous ten days' examination, worn out with stewing and stiff examinations.

The same evening I was waited upon by Jimmy and Jim McMillan.

"You have to play tomorrow."

"Oh," will I. "I shall not. Besides I am not eligible."

They replied that I was kept on the books and that I was eligible.

FETCHED BY HANSOM.

To shake them off, as I felt I could not do justice to them and myself, I said "Send a hansom for me and I'll come." They did, and I fully dressed and was driven down to the bottom of Horatio Street – a clay-dolly field it was, and no mistake. Messrs. Swan let our team have it very reasonably. This was my debut at Roker, and I managed to get three goals out of five¹⁵, and earned the good wishes of all concerned, at which I was proud, as this was my premier step. I was 21½ years and weighed 12st. 4lbs.

Let me say the ground was a quagmire. The goal posts were placed S.E. to N.W. hence winds from those directions handicapped the players. Players should always consider direction of winds before going on the field. Little Jimmy was a past master in this art. He would first of all say "Allow for the wind; don't kick to leeward." I don't know whether our teams ever think what a great part the wind plays on a rough day, and players should remember how to beat it as Jimmy Allan did.

NO FENCES – NO "GATE."

There were no fences round the field, hence there was no "gate," and we were always hard up. Collections were frequently taken by interested spectators. The late William Blumer, shipbuilder, was an ardent supporter and liberally assisted our collection. We played many teams at Horatio Street and were very successful. Castle Eden was a very friendly team, and treated us splendidly when we paid them a visit. They invited two or three to the different houses and gave the

¹³ Grayston was away the whole of 1882 and 1883. He signed off before college against Newcastle FA on 3rd December 1881, his next appearance was 19th January 1884 against Jarrow. Only on return did he become a fully-fledged teacher.

¹⁴ There is no evidence of any actual matches at these two grounds between Blue House Field and Ashbrooke residencies.

¹⁵ This must be the Jarrow game. We take his word he got a hat-trick, no scorers in the 5-2 win are listed in the newspaper reports. However, it was not by any stretch the first game after he got back, Sunderland had no game on 22 December 1883, and Grayston was not in the line-up of the first game after his return, v. South Bank on New Year's Day 1884.

Sunderland players a hearty repast, such as miners know how to do. We beat Castle Eden 7 to 1.¹⁶ The poor goalkeeper was thrown into the mud piled up behind the posts for the third time and he threatened dire vengeance. He rushed out at me and Jimmy popped in and got a goal. He afterwards apologised for his action. I may say here that the ground was never in a good condition. It was always muddy; we were always a sight – regular mudlarkers! The grassy grounds were really a handicap to us.

Our dressing quarters at this time were at the Wolseley Hotel at the bottom of Gosforth Street and Millom Terrace, and “mine host,” Mr. Ruddick, was most solicitous as to our welfare. I may say that most of our team were absolutely “T.T.,” also that no athlete can keep fit if he indulges too much. Then want of money for expenses led us to look round for another field for gate purposes.

BOXING TRAINER’S SCRAP.

We got one at last at Fulwell – Abbs’ Field – near the old Blue House Inn¹⁷, a little ramshackle sore of place – old-fashioned. This field was walled in and a “gate” could be taken. We had earned many laurels all over Northumberland and Durham, and Sunderland was becoming famous, and each individual member was proud of it. We had had two practices per week, and Jimmy set the example, and we got as hard as nails and we were as fit as pugilists. We had, by the way, a boxer or fighter, who trained us and put us in good form, and accompanied us on our visits to other teams. He was a useful supporter, and laid out one man at Newcastle who very unwisely interfered with one of our backs. The team at this time was as follows:- Goal, Wade¹⁸; Jack Innes (seagoing engineer afterwards), Jack Hall, Jack Kirtley (chief draughtsman at Messrs. Bartram’s), Jim McMillan (monumental sculptor), Wm. Allan (joiner and contractor), Jimmy Allan (left wing), Jock McDonald (right wing), Murdoch (inside right), J. Grayston (centre), Joyce (inside left). This team was practically invincible.

(To be continued.)

¹⁶ Grayston played in a 1-1 draw at Castle Eden on 9th February 1884; he is probably merging it with the later home game on 22 March 1884, in which he also played in a 7-0 win.

¹⁷ Now the Blue Bell at the Fulwell Road / Sea Road junction.

¹⁸ There is no sign of a Wade in the Sunderland 1st team in this era, bar one in March 1884 in a cup replay against Hobson Wanderers, listed in the line-up a Wade (Joyce). In those days this was an indication that Wade was a pseudonym; this is backed up by the fact that Joyce was a regular in other matches at that time. Neither Joyce nor Wade played in goal. All the others named were the basis of the 1883-84 team.

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY - III

By John Grayston

Founder of Club writes Memoirs.

Three Hours Play for Medals.

CONTINUING his memoirs Mr. Grayston tells of their efforts to gain gold medals and cups, and how, in order to keep the club's head above water, staged sports on their ground with a man taking the "gate" in a basin. Then a visit to Bolton and a ten goal defeat followed by a 22 goal victory.

COCKSURE TEAM WELL TROUNCED.

We commenced taking "gates" and gradually got a few hundreds to take a deep interest in our undertakings.

I may mention that we got together a good Committee here, and Sunderland A.F.C. was making its first mark on the life of the Sunderland people. Our gates sometimes totalled a thousand at 3d. a time!

At this time we had some great tussles, namely Morpeth Harriers and Shankhouse. We played Morpeth Harriers in a cup tie and made a draw. We went to Morpeth by excursion and took with us 800 passengers. Wonderful, was it not? At half-time, after a strenuous game, some generous friend poured out a libation of some kind and it spurred us on, and we won hands down.¹⁹

Shankhouse was another reputable opponent, and we experienced some rough times after the match. We travelled to and fro in brakes in those days, and thoroughly enjoyed the outing.²⁰

No great townsmen had interested themselves so far in our games, except John Wright Wayman, who was our sincere friend and supporter.

Of this team, as far as I know, Jack Kirtley is still very much alive. Murdoch, now a tea planter in Honolulu, was here two or three years ago, and "your humble" are the only three out of the team in existence. Wm. Allan died last year. The photo of the team is hanging in the club house. I am informed that another one is in the window of a hostelry in South Street.²¹

This team, already referred to, was the one that won the Durham Cup in '84-85. We played Darlington and made a draw.

¹⁹ He has really raced ahead here from 1883-84; these matches against Morpeth were FA Cup ties in October 1887, more than two years after Grayston had finished playing and when he was a joint secretary of the club.

²⁰ Again, we are beyond Grayston's playing days here; SAFC did not play Shankhouse Black Watch until 1886.

²¹ This team is not the one playing Morpeth and Shankhouse, which Grayston sort of confirms in the next paragraph – though it is actually the 1883-4 Durham Challenge Cup winning team.

The final was played at Birtley on neutral ground and we beat Darlington, who were a powerful team. Craven kept goal that day. A train load of spectators accompanied us.²²

Our next venture was to try for the gold medals on the occasion of the Temperance Festival on the Town Moor at Newcastle. This was a gruelling game. We played half an hour each way and beat our first opponents.

We played again another hour and again won, and got into the final. We now played another hour against East End, and beat them by 3 to 1 and won the gold medals.²³

The crowd was very hostile and rough play was indulged in, and we gave as well as received hard knocks. We were shoved off the field after a hand to hand struggle. This was a Temperance Festival! Yes, very “temperate and tolerant.”

However, the medals were worth the struggle.

To increase our exchequer we held sports on Abbs’ Field and cleared about £10. Dribbling, shooting, five-a-side contests, racing, etc., formed a good programme and brought a big crowd together. A man stood at the gate with a basin taking the money. Primitive and incongruous it seems nowadays.

The Revs. W. A. McGonigle and Hindle now began to take an interest, and Rev. Hindle often played and would have been put on regularly if he had trained.

Our team was a bit cocksure at this time, and having beaten local teams aspired to greater heights. The Rev. Hindle, whose brother kept an hotel at Accrington, arranged a match with Great Lever at Bolton. This team was the forerunner of the Bolton Wanderers.²⁴

To our surprise we got a rare wiggling, 11 to 1. It was a dirty day and the ground was muddy – a foot deep in parts. We flung ourselves into the river or canal to get the mud off. I remember seeing Jim McMillan taking “headers” to clear himself. Our aspirations thus got a serious check.

On the other hand Colonel Briggs, from Hylton, challenged us to a friendly. His sister rode round the field on horseback to cheer her brother on. We got 22 goals to none or one. I cannot just remember. Modesty compels me to say I got some of them, but the half-backs and backs were so envious that we opened out and allowed them to score!²⁵

(To be continued.)

²² SAFC lost the 1884-85 DCC final to Darlington at Feethams; Grayston did not play. He is referring to the 1883-84 final, in which he did play. He has failed to remember that the first match (at Newcastle Road) was not a draw, but a 4-3 win that Darlington appealed against. The Durham FA ordered a replay at neutral Birtley.

²³ This was June 1884. Sunderland did have to play three games to win the tournament, but not on the same day. They won a qualifier against Newcastle FA on the Town Moor on 14th June. They then played the semi-final and final, against Rosehill and East End respectively, on 25th June.

²⁴ We are now back to February 1884, and the actual score was 11-0. Great Lever were contemporaries of Bolton Wanderers, rather than their forerunners. Bolton Wanderers adopted their current name in 1877.

²⁵ Forward now to the 1884-85 season, this was reported widely as a 23-0 win against Castletown in December. There was no challenge to a friendly; the match was supposed to be a Durham Cup Tie, but Castletown turned up with only 8 players and scratched from the competition. The teams then agreed to play a friendly, with 3 SAFC second teamers making up the numbers for Castletown.

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY - IV

By John Grayston

Founder of Club writes Memoirs.

Sunderland Beaten Again

THE INSERTION of a semi-colon in the first article made it appear that the late Colonel Lynn Marr and his brother were on the team. They were only bairns then! In this week's memoirs the writer records that the Redcar team in those days, in reply to an invitation, asked where Sunderland was! Well, times don't change much!

BEATEN IN CUP-TIE.

Yes, and we got another good drubbing by Port Glasgow. They once beat us by about 11 goals.²⁶ They played a short passing game from one to the other which completely nonplussed us and left us gaping. The first half I touched the ball three times!

These lessons we got led us to assimilate our style and not trust entirely to one method of play.

Hobson Wanderers were about the best team we played in those days. We played them twice in cup ties before beating them. The last game was at Whitburn Hall.²⁷ The ground is rather on the short side, but it suited us as we had practised on it and thus gained confidence. There were many expressions used such as "Dirty Jimmy," which I am afraid he and Jock Macdonald well deserved. They used objectionable methods to secure the ball – foul or fair – it did not matter. It was apparent to all of us; a lot of ankle tapping and tripping done intentionally and elbow swinging. One little incident recalls this: Brown, captain of Hobson Wanderers and centre-forward, and Jimmy were running along the north side of the field. Brown was beating Jimmy and Jimmy, giving one side leap, hit poor Brown in the waist and sent him ten yards into the ditch which bounds the field. Of course Jimmy shouted "Sorry, old man," but should have added "I did it on purpose" if he had been conscientious.

The rules were lax in those days, but more about these later on. About this time I was taking a great many night classes and could not train at nights, and so reluctantly gave up playing as an active member. My business was more to me than football. I still continued as a member of the committee, which met weekly in Thomas Street School.

We sent to Redcar to give home and home matches some months before this. We got an answer asking where Sunderland was? They did not know we had a team and, in a sarcastic, dry way, said they would play us some day!

²⁶ 11-1, on 3rd January 1885.

²⁷ Grayston flips back yet again to the 1883-84 season here, the two matches against Hobson Wanderers were the semi-final of the Durham Challenge Cup, and both were played at Whitburn Hall.

However, in the English Cup we were drawn against them at Redcar. We played against them at Redcar and got beaten 1-0²⁸. I was centre that day. Next year they wanted home and home matches, but our committee turned them down.

The team now had made a name for itself, and was ambitious to get to the top rung. There was no League as yet, and home and home fixtures had to be made.

The Rev. W.A. McGonigle and I were appointed to interview the Misses Thompson at their house in Newcastle Road. We wanted the field nearest to Linden Terrace, opposite Ellersie Terrace. The reverend gentleman's personality and lovable nature which he possessed awakened their sympathy. He is still living and still has many warm admirers in Monkwearmouth, where he was a friend of man first and a priest second.

We got the field at £50 a year. What a huge sum in those days it was; but we were not down-hearted, as that optimism filled our veins and pushed us on.²⁹

The Workmen's Hall³⁰ team at this time was about defunct, and we very wisely took and incorporated this team with ours. Fred Dale, a mighty man of valour, was centre-half and afterwards became captain. Billy Erksine, a useful forward; Arnie Davidson, a classy right wing forward and the idol of the spectators. Nimble, fleet of foot and tricky he was, and seldom have we seen his equal. What about "Dowk" Oliver of Suddick, who still lives at Middlesbro'? These were all good men and true and made a mighty splash. There was one more "hurricane" and that was "Ole Bill" Kirtley, our goalkeeper. He was a sure rock, and no amount of bombardment could smash his citadel.

Two great goalkeepers stand out in my early days, Wade and Kirtley – our Bill – then Doig later on. When I left centre-forward I was instrumental in getting Jimmy Hunter, from Dumfries way. We got him a job at J. L. Thompson's shipyard and – well, later on I'll tell the tale. Jimmy took my place and did excellently.

Mr. James Marr (now Sir James Marr) took a deep interest in our affairs, and sat on our committee, which met in the Workmen's Hall. The field was undrained. It was a sedgy place too, and it was a very unpromising pitch – but it was a field!

We put a rope all round the pitch, wire at that, and this was our first essay. This was a beginning. The east end of the field was boarded up, so we were semi-private. The boys could still dodge over the walls, and did so.

(To be continued.)

²⁸ This was Sunderland's first ever F.A. Cup Tie. Though Grayston played it couldn't have been that memorable as the defeat was by 3-1.

²⁹ This negotiation would be during the 1885-86 season; the last game at Abbs Field was March 1886, the first at Newcastle Road on 3 April 1886 against Darlington.

³⁰ Monkwearmouth Workmen's Hall – Where SAFC held many AGMs and half-yearly meetings in their early years.

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY - V

By John Grayston

Founder of Club writes Memoirs.

First "Pro." Found a Job!

HOW SUNDERLAND captured their first professional and how they carried on, getting worse and worse in the mire, is described in this week's memoirs. The prominent part that Sir James Marr played in building up the club is also revealed.

SECRETARY DUG UP IN PUB.

Sir James Marr and Mr. Robt. Thompson later on rendered yeoman service to us in our infancy. We got a stand on the north side, consisting of three or four tiers made of sleepers, which would hold about 1,000 spectators – 6d. side. These stands were put up by our supporters, mostly from North Sands Yard. They were good fellows, and they were our greatest friends.

Our first "professional" was my doing, but done perfectly innocently. We got Jimmy Hunter a job at North Sands and gave him a "douceur" every week besides. This was being done surreptitiously all round. We got further and further into the mire. We wanted men, and we got good men and found them jobs at Messrs. Dickenson's or Thompson's or Blumer's Yard. The pay was delegated to a sub-committee who were never to mention "salaries."³¹

Our gates increased to £50, £60 and £70 a week at this time, less payments to players, whom we imported gradually. The manager and majordomo of the team was really "Jimmy."

He was streets ahead of any player or member of committee in his powers of organisation, and he still was a great "noise."

Our dressing-room was in the Royal Hotel, and was for a considerable time.

Before I continue with my own reminiscences I should like to refer to "Arbiter" (F. Carruther's) remarks in reference to Alderman Fred Taylor in a recent edition of the "Daily Mail." He states that Ald. Fred Taylor was a pioneer in the time of the Team of all the Talents. That is not correct at all. One does not wish to detract from the building up of the Sunderland team of later years. He is a great pivot, we know; but he was not even on the committee at that time. The committee at the time of the Talents consisted of men of calibre and leading lights. Robt. Thompson, North Sands Shipyard, chairman; Sir James Marr, Tom Carter (of Messrs. Dickinsons), McLintock (manager of

³¹ Jimmy Hunter arrived in February 1885, so we are back in time again to the 1884-85 season. So Grayston "innocently" instigated a covert professionalism that would last nearly 3 years before they were found out following the Middlesbrough FA Cup tie in late 1887.

Robt. Thompson's, Southwick), Wm. Pickersgill, Sam Tyzack, our worthy treasurer; Jim McMillan, W. T. Wallace, financial secretary and J.Grayston, secretary.

We now occupied a house in Ellerslie Terrace, right opposite our field. The place was small, yet big enough for a meeting room, a card room, a billiard room, etc. Committee meetings were held every week. The trainer at that time (Joe Bell, foreman at Robert Thompson's, Southwick) held an honorary job, and no man could have done better. He had trained runners, oarsmen, and had a splendid reputation as a "moulder" of would-be athletes.

My secretarial duties entailed a great responsibility and it was taking a great deal of my time, so I relinquished it. Mr Robert Thompson asked me to get the best man for the job. I knew Tom Watson – by the way of a typical Tynesider – who was out of work. He had been secretary of East End and had made East End to be feared.

The chairman gave me £10 to fit him out and bring him across to our committee meeting, to be held that night. I went to Newcastle, got to his house, and found him out.

As a matter of fact I found him eventually in a pub. He looked distressed and down at heel. A friend had invited him in to liven him up. His first salutation was "Well, ye beggor, Jack, what's th' deeing heor, hinny?"

"Come on, Tom, I have a job for ye," said I. "He's tha lad. I'se cumin." I fitted him out with a new suit, etc. He duly presented himself at Ellerslie Terrace and got the job at £150 a year³², and mighty grateful was he to get it. I know valedictory addresses are often magnified, but I say this in all sincerity and truth: that he was a magnificent secretary. He could rule his team with kindness and firmness, and always made himself the chum of the rank and file, who looked upon him as a brother. When Liverpool wanted him, he came for my advice. He was offered double the wages, and I advised him to accept. He did.

We certainly found him a house to live in, but his name was made and he also was ambitious. Can you blame him? We lost a brilliant man.

(To be continued.)

³² We have now moved forward many years; Tom Watson was appointed in June 1889 on a salary of 35 shillings a week; which is around £90 a year, so not quite as lucrative as Grayston remembers.

SUNDERLAND A.F.C.'S HISTORY – VI.

By John Grayston

Founder of Club writes Memoirs.

AND now Sunderland becomes a professional team owing to a “beery” conversation in a public house. This is one of the disclosures Mr. Grayston makes in his article this week. He describes the rise of the opposition team, Sunderland Albion, too.

SUNDERLAND TURNS PRO.

We had a magnificent field, thanks to Mr. Samuel Tyzack, who watched the field during the close season. He had the whole field drained by rubble draining. The stands had been altered. A more commodious and imposing grand stand was erected on the north side, and 1/- was charged for admission.

We felt we were improving wonderfully. Sir James Marr, and Thomas Round (manager of Messrs. Armstrong & Addison), had this matter well conceived, and a successful issue was the result.

With reference to the pioneer “Jimmy,” let me say that he still took a direct interest and acted as Treasurer till Mr. Sam Tyzack was appointed. Jimmy conceived a plan for forming a new team, which ultimately culminated in the Sunderland Albion being started.³³ Jimmy approached me to be secretary, at a salary of course. I declined and told him that I should stop with “my first love,” and did so.

For three years Jimmy never spoke to me for my refusal of his offer. Young Mr. Hartley was the Croesus with the money bags, and I must say it cost him a few thousands. They took – is it not strange? – the very spot where Sunderland started, namely the Blue House field. It was boarded up, a cycle track was made, and a splendid athletic ground was the outcome.

If the management had been all right the club would have prospered. One week’s takings mysteriously disappeared altogether. Under such conditions as these what wonder as to the finale that subsequently arrived.

Before Jimmy left us the team was amateur, or partly so. It was a veiled professionalism, if you can sum it up. I said previously that we paid a portion of and found the players a job. All this was done sub rosa by a special sub-committee. Mr. Fenton and Mr. Glass I know were implicated, but no report ever came before the committee concerning the affairs.

I do believe and, from what Tom Watson told me, we were doing the same as others were doing. But we got found out!

³³ We are back to March-May 1888, a year before Tom Watson arrived; during this period James Allan left SAFC to form Sunderland Albion.

How? I don't want to impinge on what Mr. W. T. Wallace contributed in a contemporary of last season, but must just give my own view of matters appertaining to my own personal experience and observation.

We were drawn against Middlesbro' and played at Sunderland before a huge gate in the English Cup. Of course, I mean for amateurs. We beat our opponents by 2 to 1.³⁴

After the match, one of our team, who had his 30/- or whatever it was, paid a visit to a pub and became hilarious and told the story of his getting this gift. Two Middlesbro' spectators listened eagerly to this man's (I almost wrote his name) senseless diatribes and boastings.

What was the result? We were hauled up before the Association at the Grand Hotel. The two spectators appeared and gave evidence. Mr A. Grundy, our respected chairman of the Durham County Cricket Club, and Councillor Robert Singleton³⁵ were sitting on that committee, or something terrible might have happened – well, worse than did.

We lost the tie and had £50 to pay, and our amateur status was swept away once and for all, and we came out as an unblushing professional team.³⁶

To be continued.

³⁴ This is now back to December 1887. The victory was actually by 4-2 in a replay after a 2-2 draw at Middlesbrough.

³⁵ Singleton was one of the teachers who founded SAFC...somewhat of a conflict of interest!

³⁶ Grayston is somewhat understating the outcome of investigation into the illegal payments that happened during his watch; Sunderland were actually disqualified from the FA Cup, and three players (Monaghan, Hastings and Richardson) were suspended for 3 months.