

The Beautiful Game

January brought Sir Geoff Hurst, undoubtedly the most famous northern hammer ever, to Riyadh. He made 502 appearances for West Ham between 1960 and 1972, scoring 180 league goals and 72 in cup competitions. Sir Geoff won 49 England caps, the most memorable of course being in 1966 when as well winning the game for England he became the only player ever to score a hat trick in a world cup final. As part of the United Kingdoms bid to host World Cup 2006 he came to open an exhibition at Al Akaria celebrating the UK's connection with the beautiful game. Whilst in Riyadh Sir Geoff attended a function hosted by David & Denise Burton from the British Council another hosted by Simon McDonald, the deputy Ambassador as well leading a coaching session for young boys at a school on the DQ.

Readers will know that football has been the UK's favourite game for generations, legend has it however, that the Romans might have originally brought the game of football to the British Isles. Visiting Romans and local Brits apparently used to play the game of *harpastum*. Fought out on a rectangle of land, it was a sort of football match that engaged two teams with each endeavouring to take a ball - by any means - to the opposing base line. Following the Romans' departure, the Normans arrived and brought their early form of soccer, *La Soule*, another rough contest. It is recorded that in one game in 1280 Henry, son of William de Ellington was killed when playing football with a large number of friends. In the course of play he ran fatally against David le Kell's dagger!



Football has been around in various forms throughout history as an undisciplined game. Following on from the cohorts of Rome and the early Normans, the game developed in a crude way and was actually banned by Royal decree on several occasions. In 1579 a certain John Winkell of County Durham was sent to prison for a week and had to pay a public penance for playing football, while in the same year Sir Thomas Elyot wrote that the sport was a "game giving no pleasure but beastlie furie and violence". Someone called Philip Stubbs recorded in 1583 that football was, "Rather a friendlie kinde of fyghte than a play or recreation - a bloody and murdering practise than a fellowly sport or pastime."

Macaulay's History of England noted in May 1690 that, "letters from Newcastle give an account of a great match at football, which had been played in Northumberland, and was suspected to have been a pretext for a large gathering of the disaffected, i.e. Jacobites. In the crowd, were 150 horsemen well mounted and armed, of whom many were Papists." Early such games were played between rural villages, on sports or carnival days, at places like Alnwick and Chester-le-Street. But it was only during the mid-19th century that the medieval brawl evolved into a form that can be recognised as the sport of today. The first rules were drawn up in 1848 at Cambridge University. Notts County was the first senior club to be formed, in 1862, followed by Sheffield Wednesday and Nottingham Forest. The Football Association was set up in 1863 and the game flourished rapidly thereafter.

Sir Geoff's own club, West Ham, was founded in 1895 as a company team of the Thames Ironworks a famous ship building yard. In 1900 they were elected to the Southern League and they then became a Limited Liability Company under the name of West Ham United which then severed it's former association with the Ironworks. In 1904 the Club decided to move to its present ground at Upton Park. In the period between 1900 and 1914, the Hammers had a good record in the Southern League and when soccer was resumed on a national level after World War 1, the Club obtained entry into the 2nd Division of the Football League. In 1922/23, they ended as runners up in the 2nd Division and appeared in the first ever Wembley F.A. Cup Final loosing to Bolton by two goals to nil.

But what will the annals record as some of the highlights from those early years? Herewith a little bit of history of some of the clubs in today's premier league. At Arsenal they have a museum which is considered by many to be the largest and most extensive archive of any club's football memorabilia in Britain. The Museum opened in 1993 and has helped promote the history of the club since its formation. It tells the story of Arsenal Football Club from the very beginning when, in 1886, a group of munitions workers collected all their sixpences to buy the club's first football, right up to the 'Double' triumph of 1997/98.

With no written record and human memory being too cloudy for reliance, the precise date on which Aston Villa football club was founded can never be firmly established. But it can be linked to an impromptu meeting between four members of a local

