

TT No.73: *Dean McClean* - West Lancashire League Premier Division; **Turton 0-0 Wyre Villa**. Admission: free; Programme n/a (old copies available on request); Att: 25; FGIF Match Rating: 2*.

Few villages in Britain can match Turton FC's history and influence on modern day soccer as we know it. It was in 1871 that the club was formed, by men from Chapeltown, in the Turton district of Bolton. In the late 19th century Turton village was the centre of development of football in the area.

The first games were played on a pitch in Chapeltown, which is argued to be the oldest football pitch still in use. Amateur team Old Boltonians use the pitch now. The dawn of "soccer" football in Lancashire was pioneered in Turton, as the Harrow rules, which allowed the ball to be caught, were ditched in favour of the London Football Association rules. As well as this, Turton were influential in the forming of Christchurch, later to become Bolton Wanderers.

As well as being at the forefront of tactical thinking, Turton also hired the world's first known Professional footballer, Fergul Suter. £3 was paid for his services for an FA Cup match. Quite remarkably all of Turton's players lived on the same street, high street, Chapeltown.

Possibly the most famous son of Turton was J.J Bentley. Later a pioneer of Football journalism with his newspaper, "Athletic News". As well as going on to serve as a member of Football League, JJ Bentley went on to be Manager/Secretary of Bolton Wanderers FC.

Winners of the prestigious Lancashire Trophy on six consecutive occasions (1899-1905), Turton FC now ply their trade in the rather modest surroundings of the West Lancashire League. Today's visitors were Wyre Villa. After an uneventful first 45 minutes, the game soon came to life for all the wrong reasons as two Wyre Villa players were dismissed for violent conduct within minutes of re-start. From that point on the game took an almost farcical state, as the vast majority of the game was played in or around the Wyre Villa 18-yard box, as Turton searched in vain for that elusive goal. The Wyre Villa Goal-keeper took on a Rugby Union-esque style, as he deliberately kicked for touch. He would probably make a half decent rah, rah, player, but then again, his handling skills are probably too good.

So, despite having two men sent off in disgraceful acts of violence. Wyre Villa gallantly hung on to a point despite continuous pressure from Turton. Though the away side defended resolutely, I find it hard to be happy that they went away from this match with a point, for the disgraceful way in which two of their players were sent-off they hardly deserved a point.

As well as mentioned above, Turton can also be proud not only W.T Dixon, founder member of the Lancashire FA, J.J Howarth served as member of the Association. It was he who wrote a fitting eulogy to Turton's place in footballing history.

“...perhaps no other village in England has football such a hold on it, and have cherished Association (Football) with past glorious days, when football was played as a sport, and not as gigantic business, tending to crush the game out of the little village that first gave it birth”

Despite J.J Howarth's considerable achievements, he pales into relative insignificance compared to another J.J from Turton-J.J. Bentley. It was he who echoed Howarth's words to Turton when he wrote: “...Turton was the factory of footballers for Lancashire and good many other places beside...The little village has the further distinction of having introduced the Association game into Lancashire....The club gave Bolton Wanderers their first lesson”

So, for Football historians and lovers of grassroots football alike, Turton is well worth a visit. What would the pioneers from Turton over a century ago make of today's mega rich, superstar footballers!?

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