

NUNEATON FOOTBALL HERITAGE HEROES

No. 3

William “Billy” Ball



William Ball, who was as robust and resilient character as ever stepped onto a football field. Ball worked all week as a coal miner, and on Saturday afternoon turned out for Nuneaton Town. Mostly he played at centre-half, at a time when such players were expected to defend and attack - in the days before the 1925 Offside Law led to the creation of the ‘stopper’ centre-half.

Billy Ball was born at Newhall, near Burton-on-Trent, and played his early football for Newhall Red Rose. He also played for Woodville, Gresley Rovers, and Nottingham Forest Reserves, before moving to Nuneaton in the late 1890s to work in the coal mines. Billy played for Nuneaton Town from 1898 to 1900, and certainly played at right back during some of this time.

Nuneaton Town were in the Leicestershire Senior League during the 1899-1900 season, but in the following summer they lost the use of their Arbury Road ground and could not find a replacement. As a consequence, the Town ceased to function for the whole of the 1900-01 season and lost several of their best players, including William Ball who, sadly, moved to Hinckley United.

Fortunately for the followers of Nuneaton football, Billy returned to the Town for the 1903-04 season, by which time the club were playing in the Trent Valley Combination. Ball became club captain, centre-half, and part-time taker of penalty kicks. The ‘Nuns’ finished fifth in the table that season. The following season, 1904-05, Town sought a better class of football in the Coventry & North Warwickshire League, with Billy Ball as their captain. They proved their worth by taking the title, winning 15, and losing just 3 of their 22 games. Billy was a key member of the team which took the Birmingham Junior League title in 1906-07, but left the following season to join Hinckley United.

Ball lived in Nuneaton for the last 58 years of his life, dying in the Manor Hospital following a seizure on 11th May 1955 at the age of 78. Back in May 1920, the Observer had published an article by ‘Old Blue’, in which the writer had chosen his ‘ideal team’ from all the footballers who had played for Nuneaton up until that time. Of William Ball he wrote: “Ball was a wonderful player, indefatigable and strong, and possessing a faculty for headwork which has never been surpassed in the local history of the game”.