

## **THE SOUTHPORT STORY by Michael Braham**

### **In The Beginning**

It was on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 1881 that Southport played its first Association Football match.

Although association football was played in the town's private schools in the late 1870's the original Southport Football club began as a rugby team. The 'handling code' had been played competitively since 1872 in Southport and there were teams under the titles of Southport Olympic, Southport Wasps, Southport Hornets and The Grasshoppers. Southport Football Club, who had been in existence for some seasons, arranged rugby fixtures for 1881-82. After some heavy defeats, the last recorded being on 15<sup>th</sup> October when Wavertree prevailed, the club switched to association football. On 12<sup>th</sup> November, six of that team lined up when Southport played Bootle "second" in their first match under Association Rules. Bootle took the lead but Jackson shot "a capital goal to equalize" The Southport team was S.Platt (Goal), B Pidduck, JG Howard(Backs) P.Edwards, F Jackson and TB Burnett(Captain) (Halves), JR Topliss and F Holden(Rights) W Platt(Centre) J Melross and J. Sykes (Lefts). The Southport Visiter commented "that the team will no doubt render a good account of themselves when they get over the difficulty of hands off and forget the rugby rules" The following week Southport lost by "one goal and one disputed goal to nil" at Burscough.

Most of the club's rugby players made the switch to the "round ball game" and Dalby, Irving and Morris were also lured over to soccer from Southport Hornets.

Ralph Rylance did more than anyone to establish association football in the town. He came to Southport from Blackburn where he was employed by a firm of solicitors. Before moving he played for the Blackburn Law team, a noted eleven in those days. He played for the "Lawyers" against Southport in our third engagement. The Blackburn Club displayed superior skill and thrashed Southport 7-0. Performances soon improved with Ralph Rylance now playing for Southport and Tranmere Rovers were beaten twice whilst the Tradesman of Southport and Liverpool Excelsior were both overcome 7-0. However, little interest was shown in Southport's matches compared with Southport Olympic who played on an adjoining pitch at Scarisbrick New Road. Spectators left the football field when Olympic began playing. It was not even possible to buy a football in the town and Ralph Rylance had to bring three footballs from his former club.

### **Up For The Cup**

The 1882-83 season was preceded by an exhibition match between the two famous Blackburn Clubs - the Rovers and Witton - at the Athletic Society's Sports. This match created considerable interest and encouraged by this, Southport joined both the Lancashire and English Football Associations and entered the Football Association, Lancashire and Liverpool and District Challenge Cups. At the club's A.G.M. in September, held at the Bold Arms Hotel, Charles Scarisbrick was re-elected President, W. J. Connell, Treasurer and Ralph Rylance was elected Captain. A full list of fixtures was arranged with teams such as Bootle, Everton, Wirral, Liverpool Rovers, Birkenhead and Bolton Olympic. The competitive element of the cup-ties aroused most interest. On 7th October, Southport entertained Liverpool Ramblers in their first ever F.A., or English Challenge Cup tie as the competition was called for years. This game was watched by 300 spectators including many women supporters and resulted in a 1-1 draw, Ambler scoring for Southport following a neat pass from Arthur Dalby. In the replay, Southport were weakened by the non-arrival of one of their best forwards and goalkeeper, Platt, missed the train.

"The Reds" had to play two substitutes and because of the re-organisation lost 4-0. In the Lancashire Challenge cup, after easily accounting for Stacksteads, 4-0, Southport, now playing the six forward game lost 5-4 in a thriller at Rishton.

The rules of the game were somewhat different at that time. The game was rough with little combined play. Penalties were as yet unknown and the charging of goalkeepers

was not only permissible but relished with delight by the forwards.-The players boots were of the ordinary every day variety and spikes in place of studs were not uncommon. Games were often spoilt by colour clashes. When Southport visited Birkenhead Association

they were placed at a disadvantage with the home side, who also wore scarlet shirts and the ground was covered with long grass- on other occasions home games were interrupted when the ball was kicked into adjoining gardens and the players had to argue with irate householders.

The highlight of the 1883-84 season was the English Cup clash with Blackburn Rovers at their Leamington Road ground. Rovers won 7-0 but Southport were far from disgraced.

In the 1884-85 season the club merged with the Southport Athletic Society. The team moved to the Sports Ground, Sussex Road, and training took place at the Circus Field, Eastbank Street, every Tuesday evening. Also it was unanimously decided to change their red jerseys for red and white striped flannel shirts.

### **SOUTHPORT WANDERERS**

As football grew in popularity other clubs sprang up in the town. Southport Wanderers, High park, Churchtown and Southport Old Boys were amongst the most prominent. However Southport Football Club was considered to be the town's premier side. In 1884 the Charity Cup was launched. Eleven local teams entered with the proceeds, £18 in the first year, going towards the Infirmary. Southport confirmed their premier spot by defeating Crescent 5-0 in the final at the Sports Ground.

The club's most notable success to date was their 1-0 victory over Preston North End in the Lancashire Challenge Cup in 1884. Although North End only sent their reserve side Southport caused something of a sensation and it was said that the Preston players were ashamed to go home after such a disgrace. Dalby scored the goal just four minutes from time.

The County selectors were present at that game and singled out Squire Platt, the Southport goalkeeper, to represent Lancashire against Hallamshire at Sheffield the following month, Lancashire winning 4-3. Platt also appeared for Liverpool and District when they played North Wales at Wrexham.

With no fewer than twenty-seven teams competing in Southport in 1885-86, Southport reduced their annual subscriptions to five shillings. Boarding was erected around a portion of the ground as protection against the weather. This did not prevent a match against Burscough being reduced to half an hour each way due to "Boisterous and disagreeable weather"

In October, an understrength Southport lost 12-1 at Darwen. The following week, although Southport led Astley 2-0 at half time, they were beaten 3-2 in an English Cup tie. Nevertheless, Southport again demonstrated their local superiority by beating Southport Wanderers 4-0, in the final of the Charity Cup.

At the Wanderers AGM in June 1886, at which a representative of the Southport club was present, they invited Southport to amalgamate. Southport Football Club had severed their connections with the Athletic Society. In the Athletic Society's Annual report the Committee regretted "their unfortunate connection with the Football Club which resulted in the Society incurring an expenditure on their account of £88-3shillings!!

.....After five years existence. Southport's first football club folded. At least six former Southport players and many of their supporters transferred their affiliations to Southport Wanderers who, although sustaining a loss of £4 on the previous season, could face the future with renewed confidence.

### **The Move Towards Professionalism**

Southport Wanderers moved to a new ground in Scarisbrick New Road for the 1886-87 season. It was a large field, enclosed to a height of 7 foot 6 inches and big enough to accommodate three matches at once. A covered grandstand, to seat 140 spectators, and

a dressing tent were provided. Three cows which grazed on the field withdrew behind the grandstand during matches.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1886, with the Wanderers leading 2-1, Skelmersdale United's team walked off the field after disagreeing with the referee's decision and Southport claimed the match. Three days later, at a General Meeting held in the Mather's Saleroom, it was unanimously resolved that in future the club be called "Southport Football Club" Thus imparting to it a representative character which it had not hitherto enjoyed.

Although not winning the Charity Cup, High Park defeated Old Boys 5-2 in the final, Southport's second team won the town's first regional honour by lifting the Liverpool and District Cup after defeating Earlestown 1-0 at Everton's ground in front of 3,000 spectators. The victorious Southport team and 100 supporters journeyed from the ground to Exchange Station in wagonettes amid the tooting of horns and blowing of bugles. When the train arrived at Chapel Street Station some three or four hundred people heartily welcomed the winners. The captain, Alfred Halsall was carried shoulder high to the Railway Hotel, the club headquarters.

The 1887-88 season began sensationally with several members of the team refusing to play whilst "men from out of town" were being played. The offending players both professionals from Blackburn were Ackroyd (later to captain Southport Central) and Whittaker. At a clear the air meeting it was decided by a large majority to discontinue the use of the Blackburn men and play nothing but local talent.

During the season Southport Recreation amalgamated with the club and the Charity Cup Final was reached. After drawing 2-2 with old rivals, Churchtown, in the replay Southport fought back after trailing by three goals to equalise with the last kick of the game. The goal was hotly disputed as the referee added four minutes to compensate for the time lost kicking the ball amongst the spectators. The Charity Cup Committee decided that extra time should be played and when Southport attempted to score a goal and claim the game they were prevented by a number of Churchtown spectators who invaded the field. Southport eventually won the final 4-1 at the third attempt.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1888 the Southport Guardian newspaper revealed that there was a scheme in the town to provide a football club of "Mighty proportions.....by raising an importation team" Professional football was about to be launched in Southport.

### **The Introduction of 'Foreign talent'**

In the summer of 1888, the year the Football League was founded, with the game increasing in popularity, It was felt that a team of stronger calibre should be formed to represent the district The idea met with favour and the initial meeting called to form such a club took place on 12th June at Scarlett's Rooms, Chapel Street.

At a second meeting, held at the Railway Hotel a week later, Mr. McGowan successfully proposed that the name of the club should be "Southport Central Association Football Club.

When the proposition to form a committee was put eleven voted in favour, none against and nineteen abstained. Mr James of Hoghton Street was appointed Honorary Treasurer, Edwin Ramsbottom Secretary and an Executive Committee was formed. A resolution was passed "that the Executive Committee be requested to organise and canvass for subscription necessary to defray expenses of the club during the coming season and that they incur no liability in excess of assets without the authority of a General Committee. "The Ratepayers Association donated five guineas and more than £50 was collected altogether.

At a meeting held on 29th August, M r. J. B. Watson explaining the objects of the club said it was likely to place Southport in the front rank of football with the certain result of bringing increased crowds of visitors to the town and it was confirmed that "Foreign talent" would be introduced by paying players.

Two teams were put into the field, the Reserves being known as Southport Swifts, and the first team consisted of both local and professional players with a strong East Lancashire element including Walsh and Ackroyd (Blackburn Olympic), Mullins and Duncan (Halliwell) and Joe Sourbutts (Blackburn Rovers). The Sports Ground in Sussex

Road was hired and on 1st September 700 spectators assembled there for the visit of Stanley a Liverpool club, who prevailed 4-1. The Southport team was: Tyldesley Walsh, Aitken, Taylor, Horton, Ackroyd, Duncan, Sourbutts, Lea-Jones, Farrar and Graham, Goalkeeper Lewis Tyldesley was a bell ringer at Christ Church for more than 50 years. In their first excursion in the F.A. Cup Central were drawn away at Irwell Springs, winning 5-4 after extra time, before being hammered 7-1 at South Shore to the disappointment of the 200 supporters who travelled from Southport. Nevertheless the club took their defeat well and entertained the team and referee, Sam Ormerod of Accrington, to tea at the Palatine Hotel, Blackpool, after the game.

### **Local Rivalry**

In their first season Southport Central often experienced difficulty in arranging fixtures and when they applied for matches some clubs treated them rather curtly. Lytham simply wrote on the memorandum bearing Central's application "We do not know this club! and returned it to their secretary.

Rivalry amongst the local clubs remained intense. After Central had defeated Haydock St. James 4-1 in a Lancashire Junior Cup tie an anonymous correspondent from Southport informed Haydock that Central had played an ineligible player. An inquiry found that there was no truth in the allegation but it typified the ill feeling that existed. Central reached the fourth round of the Lancashire Junior Cup before losing 2-0 at home to Fleetwood Rangers.

A fortnight later Southport and High park clashed in the Charity Cup. The "Parkites" had won 4-3 at Sussex Road on New Years Day before 2,000 spectators. A record gate of 2,500 assembled at High Park's Devonshire Road enclosure. "When Hill gave the home side the lead" the Southport Visiter remarked "the shouts and cheers that followed the goal must have been heard miles away" Taylor equalized but Central had to thank Ingram whose brilliant goalkeeping kept them in the game. The replay was fixed for the following week. Sensationally, High Park scratched from the competition due to the fact that full-backs Fairhurst and Caldwell were injured. Local pride was at stake and High Park were not prepared to play a weakened side even if Infirmary funds suffered. Central defeated Churchtown 2-0 in the final.

In December the Athletic News commented "that football is looking up in the pleasant sea port whose only defect is being without the sea" However, the game was still in its early stages and disputes regularly occurred. These were often resolved by the captains. Ackroyd, the Central captain almost withdrew his men after half an hour in a match against Heywood due to the referees one sided decisions but he stayed only to lose 3-0. In the return game the entire Heywood team left the field disputing Central's goal scored by Horton. Southport, although trailing 2-1, claimed the match.

The club's record for their initial season was Played 40 Won 21 Drawn 6 Lost 13.

The event which caused the most excitement in the town was the visit of Preston North end who had just carried off the League and Cup double. They came to Southport on 13<sup>th</sup> May and were given a rapturous welcome on arrival at the railway station. They were driven to the ground behind a marching band. There was a record gate of 3,500 and North End won 4-2 even though Central were re-inforced for the occasion by Forbes, Townley and Southworth of Blackburn Rovers.

### **Lancashire League and Floodlit Football**

Two important events occurred during the summer of 1889. The Old Boys Football Club amalgamated with Southport Central and formed the nucleus of their reserve team, calling themselves Central Old Boys. Also, the club joined the newly formed Lancashire League. Following the success of the Football League it was hardly surprising that there would be a demand for a County Competition in Lancashire. At a meeting organized by the Secretary of the Earlestown club the Lancashire League became a reality. Isaac Smith, Central's Chairman, became the league's first treasurer.

The team was strengthened with new players including Jimmy Gee (Churchtown),

Dobson( Everton) Wilson( Stanley) McClaren( Vale of Leven),Fecitt Barton and Chew (Blackburn Rovers). Fecitt had helped Rovers to win the F.A. Cup in 1885 and 1886. Travelling arrangements were facilitated by the club committee reaching an agreement with the West Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company to obtain cheap rates for eight men coming from Blackburn.

Preston North End made a quick return the following season to open Central's new ground at Scarisbrick New Road. The ground had previously been occupied by the Southport Olympic Rugby Club and the goal posts were directly opposite the Infirmary Clock. The Southport Visiter said that the field was "sufficiently extensive, thoroughly well laid out, capitably fenced and included two excellent pavillions and a covered grandstand." It was to be Southport Central's home for the next sixteen years.

The Lancashire League programme was opened on 9th September with a visit from Rossendale, Central winning 3 -1. On 31st December when Central met Higher Walton at Scarisbrick New Road the ground was illuminated by the Wells patent limelight.

The clubs had met a short time earlier with the home team winning 3-1 but a greater part of the second half was played in semi-darkness and it was agreed to replay the match at Southport. A torchlight procession accompanied by the 3rd L.A.Y.

Band headed the visitors to the ground. Although it was raining heavily such was the novelty of the match that 3,000 spectators assembled on the ground for the 7.30 kick-off. Higher Walton took the field shortly afterwards but it was quite half an hour before Central put in an appearance they had a reputation for lateness at that time. The visitors lodged an objection before the game actually got underway so a friendly was played instead with Walton winning 2-1. It was to be more than 70 years before floodlights were erected at Haig Avenue. Later that season, 3rd March, Southport visited Bootle in another floodlit match. The lights were under the managership of Central defender Frank Sugg, a former Everton and Derby County footballer and a County Cricketer. Central won 4-1 before a crowd of 5,000.

### **Economic Measures**

During 1892-93 a Special Fund Committee was formed to liquidate the clubs debts. Their efforts raised £73, a Christmas Draw realised £53 and a number of members doubled their half guinea subscriptions, resulting in the club making a profit of £38. Early in February, many supporters took the opportunity to pay a shilling instead of 6d admittance. Central meanwhile shocked everybody by defeating Bury 2-1. The season saw the introduction of the redoubtable Tom Smith at full back. He was signed from Church and rendered 10 seasons splendid service. The star capture was inside-forward Kenny Davenport from Bolton Wanderers who had been capped twice for England in 1885 and 1890 against Wales and Ireland respectively.

Early the following season, the Hon. George Curzon, M.P. promised to present medals to the players if they finished in the first four places in the league. They duly obliged by finishing third, their highest position in the Lancashire League to date.

The team was strengthened by the signing of Jimmy Tattersall a hard but scrupulously fair wing-half who had played for the defunct Accrington 'Reds' in their early football league days. "Tatt" went on to make 194 Lancashire League appearances out of a possible 204 in eight years with the club.

In the F.A. Cup, Central beat Oswaldtwistle Rovers 9—0, Workington 5-1 but were narrowly defeated 4-3 at South Shore. The match against Fairfield on Christmas Day was the only occasion that a match was abandoned at Scarisbrick New Road, the referee calling the game off after an hour with snow freezing as it fell.

Although successful on the field Central had to effect further economies to keep solvent. The Central "Old Boys", the reserve team, cost the club £50 a season and in December it was announced that the Old Boys would be worked and financed independently of the first team. More economies were inevitable and at a meeting of the Executive a letter was read from Mr. R. S. Stuart resigning his position as Secretary. The Executive accepted the resignation and as they could no longer afford to have a paid

secretary. Don Ashton was appointed honorary Secretary. Don, one of the members of the original committee, was, like Isaac Smith, a generous benefactor during these times. Another economy measure was the Executives decision not to pay any bonuses during the summer and to run the team at £5 per week less in 1894-95.

### **NATIONAL FAME... then CRISIS**

In 1894 95 Central won national fame by reaching the first round proper of the F.A. Cup the equivalent of today's third round. After defeating South Shore 1-0, Nelson 4-0, Fleetwood 4-0{at the third attempt and Workington 5-0 after a replay they were paired against Everton at Scarisbrick New Road. A then ground record of 5000 saw the home side fight gallantly throughout but were well beaten by 3-0. Like the Cup tie of 1968 Everton wanted to transfer the match to Goodison Park. However, they were-not prepared to accede to Central's £200 guarantee. Central had been promised £5 each in the event of a win or draw. The club made £59 as their share of the gate with £30 being spent on extra accommodation and snow clearing,

After only-eight years in existence, Southport Central almost folded in May1896. In December 1895 the players who had not received full wages for a fortnight sent a "round robin" to the Committee stating that unless the money was paid they would refuse to play the following Saturday. Tom Smith, who had been absent for several weeks during illness but had his wages paid regularly, also signed the document. The Executive felt he had no grounds to complain and showed their disapproval by striking his name off their books. The mutiny was eventually quelled and the players received their wages. The Executive reconsidered their decision regarding Smith who was punished only with a short suspension In February the players, now aware of the precarious financial position, agreed to forgo one weeks wages.

Although in the middle of five consecutive wins attendances did not improve. As Central's championship challenge waned, they finished 4th, support slumped still further. A special guarantees list was started and the Honourable George Curzon MP promptly sent £5. However, only £72 was forthcoming altogether, Squire Platt, a Committee member gave a valuable fox-terrier puppy as a prize in a draw which realised £18. A special Committee was formed to confer with the Executive on how to improve the ailing fortunes of the club. They decided not to form a Limited Company even though the Guarantors, Messrs. Smith, Ashton and Emmison were prepared to take out one third of the shares. On 24th April, bereft of further ideas, the affairs of the club were temporarily suspended.

### **"SHALL IT DIE?"**

Four days after suspending operations, a meeting was held at which Isaac Smith expressed his wish to keep the club going. Posters were placed on the walls calling a further meeting asking "Shall it die?". On 4th May Southport Central was revived when a new committee was formed and Isaac Smith once again came to the rescue when he wrote off £290 owing to the Guarantors leaving the club with debts of £60. The season began disastrously with the first league win coming at the fifth attempt with a 10-1 victory at Rossendale. The Saturday evening Football Standard, edited by William Lymath, a Central Committee member who wrote under the name of 'Itinerant' celebrated in verse,

Bring out your brazen trumpets  
Have forth the sounding drum  
There's no mistake about it  
That first league victr'ys come!  
Then blow yer bloomin' ardest  
And bang that blessed drum  
Let all both near and farthest  
Know that league victr'ys come  
This latter state of Rossendale

Must surely be their worst-  
For Central landed seven goals  
'Ere they could notch their first  
Oh! Sad the fate of Rossendale  
All hope must serve be gone  
When on their own high mountain's steep  
They're routed ten to one  
Bang, Bang, along that drumlet  
For Central's spanking team  
Who waltzed all round the Hillman  
And banged 'em through like steam

Central won the return match 10-0 on Christmas Day. Inside left Jackie Kirwan scored five goals at Rossendale and three in the return match. A native of Wicklow he was Central's most sought-after player at that time and in February, 1898 he was transferred to Everton together with centre-half Harry Stringfellow for a fee of £130. He subsequently played for Tottenham Hotspur in the 1901 F.A. Cup Final and gained 16 Irish International caps.

The transfer fees enabled the club to embark on a London tour losing 5-0 at Reading and defeating St. Stephens 2-0.

With transfer fees and a curtailed wage bill the club's finances improved. At the end of the 1896-97 season Central met Preston North End in a friendly and to everyone's amazement won 6-1. Speedy outside-left Lollie Halsall subsequently to play for Blackpool and Preston, excelled.

## **RESERVES WIN THE LEAGUE**

There were two important acquisitions to Southport Central's staff during the 1897-98 Season. In September T. G. Shipley became Secretary. He had been the founder of Southport Royal in 1894. In 1895 he helped found the Southport and District League. He stayed with Central for eleven years as secretary. His nine predecessors had only nine years service between them.

In March Fred Spink was signed from Clitheroe and during a career with Central which spanned 13 years he gained the reputation of being one of the best backs in Lancashire. He had several offers to assist league clubs but preferred to remain at Southport where his coolness and resource were his outstanding characteristics. On Christmas Day 1899 he missed the train from Parbold and rather than not play he walked all the way to the ground in time for kick-off.

Central at this time fielded a settled combination, Tom Abram in goal proved to be a most consistent performer and gave five years service. Smith and Spink were generally acknowledged to be the best pair of full-backs in the league, with Cunliffe, Herbert, Hallows and Tattersall at half-back and a forward line of Charles, Hallows, Long, Lawson, Sinclair and Wilmington. Central's players continued to be in demand. Bolton Wanderers offered £120 for Jack Sinclair but Central refused to part under £200, whilst negotiations with Sheffield United for Tom Wilmington were broken-off when the price offered fell below Central's valuation.

In 1899-99 the team finished 2nd in the table and all the players with the exception of Richard Lawson, a prolific goalscorer were re-signed. Lawson signed for Newton Heath the fore-runners of Manchester United. In addition the side was strengthened with the signing of Scholes of Little Lever and Baxendale of Attley Bridge.

In July, an ambitious Summer draw took place. Prizes included one week's holiday in London plus five shillings spending allowance a holiday for a similar period in the Isle of Man three days in Blackpool and day trips to Belle Vue, Morecambe and Windermere. Southport Central Reserves stole the honours in 1900 by winning the Preston and District league The cup and flag was brought back to Scarisbrick New Road by Mr. Shipley. The reserves then defeated "The Rest" 6-1 in a challenge match. The centre-forward and captain, Roly Gibson, was an army international, a stalwart of the now

defunct Hesketh Park Club and later became a Director of Southport Football Club. He received the trophy from the Mayor, Alderman T.P.Griffiths. Thus a Southport team had won a trophy for the first time since Southport Wanderers Reserves lifted the Liverpool Junior Cup thirteen years before.

### **Crowd disturbances**

Like today referees at the turn of the century had to contend with crowd disturbances. In a game against Earlstown a visiting spectator believing the referee was favoring Central called out "when tha comes to Earlstown tha may come for tay to ahr ayse" To the amusement of the spectators the referee stopped the game and ordered the offender off the field! Against Chorley a corner was awarded to the visitors which was taken by Ashton. Some nearby youngsters gave cheek so Ashton threw the ball at them. At that point a "pugilistic" spectator intervened and he had his coat off on the boys behalf. The expected fight was only just avoided by the timely arrival of the referee.

In 1900-01 Central ran neck and neck with Stalybridge Rovers but were defeated 2-1 on Easter Monday by the Rovers in front of a record Scarisbrick New Road of 6000. That was one of only two defeats during the season and Central finished second on goal average. The regular side was, Topping, Spink (who was constantly urged to sign for Preston North End), Smith, Sinclair, Tasker, Tattersall, Atherton, Shadbolt, Long, Watson and Halsall. The team was kept together with a minimum of injuries. Jack Sinclair moved from inside-forward to succeed Walter Cunliffe. Bob Tasker, formerly of Preston North End, came in at centre-half for Herbert Hallows who had signed for Manchester City. Lollie Halsall, after two years with Preston, returned to the left wing and his partner, Lionel Watson, who played for junior club Laurel Rovers twelve months previously, made such a good impression that he joined Blackburn Rovers the following season. Meanwhile the Lancashire league had been reduced to a mere eleven clubs in mid-season by the resignation of Rochdale Town, the rugby league counter attraction and the fact that their ground was three miles from the town being contributory factors for the club's demise.

There was some dissatisfaction expressed that the Lancashire League was practically played out and supporters looked for something better. Highlights of the season were the 3-1 win over Manchester City in a benefit match for Tom Smith and the captain Jimmy Tattersall and the 5<sup>th</sup> Qualifying round Cup-ties with Darwen which Central lost 2-0 after a replay. One unpleasant incident took place at the conclusion of the last league match of the season at Haydock when a spectator hurled a brick at the referee as he left the ground which narrowly missed him and Fred Spink but caught one of the spectators above the eye inflicting a nasty gash which bled profusely.

### **Next Time Around "The Second Division"**

#### **The Second Division**

When it became known in February 1901 that there was a proposal to amalgamate the Football League with the Southern League and thus regionalise the Second Division Central decided to aim for a better class of football. They could do so with confidence. Due to economics by the Committee and the cultivation of local talent they had succeeded in clearing off the previous season's deficit and wiped £50 of the stand account leaving only a debt of £65 and the old Guarantors account of £70 outstanding. The Committee held a public meeting at the Temperance Institute to test public opinion on the advisability of making an application to the Second Division and the members voted overwhelmingly in favour. In a circular to all football league clubs, the club stressed that Southport was easily accessible by rail and all clubs with the exception of Woolwich and possibly Middlesbrough could complete the journey in one day. The Club was "an old and established one being the only one to have been connected with the Lancashire League from its commencement to the present date." Their ground was "one of the finest in Lancashire with plenty of accommodation, dressing rooms on the ground



and every convenience provided for football teams."

The proposed regional Second Division did not materialize and Preston North End's resolution to increase the Second Division by four clubs was defeated. Central were disappointed at the result receiving only five votes. The successful clubs were Burton Swifts(23), Bristol City(23), Stockport County(21) and Doncaster Rovers(16). Stalybridge Rovers(7), Walsall(7) Crewe Alexandra(5) and Darwen(0) were unsuccessful/

At the club's A.G.M. in August, William Platt was elected auditor. Mr. Platt a playing member of the old Southport Association Club, continued in that position until his death in 1938.

Central, runners-up in the Lancashire League once again in 1902, had three hard F.A. Cup-ties against Blackpool drawing home and away 0-0 but prevailing 2-1 at Deepdale. There followed three dour struggles against Darwen who finally won 1-0 at Bolton. Central were weakened when Arthur Kelly received a nasty cut over the eye which had to be stitched by the club surgeon, Dr. Hall, and prevented him from appearing for the remainder of the game.

In October, Southport created a Lancashire League and club record 11-0 win over Bacup Borough. During the season Warrington disbanded and their record was expunged but not before Central had beaten them 4-0 at Scarisbrick New Road after paying their expenses to secure their presence.

### **The Championship-at last.**

The semi-final of the Chorley Rawcliffe Charity Cup was reached in 1902 before Stalybridge Rovers defeated Central 2-1. In an earlier Cup-tie in the competition a demonstration took place at the final whistle against the referee who had disallowed a Cooper goal for offside. A crowd of between 300 and 400 made a dash for the dressing tent which the referee reached in safety, some constables kept guard at the entrance with the crowd maintaining its menacing attitude. The Committee tried to disperse the crowd. At 6.15 fully an hour after the game the referee guarded by constables and in the company of the Chairman, Mr. Robinson, was escorted to the tram. Outside the ground some dirt and a few stones were thrown, one of which struck Mr. Robinson's hat.

Fortunately, no one was hurt,

At their annual general meeting it was reported that the club was at long last out of debt and had a balance of £75. It was decided not to make an application to the Second Division. Excellent work was accomplished in the Lancashire Senior Cup. Rochdale were defeated 3-0 in the Qualifying round and both the Manchester clubs, City 1-0 away and Newton Heath 5-0 at home before going out to Burnley who scored in the last minute.

After being one of the original members of the Lancashire League, Southport Central won the Championship at their 14th attempt. Their success came in what proved to be the last season of the League. Southport suffered only three defeats and won the Championship with five points to spare. They also won the Chorley Rawcliffe Charity Cup, defeating Stalybridge Rovers 1-4 in the final. Southport showed complete superiority when they gained a 3-0 win in a Champions v The Rest match.

On May 26th, 1903 the championship medals were presented at a dinner held at Hayes Restaurant Chapel Street. The dinner was marred by the season's only disappointment which had taken place the previous day. Councillors Isaac Smith and Edwin Trounson went to London to put the club's case in their second bid for membership of the Second Division of the football league with plenty of confidence. Despite many promises of support some clubs evidently changed their minds for they received only four votes. Only one other Lancashire Club supported their application.

### **The Lancashire Combination**

Edwin Trounson pleaded Southport Central's case for admission to the Second Division. He claimed that the ground was one of the best adapted for football in the country. The grandstand held 2000 and about 20,000 more could view the game in comfort. They

could call on an 80,000 population and the town was easily accessible from all over the country. A circular sent to the league clubs stated that Southport had been in existence for a "lengthy and honourable period. "The pitch had been described by a prominent o Football league referee as the best in Lancashire The financial position was sound" being free from debt." It was stressed that the town was reputed to be the wealthiest in Lancashire and the population was only used to the association game but it was all in vain.

Southport were one of eight clubs to apply. Doncaste Rovers, Stockport County and Burnley sought re-election. The voting went Bradford City 30, Stockport County 20, Burnley 19, Doncaster Rovers 14, Crewe Alexandra 7, West Hartlepool 7, Southport Central 4 and Wellington 1 . The result made bitter reading for club officials.

With the Lancashire League defunct, Southport were admitted to the Lancashire Combination 'B' Division for 1903-04 season. Continuing the successful form of the previous season Southport won the Championship by one point from Earlestown and in a Challenge match against Everton Reserves Champions of the 'A' Division they drew 1-1 at Goodison Park.

In the F.A.Cup Central were involved in an exciting game at Accrington. Goalkeeper Jim Garvey gave a brilliant display as Stanley bombarded the Southport goal, Ben Rickerby scoring the game's only goal for Central. A Veteran oysterman Stephen Danhay of Anchor Street was one of 300 Southport supporters who made the trip. He suffered a seizure and was removed to a neighbouring cottage and was later conveyed to Southport where he died the same night. In his only interval of consciousness he murmured "Did they score?"

In the Lancashire Senior Cup Central reached the final overcoming Bury (the holders) 6-1, St. Helens Town 1-0 and Preston North End 3-2. In the final at Deepdale two goals from Lionel Watson, formerly of Southport settled the issue in Blackburn Rovers favour. Probably the season's most bizarre incident occurred when referee McQueen blew the 'final whistle' seven minutes early against Stockport County. Many supporters left the ground but others ran onto the field to explain the mistake to the referee who immediately restarted the game and played another seven minutes. There was no further scoring Southport winning 1-0.

### **LANCASHIRE SENIOR CUP SUCCESS**

Southport were promoted to the "A" Division of the Lancashire Combination for the 1904-05 campaign. They finished third behind Stockport County and Liverpool, their best placing in that league.

It was also the season that central gained their most notable success to date when they won the Lancashire Senior Cup for the first and only time in their career. To reach the final they beat Earlestown 6-1 and Blackpool and Liverpool's full first teams. The final was against Everton who fielded their reserve team at Sarisbrick New Road their first team having a cup engagement with Aston Villa the following day. Lawson and Smith gave Central a 2-0 lead at half-time and although Caldwell struck an upright and Dilly reduced the deficit, Central hung on to win a stirring game in front of 5,000 spectators Thereafter the cup was on view in Fred Dunkerley's sports shop during the day and taken to the police station every night for safe custody.

In January Central transferred Jim Garvey to Bradford City for a £100 fee and a 'match gate.' During his 2 ½ year spell with the club he had been a tower of strength and a wonderfully agile goalkeeper. Garvey was the highest paid member of the staff and was also in receipt of a summer wage.

The season was also the last the club played at Scarisbrick New Road, building development being imminent on the ground. The club first approached the Scarisbrick Estates with a view to obtaining anew ground but could not reach an agreement Several meetings were held with the Athletic Society but after inspecting their ground and being mindful of the cold winds which swept through the ground in winter the offer was not accepted.

Mr. Yates, the proprietor of Kew Gardens tried to induce them to enter terms there but following problems with the trustees of the property this proposal also fell through. It was then decided to meet Sir Charles Scarisbrick and the agent Captain Cross who declared that a ground must be found. A field in Ash Lane belonging to Mr. Rimmer a farmer was chosen and a surveyor measured the land the club wanted. Finally it was agreed to let the ground to them at a rent of £30 per annum on a 5 year tenancy. The final game was against Darwen where two goals were shared. At the end of the match the spectators joined with the band and sang 'Auld Lang Syne.'

### **Problems At Ash Lane**

Few people who attended Southport Central's Annual General Meeting in July 1905 would have believed it possible that the club would be holding a crisis meeting in December but such was the case. At the AGM, the President, Sir George Pilkington had congratulated the club on "a most successful season if not the best they had ever had." During 1904-05 the club had won the Lancashire Senior Cup and finished third in the Lancashire Combination.

It was not until 2<sup>nd</sup> December that Central recorded their first victory of the 1905-06 season, defeating Oldham Athletic 3-0. Most pre-season signings played below their reputations and a series of injuries-most notably to Syd Smith and Jack Sinclair-resulted in constant team alterations. Meanwhile the wage bill had mounted considerably but gates were down £5 per game. The move to Ash Lane, including moving the stand, erecting the hoarding and laying the pitch cost more than £200.

For the first time since the crisis of 1896 a Special Meeting was held at which it was reported that the club were £450 in debt. They had lost the proceeds of the Summer Draw due to the pressure of the removal and cup-tie income was well down. Exempt until the Fourth Qualifying Round of the F.A. Cup, Central were actually £11 out of pocket on their trip to Watford after an overnight stay in London and they lost 3-1. In the Lancashire Senior Cup, Preston North End, with former Southport player Herbie Danson scoring twice, won 3-0.

In a bid to economise Central released Jolley and McGregor. A £60 profit was realized from the hiring of the Hippodrome for the week between Christmas and New Year. Fencing and boxing competitions and a demonstration between footballing dogs were among the attractions.

More important, the side's form improved and after taking a mere twelve points from the first half of the season, twenty points from the second half meant that Central finished in 17<sup>th</sup> position and this retained their First Division status. Even though short of cash, the club took a collection for their former outside-left, Lollie Halsall whose leg had been amputated. The collection raised £7/10shillings. YMCA and Park Villa also held benefit matches for Halsall who had been a popular performer. The Promenade Bowling Club also subscribed twenty-three shillings.

The season's discovery was sixteen year old, Lol Abram, who later played with Stockport County, Hearts, Chelsea, and Cardiff City before returning to Southport in the twilight of his career in 1921. When Oldham Athletic gave Southport twenty-four hours notice to approach Abram, Central protested that they had not received the necessary legal period. In order to keep Abram, they signed him professional and because of this they unsuccessfully claimed £18 compensation from Oldham. Nevertheless, Athletic were fined £5 by the Lancashire Combination, whilst Abram became Southport's youngest ever professional. Oldham had earlier signed Joey Shadbolt who had joined Central from Birkdale South End as a 17 year old in 1893. A capable inside-forward with a good shot, he was sorely missed.

In November 1906 Southport Central recognised the services of two of their long-serving players, Fred Spink and Jack Sinclair. The latter was a product of the Southport Working Lads Club and the first of the famous footballing family to play for Southport. Both had been with the club for nine years and it was decided to give them a benefit match with the proceeds of the Lancashire Combination game with Barrow allocated to the Benefit Fund; as a result £60 was divided between the two players.

In need of a good F.A. Cup run to improve their ailing finances Southport were drawn at home to Carlisle United. Although Carlisle were only a Lancashire Combination Second Division outfit, they were much better supported than Southport and when they offered a £100 guarantee Central agreed to relinquish their home advantage. Carlisle also agreed to give them 50% of the gate receipts over 4500. Just as on the occasion seventy years later involving Newcastle United, many supporters complained bitterly about the switch but it proved a successful venture. On November 24th, 1906 a crowd of 4,550 saw the game and receipts totalled £122 - Southport's share being £103.10s 0d- but, most important of all, Southport won the game 44-0. Over eighty supporters paid the 4s.9d. rail fare to Carlisle.

The Cup trail came to a close when Northampton Town from the Southern League won 2-1. The Southport team had left Lord Street station at 7.50am and endured a tedious five hour train journey. An unfortunate goalkeeping error after Gara had equalised cost Central any chance of a replay. A 5000 shilling fund was launched and the usual concerts and draws kept the season's debt down to £70. At one concert at Southport's Albert Hall shortly after the Carlisle United victory Fred Spink sang the Toreador's song from Bizet's Carmen He was greeted with a "furore of applause" and, commented the Southport Visiter, 'he delivered it in a right rousing fashion too'. The side who finished ninth in the Combination included Billy Gate, a tricky outside-right from Blackburn Rovers who was just over 5 feet tall, and Tom Edmond, a versatile performer whose unconventional methods and agility earned him the tag of "India Rubber"

### **BLOWICK WESLEYANS**

The 1907-08 season saw Southport Central finish in sixth place. Jack Sinclair who had already wrenched a cartilage in his knee, twisted his knee in the third game of the season. At the club's expense he visited a bone specialist, who announced that the knee was not strong enough to withstand the strain of football any longer and, on his advice, Sinclair never played again. A young wing-half, Eddie Holdsworth, a product of Southport Working Lads, thus gained a place in the side and played so consistently well during the season that he was transferred for a £100 fee to Preston North End where he rendered splendid service over ten years.

When Southport Central Reserves found themselves short of players to fulfil their Lancashire Alliance commitments, Blowick Wesleyans took over their fixtures and won five out of the next six games. One of their players, seventeen year old Billy Watson, made a great impression at left half and was soon promoted to Central's first team. By March 1909 he had been transferred to Burnley for a record fee of £200. Watson went on to make 346 League appearances at Turf Moor and won England International honours. Another "Wesleyan" who was capped for England was Eddie Moscrop who joined Central some years later.

What proved to be a significant moment in the club's history came on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1908 when Edwin Clayton was appointed Secretary of Southport Central on the resignation of Tom Shipley. Clayton was highly ambitious for Central to progress in the football world and from the outset yearned for the day when they would be members of the Football League. Almost immediately an opportunity presented itself when Stoke resigned and a casual vacancy arose.

On June 21<sup>st</sup> Central were one of five clubs to apply for the place in the Second Division, but Tottenham Hotspur were elected, while Central failed to attract a single vote: it was recorded that their representative at the meeting did not speak. Clearly Mr Clayton had much work to do if his ambition were to be realised.

Southport Central finished the 1908-09 season in thirteenth place but tighter economic management and Billy Watson's transfer fee considerably reduced the bank overdraft. A novel event at Ash Lane was the Northern Union (Rugby League) match on New Year's Day, 1909. The game between the Australian Touring Team and Widnes was staged to assist Southport Central's funds. Record gate receipts of £123 resulted in the club benefitting by £60. The Kangaroos, making their first tour of England won 55-3. Their team had taken a house in Albert Road as its headquarter and conducted their entire tour

from there while training at Ash lane. The Mayor, Cllr. J.W. Paton, kicked off and afterwards entertained both teams to dinner at the Prince Of Wales Hotel.

### **FRED SPINK'S RETIREMENT**

Fred Spink, now in his eleventh season, was honoured following the home match with Blackburn Rovers when Committee member George Cranshaw invited the players and Committee to supper at the Shakespeare Hotel. A cheque was presented by the club and a beautiful silver flower stand was presented by Richard Orrell on behalf of the players. Spink, who had been captain for eight years, had been out of the team for some weeks: his arrival was greeted by loud cheering and everybody present sang "For he's a Jolly Good Fellow". Responding, Spink said he had hoped to be playing with the club until he was in receipt of his old age pension, a topical reference to a measure which had only recently been introduced by the government.

After he had badly twisted his knee early the following season he was forced to retire: this came after he had received a further benefit cheque of £30 as a result of the match with Blackburn Rovers, when Spink and the legendary Bob Crompton acted as linesmen. Without him, Southport Central's defence was drastically weakened and they were only saved from relegation by the resignations of Carlisle United and Workington. The financial position worsened considerably, a loss of £200 making a total deficit of £500 by the end of the season.

One of the few bright features of 1909-10 was the form of George Latham. He was a full-back and a popular favourite with the crowd. He became the first player to gain International honours while actually playing with Southport when he was capped by Wales against England. At the end of the season he was transferred to Stoke City and served for many years as Cardiff City's trainer. He also won the Military Cross during the First World War.

The following season, which as it transpired, was their last in the Lancashire Combination, Central defeated their old rivals Darwen in the FA Cup. Walter Knowles-linesman and president of the Darwen club-was ordered off by the referee for arguing when he refused Darwen a penalty. An even more unpleasant incident occurred on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1910 when "Dossy" Wright was sent off for jumping at an opponent. The referee was molested as he left the field and several blows were aimed at him. As a result the club were ordered to post warning notices. Wright, the captain, was a rugged quick tackling defender. He was one of the greatest characters the club ever had. As tough as teak, his pet expression used to be "I can't play football but I can stop those who think they can" It was ironic, to say the least, that his daughter Belinda should grow up to achieve national fame as a prima ballerina. Some contrast!

### **THE CENTRAL LEAGUE**

At the end of 1910-11, when Central finished in eleventh place, there was a rift between some of the reserve sides of Football League clubs like Manchester City, Everton and Liverpool and the Lancashire Combination. Southport Central joined forces with these teams in a bid to form the Central League. In all, thirteen clubs seceded from the Combination but the league refused to accept Southport's resignation which was sent by telegram to a meeting of the Combination at the Pack Horse Hotel, Bolton. The Combination felt that they were entitled to more than a mere telegram for a matter as serious as withdrawal. A further meeting held at the Queen's Hotel, Southport-at which Southport were again unrepresented-turned down their resignation request and went on to draw up the Combination fixture list. Southport, together with Rochdale, stuck by their original decision and the whole matter was referred to the Lancashire F.A who found in their favour. Southport Central were duly elected founder members of the new Central league, receiving the maximum 13 votes.

In 1911-12, for only the second time in the club's history, Southport Central reached the first round proper of the F.A Cup. Home victories over Padiham, Rossendale United and

Colne and a 1-0 win at Heywood (after a 1-1 draw at Ash Lane) had already brought Frome Town to Southport. The secretary of the Frome club caused some amusement by writing to Edwin Clayton to ask if accommodation could be obtained in the village! A crowd which numbered 3566 responded by shouting "Play up Villagers!" and Southport duly obliged by winning 4-1.

Reading, members of the Southern League, provided the opposition in the first round proper. This time Southport turned down an offered £125 guarantee to take the game to Berkshire. For the cup-ties the ground admission had to be raised according to F.A. rules from 4d. to 6d. and the stand charges were increased from 6d. to a shilling. Although the Southport players refrained from their ordinary work during the week preceding the cup-tie and went into extra training, their efforts were unrewarded. With the scoresheet blank after half an hour's play Eddie Moss crop shot straight at the Reading goalkeeper from the penalty spot: the chance had gone and Southport were beaten by two clear goals before a crowd of between 5 and 6000 who paid £174 13s 1d.

There were those in the crowd who never forgave Moss crop for that miss.

The following season he was not invited along for pre-season trials by the club and was persuaded instead by his old Blowick Wesleyan colleague Billy Watson to attend Burnley's trial matches where he shone and was duly signed up. He was subsequently twice capped by England in 1914 and in later life was Headmaster of Birkdale Council School in Bury Road for a number of years.

Another Southport product to make his mark around this time was centre-half Teddy Lightfoot, who had joined Tottenham Hotspur for £150 the previous summer. During the Edwardian period Southport was widely considered to be a footballing nursery for larger clubs. Besides the aforementioned Eddie Holdsworth and Billy Watson other local successes in League football were half-backs Lol Abram, not long transferred from Stockport County to Hearts, and Jimmy Fay at Oldham Athletic, who was originally with Southport Working Lads Club.

On December 16th, 1911 Southport Central suffered a record League defeat when Burnley Reserves thrashed them 12-3. Jack Flynn, son of the Birkdale stationmaster was the unfortunate goalkeeper on the day.

With the following season in mind, Central paraded four new signings on Good Friday 1912, one of whom, outside-left Billy Semple, had just been secured from Haslingden. Few would have predicted the monumental significance of this signing at the time. Later the same month Torn Dorward was signed from Arbroath Dorward himself gave splendid service to the club, as indeed did right-half Harry Schofield, signed some time earlier after excelling for Walkden in an F.A. Cup-tie against Southport. After several abortive attempts, the club was floated in the summer of 1912 as a Limited Company called 'The Southport Central Football Club 1912 Limited' - with a share capital of 2000 Ordinary ten shilling shares. The original directors were George R Cranshaw, George H. Collinge, James Hamer, Harry Rimmer, John Walmsley and Joseph Winterbottom.

Although it was stipulated that any shareholder with more than fifty shares would be entitled to free season tickets the organisation did not create much interest among the general public; indeed, only twenty-three subscribers (beyond the eleven guarantors) took out shares. With the team also struggling, the directors offered each player a free transfer or a cut in wages. Former Welsh international Moses Russell joined Merthyr, Fred Pagnam later to become a prolific goal-scorer with Liverpool, Arsenal and Watford - went to Blackpool and Charles Pinch was signed by Preston North End. And all that after the season had begun well with five consecutive victories.

The 1913-14 season was notable for Central's record F.A. Cup win when Lancashire Combination side Portsmouth Rangers were defeated 9-0. At the end of the campaign Central found themselves in seventeenth position in the League having taken 30 points from their 38 games.

Although war was declared on August 4th, 1914 the season went ahead as planned. Southport experienced a disastrous year finishing next to bottom with just 26 points. Stringfellow, with seventeen goals, was leading scorer for the third successive season

while Billy Caulfield, although transferred to Blackburn Rovers in the February, notched a further fifteen.

The club decided to charge soldiers half price, with wounded soldiers and sailors admitted free. On September 19th, 1914 after the match with Liverpool Reserves the crowd was addressed by the Mayor, Dr Limont, who appealed for recruits for the forces. Tebay, formerly of Croston and a valuable member of the team, joined the Liverpool Scottish just after Christmas and Anderson, the goalkeeper, joined the King's Liverpool Regiment. He was wounded on active service and wrote from hospital to a friend " I do wish I could get home before the footer season's closed as I often feel like having a go. We do play when The German's aren't about. We play with a empty jam tin. How are Southport Central going on? By November 1915 no fewer than nineteen ex-Central players were in the forces, About this time Private Jack Flynn the former goalkeeper, wrote to Secretary Edward Clayton asking for a football His letter was a touching one: 'We returned from the trenches after having had a bit of a rough time. We have had plenty of rain and it's been very cold with it" Mr Clayton duly complied with his request and helped out again several months later when Flynn wrote to ask for a second ball "the other having been kicked to death"

## **WAR TIME FOOTBALL**

In September 1915 football was completely reorganized. To save unnecessary travel it was decided to run various sections for different areas of the country. With Blackburn Rovers suspending operations altogether, Southport were called upon to join the Lancashire Section of the Football League which also included Stoke City, Port Vale and Stockport County. Their first game was against Blackpool on September 4th. Southport winning 2-0. Later on that month over 5000 spectators, including 2000 soldiers billeted in the town plus a large number of wounded soldiers admitted free watched Southport Central beat Everton whilst a then ground record 6100 paid £131 when Manchester City visited Ash Lane in October. The highest gate receipts of the previous season had been a mere £37

The team which began the 1915-16 season was Drabble, Dorward, Holbern, Holdsworth, Fay, Abram, Rigby, Caulfield, Stringfellow, Garner and Semple. Southport were regularly able to field at least six players with First Division experience. Ted Lightfoot came back from Tottenham-he was stationed at Fulwood Barracks often playing at centre forward from which position he scored 4 out of 6 goals against Preston North End at Deepdale on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1915.

Sadly he was one of a number of wartime fatalities being killed in action in July 1918 *Perseus* writing in the *Lancashire Daily Post* paid the following tribute 'Edward Lightfoot was a splendid footballer but, more than that, he was a good sportsman and a player who respected both himself and his opponents. He has joined a noble company who will leave a big void in football"

Other football wartime fatalities included Gunner Jack Waring, who had played for Chorley and Burnley as well as Southport Central and Sapper William Sinclair-one of Jack Sinclair's four footballing brothers-was killed in action in France.

From one week to the next it is impossible to predict the composition of the team owing to certain players going into the Army and others coming home on leave. Even the great Charlie Buchan, who was in the Coldstream Guards, made a fleeting appearance in mid-season: he was to have held a recruitment rally immediately after the game but heavy, rain left him with no crowd to address!

The team was seriously weakened in March 1916 when Billy Semple joined The 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion and Lol Abram the 13th of the Kings (Liverpool) Regiment, though Abram, based in Oswestry continued to turn out whenever available.

Southport finished the season ninth in the Lancashire section and following the passing of the Compulsory Service Act and the consequent dispersal of many guest players, bottom of the supplementary competition which was run to ensure a full season's programme. In this latter they managed only one win and a draw in the ten games.

The next season began with Corporal Kenneth Campbell, formerly of Liverpool and Partick Thistle, in goal; he was destined to be capped nine times by Scotland after the war. Admission was now 6d. for adults and 3d. for boys with an additional 1d. government tax on top. On Boxing Day 1916 Southport scored their most notable victory of the season before an Anfield crowd of 15000 and with Campbell, who had returned to Liverpool, guarding the home goal. George Schofield, a Crossens lad, scored the game's only goal from the left wing. Although they played good class football the team could again finish only ninth, though they improved one place in the subsidiary section.

### **SOUTHPORT VULCAN**

The 1917-18 season saw the arrival of another splendid goalkeeper in Tommy Capper who went on to play for Dundee and subsequently Southend United when they were elected to the Third Division. Even so, he had to pick the ball out of the net six times in the first match against Everton. Southport born Billy Waring was in the Goodison side and Frank Jefferis was among the scorers. Bert Rigsby another to play in the early Northern Section days, was also acquired from Everton. In defence were Crump, a left-back from West Bromwich and C.Roberts, a strong wing-half from Bristol Rovers. Southport eventually finished thirteenth out of the sixteen clubs and slipped back to bottom in the subsidiary tournament.

The following season, clean out of the blue, the club was taken over by the Mayor Cllr T Hampson - a pioneer of the car industry - who had built up the Vulcan Motor & Engineering Company in Crossens. The club was financed by this company on the express condition that it be called Southport Vulcan. A new committee was formed (with Edwin Clayton still at the helm) and the original Limited Company was wound up. The 1918-19 season was only a month old when a young centre-forward, one William Thomas Roberts, who was employed in the Vulcan on munitions work, arrived on the scene, He was regarded by many as the best centre-forward the club has ever had. He netted twice against Rochdale in his first match and week after week he continued to crack in the goals; during one match at Liverpool he hit the ball with such ferocity that it burst through the netting. He possessed phenomenal ball control and was quite deadly in front of goal. In the December against Port Vale he scored all four goals. Tommy Roberts, who was on Leicester Fosse's retained list, joined Preston North End in 1919 and remained one of football's most prolific scorers. By September 1927 he had become the first player after the war to register 200 Football League goals.

These were halcyon days as far as talent was concerned and it was generally conceded that the half-back line of C. Roberts (or Holdsworth), Fay and Abram was the best in the area. The club finished sixth and proved themselves to be one of the best sides in the North of England. There were some brilliant players working in munitions at the Vulcan: Sid Bowser-he afterwards won England International honours while with West Bromwich Albion played at inside-left and his wing partner was the former Preston North End international George Barlow.

### **SOUTHPORT FOOTBALL CLUB**

Yet despite all the promise on the field, by the summer of 1919 it looked doubtful whether the club would remain in being for very much longer. The Vulcan Company had indicated that they were no longer interested in renewing their patronage. On June 5th, 1919 a meeting was called for the purpose of reorganizing the Football Club and at a further meeting at which the Mayor, Cllr E. Wood, presided on July 29th. It was revealed that the Vulcan Motor Company had now relinquished their control: since, however, they had taken over all the assets and liabilities along with the unexpired portion of the lease of the ground Southport were effectively debt free.

The Southport Education Committee took over the lease of the Ash Lane ground and also purchased the stands- They proposed to allow the Football Club to use the ground on



alternate Saturdays. Cllr Clayton had safe guarded the club's interest by registering it in the Central League and entering it for the F.A. Cup.

It was proposed and agreed that the club should be reformed and that it should simply be Southport Football Club. The new committee which was formed comprised Messrs R.T.Bentley, J.H.Preston, H.Watchorn, J.H. Robinson, T.Rimmer, G.H.Collinge and J Winterbottom

Prior to the upheaval, the club had applied for a place in the newly enlarged Second Division of the Football League but again they suffered disappointment gaining only 7 votes. Coventry City(35), West Ham United(32), Rotherham County(28),and South Shields (28) were elected. Realistically the application for election was always doomed to failure since the Football League has never allowed "works" teams in its ranks. The reason that the Vulcan Company suddenly abandoned its interest in Southport Football Club may be explained in part by the fact that Cllr. Hampson. Vulcan's Chairman and Managing Director, was shortly afterwards imprisoned for twelve months after having been found guilty of fraudulently applying the sum of £22,266.5s 1d. to his own use! Southport's first peace-time game took place at Oldham on August 30th, 1919 Billy Caulfield scored a hat-trick and Billy Little netted the other goal in a 4-2 win. Early in the season a young inside-forward briefly appeared to partner Billy Semple; some thirty-five years later that same inside-forward now Cllr. Fred Thornley, was to join the Board of Directors.

During the immediate post-war period Southport had no more popular player than centre-forward Tommy Green. One incident involving him was vividly recalled over fifty years later by Gordon Hunt, a young schoolboy at the time.

On November 8th, 1919 Green was sent off shortly before the end of the home game with Bury Reserves for an alleged kick at Watmough. So dissatisfied were the crowd with the referee's decision that many of them remained outside the ground afterwards loudly protesting about his action. Committee member Harry Watchorn advised them to leave but they stood their ground. It was only when Green himself mounted a nearby cab and asked them for his sake to go away quietly and not create any disturbance that after giving him several loud cheers the crowd finally dispersed. At a meeting under F.A auspices on December 4<sup>th</sup> Green was fined 40s. and Southport were ordered to pay the referee's expenses for attending the meeting.

Later the same month the club were involved in further trouble over an F.A. Cup-tie. Exempted until the fourth qualifying round, Southport were drawn at home to South Liverpool and won 1-0.'South' protested that the home side had fielded an ineligible player, in that Littlejohn had played for Hurst in an earlier qualifying round. An F.A. commission met to consider the protest and held that the game should be replayed at South Liverpool's ground at the Dingle. Two goals were shared in the replay and the tie went to a third meeting at Anfield where South won 2-0.

## **LANCASHIRE JUNIOR CUP WINNERS**

Southport did not have long to wait before winning their first post-war trophy however. Competing in the Lancashire Junior Cup. they easily accounted for Prescott and Nelson. A huge crowd of over 7000 was attracted to Chorley for the drawn semi-final but in the replay Southport won through by two clear goals.

The final was against Lancaster Town at their Giant Axe ground and Southport won the cup with a Billy Hooper penalty 12 minutes from time after Billy Little had been tripped in the area. Hooper, an experienced campaigner with Grimsby Town and Nottingham Forest signed for Lancaster the following season. More records fell as 6347 paid £340.1s.10d., Southport's share being £117.

The team which represented the club in the final was: Halsall, Dorward, Yates, Schofield, Marshall, Norton, Hooper, Caulfield, Green, Little and Semple. Shortly afterwards centre-half Jack Marshall was transferred to Preston North End. The season ended with Southport in sixteenth position- disappointing considering they had headed the table at the end of October.

The success of 1919-20 was undoubtedly full-back Wilf Yates, a Southport Trinity product, who was transferred to Preston North End in the close season and later assisted Tranmere Rovers and Crewe Alexandra. Local talent was now seizing its chance with Billy Little, Harry and "Topping" Sinclair, "Salty" Halsall and Billy Glover establishing themselves in the Central League team.

In May 1920 the question of the formation of a Third Division of the Football League with Northern and Southern sections was considered at a meeting in Sheffield and it was decided to proceed with the proposal. The Northern clubs unanimously carried a resolution that the formation of a Third Division was in the best interests of football, pledging themselves to everything in their power to facilitate its adoption: but the following month it was announced that, subject to obtaining the consent of the F.A. a Third Division of the Football League would be formed for 1920-21 with such division being composed entirely of clubs from the Southern League. The clubs in the proposed Northern Section did not commend themselves to the Management Committee as being suitable and it was agreed that the matter would be further considered the following season.

The Northern clubs convened a meeting at the Grand Hotel, Manchester on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1920 and passed the following resolution: "That those present do all they possibly can do to press forward with the programme for the 1921-22 season" A committee was elected with Southport's own Edwin Clayton as its Secretary. A Northern Section of the Football League Division 111 now appeared a real possibility, but would Southport be admitted?

### **THE LEAGUE-AT LAST!**

The 1920-21 season was completely overshadowed by the club's attempt to gain admission to the proposed Third Division North. Secretary Edwin Clayton played a large part in its formation but the voting could not have been much closer.

At a special meeting of the Football League held at the Connaught Rooms, London on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1921 Southport were one of twenty-eight applicants for the proposed Northern Section. After the First and Second Division clubs agreed to the formation of the section on the recommendation of the Football League Management Committee it was proposed that fourteen clubs be elected en bloc. This was passed unanimously. Thus Accrington Stanley, Ashington, Barrow, Chesterfield, Crewe Alexandra, Darlington, Durham City, Hartlepool United, Lincoln City, Nelson, Rochdale, Tranmere Rovers, Walsall and Wrexham were accepted. A ballot was then taken to admit four more and those who received the most votes were Wigan Borough with 34 and Halifax Town, Stalybridge Celtic and Southport with 25 votes each. For the record, the unsuccessful clubs were Castleford Town(18), Rotherham Town(13), Blyth Spartans(9), Gainsborough Trinity(8), Doncaster Rovers(6), West Stanley(6) Wakefield City(6), Lancaster Town(3), Scunthorpe(3) and South Liverpool (1). The Division was made up to twenty clubs by the inclusion of Stockport County who dropped down from the Second Division and Grimsby Town who were transferred over from the Southern Section.

Mr Clayton who represented the Southport club together with committee member Walter Parkinson, could take satisfaction from the fact that thirteen years after first proposing a Third Division his ambition had been realized. On a later occasion he was presented with an inscribed gold watch on behalf of the clubs in appreciation of his efforts.

Southport's last season in the Central League saw them finish in eighteenth position with 32 points from their 42 games. The most impressive feature of 1920-21 on the field was the Billy Semple, Tom Dorward and Harry Schofield benefit match in April which attracted a new record crowd of 7000 to the Haig Avenue enclosure, Ash Lane having recently been renamed in recognition of Earl Douglas Haig, who had been made a Freeman of the Borough the previous year.

On April 4<sup>th</sup> 1921, at a wildly enthusiastic public meeting at the Temperance Institute Assembly Rooms, with hundreds of supporters unable to gain admission the club once again became a Limited Liability Company with a share capital of £4000 divided into 8000 ten shilling shares. The qualification for directorship was then only twenty shares and the members of the first board were Richard T. Bentley (Chairman), Fred Lawlor,

Walter Parkinson M.B.E, Fred Read, Fred W.Hyde, John W. Robinson, Sam H. Banner, ASrthue E.Hindley, Henry Watchorn and John H. Preston. The club issued a prospectus explaining that it was being formed to promote "Football, cycling, cricket, trotting, tennis, bowls, pedestrian tournaments, athletic sports, fetes and galas" The new Southport Football Club was thus launched and after forty years of courageous and determined endeavour, the town was at last firmly on the football map.

## **THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

Twenty years after first applying for membership of the Second Division. Southport Football Club were elected to the Football League with the formation of the Third Division North in March 1921.

Their election was largely due to the efforts of Edwin Clayton the hon. secretary who was one of the leading lights along with Alderman Cropper, of Chesterfield, in urging the formation of the Northern Section. He was secretary of the Northern Section until 1935, as well as being a member of the Football League Management Committee.

Having finished their last season in the Central league 19<sup>th</sup> out of 22, the team was strengthened with several new signings, amongst them were Sandgrounders Jimmy Fay and Frank Drabble from Bolton Wanderers and Lol Abram from Cardiff City. In all, 13 locals appeared in the first team that season. The only players to cost a fee was William Greatorex, a full back from Preston-and that a mere £75!

Improvements to the ground included the erection of a covered stand on the popular side paid for by the supporters club and the extension of the stand bordering Haig Avenue.

Centre stand season tickets cost £2-2-0, wing stand £1-1-0 and ground £1.

Southport's first Football League game was against Durham City. A 7000 crowd saw Billy Glover score in a 1-1 draw. Southport were represented by Drabble, H.Sinclair, Bainbridge, Skinner, Little, Abram, Appleton, Glover, Wray, Rigsby and Semple.

During October, Grimsby Town visited Haig Avenue and were thrashed 7-1. Billy Glover scored 6 which still remains a club record for one player and veteran Billy Semple scored the other. In addition Rigsby missed a penalty and Southport played the second half with only ten men, Skinner being injured.

In the Cup, Southport reached the first round proper, the equivalent of the present day third round and shocked the football world by holding First Division Blackburn Rovers to a 1-1 draw at Ewood Park before bowing out 2-0 in the replay at Haig Avenue before a then record crowd of 12408. They had previously defeated Second Division Coventry City 1-0 at Haig Avenue. Glover scored the goals against both of these teams, to add to his 26 goals in the League.

A satisfactory ninth position was reached which would have been higher but for a deplorable injury crisis after 20 points had been secured from the 16 games up to Christmas. Yet almost £2000 was lost during the season, a familiar story which was to recur again and again in the years that followed.