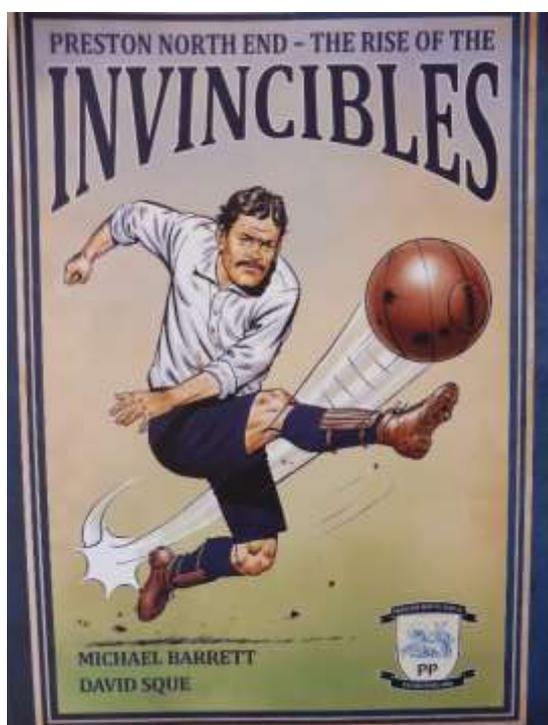


## “... His Famous Footballing Brother, Bob Howarth...”

I recently signed up to the family history database, FindMyPast, a major attraction being they included the British Newspaper Archive in their coverage. Many have discovered that this is not as comprehensive as it claims, so for my first foray I thought I would look up someone I knew was there, namely, the cousin of my great grandfather, Sir Alfred Howarth. He had been Town Clerk of Preston from 1907 to 1933, and was knighted for his public service in the New Year's Honours of 1931. Sure enough, a large article came up from a series of profiles of local worthies under the collective title of 'Each Man in his Time...' in the Lancashire Daily Post, dated June 1935. Instead of just listing his achievements in office, this article was entitled 'His Life Turned on a Chance Meeting: Office Boy, Town Clerk, Knight', written from the prospective of when he went out with his father, at the age of 12 in 1880, looking for his first job, failing at his first interview, but then being directed to the town hall by a chance meeting with the caretaker of the building.



Whilst this article on his early life was extremely interesting, I did know quite a bit about Alfred's subsequent career, however, what I didn't know was what it revealed about his brother, known to me only from the census as Robert Henry Howarth, a solicitor's clerk, then solicitor in his own right. Here he was described as Alfred's "famous footballing brother, Bob Howarth, of the 'Old Invincibles', North End's classic side"!

This referred to Preston North End being unbeaten in the season of 1888-89, achieving the double of becoming Football League Champions and winning the first English Association Challenge Cup, now the FA Cup. This involved the very early days of national football, when the Preston Herald wrote in September 1890 that it was the intention of the paper, "during the football season which has just commenced, to pay particular attention to Association Football in the

country in general, and in Lancashire in particular.... Secretaries of clubs desirous of making the exploits of their organisations known, will find in the 'Herald' the best medium for doing so."

At this time no-one was a full time professional football player, so sides often had difficulty presenting a full team. In a 1889 game against Newton Heath, a team grown out of the Carriage and Wagon Department of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, it was reported, "Newton Heath were at their full strength, and in order to avoid presenting a single weak side to the attacks of the League Champions, they had kept back J. Doughty from playing in the day's international [games played between the home nations, in this case England vs. Wales]. On the other hand, North End were without half-a-dozen of their ordinary team, F. Dewhurst, Goodhall and Trainer being engaged in the international match at Stoke, Thomson having been called suddenly on private business to Scotland, and Howarth being unable to leave urgent business at Lancaster Assizes."

This match was eventually called off and declared a draw, due to the incursion of the 12,000 strong crowd onto the pitch, basically only a marked-out field. In 1902, Newton Heath changed their name to Manchester United and moved to their Old Trafford ground in 1910.

So... little did I think I would be investigating the early days of football in the interests of family history, but it just goes to show that it can involve much more than dry dates and names. Purely from the original article mentioned, one could go on to examine such topics as the differences in education over time, the effects of rapid industrialisation, the opportunities for self improvement and the concept of social mobility through a career.

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