

From County Ground to Battleground
The Story Of Freddie Wheatcroft.



Frederick George Wheatcroft

1882-1917

Frederick (Freddie) George Wheatcroft was born in the autumn of 1882 in Alfreton, a former coal mining town in North Derbyshire. He was the son of James Wheatcroft, a grocer, also born in Alfreton, and Mary Garratt. His grandfather, William was part of the tailoring Wheatcroft dynasty of Ashover.

He lived with his three older brothers, William, Leonard and Arthur, and two younger sisters Ethel and Gertrude above the shop at 114 King Street Alfreton.

The 1901 census has his occupation as a school master, his sister Gertrude Wilson was an assistant school mistress at the local council infants school.



King Street Alfreton

Freddie, as he preferred to be called, started his football career playing for local team Alfreton F.C. a side formed initially by the Miners Welfare Club. He moved to Division One club Derby County in 1903. He was a centre forward but found his opportunities with the first team limited as his rival for the number nine shirt was non other than the legendary England striker Steve Bloomer. He joined Swindon Town for the first time as an amateur in 1904 making 14 appearances before returning to Derby County the following season. He had spells with Fulham and Reading, but

it was to Swindon Town he kept returning, playing a total of 245 games for them and scoring 98 goals.

One of his greatest moments must have been Swindon's FA Cup giant killing match against Everton on Saturday 9th of March 1912, which they won 2-1.

For the last five years, "The Robins" were building a fine reputation as one of the best football teams in the Southern League. Winners of the Dubonnet Cup and holders of the Southern League shield, they had already claimed the scalps of both Tottenham Hotspurs and Arsenal in previous FA cup ties, but found themselves playing a little below par this term, so it was with some trepidation that they turned out to face Everton at the County Ground that afternoon. Everton were a side boasting five internationals and were fighting it out with Blackburn for the league title.



Swindon Town Football Club 1912

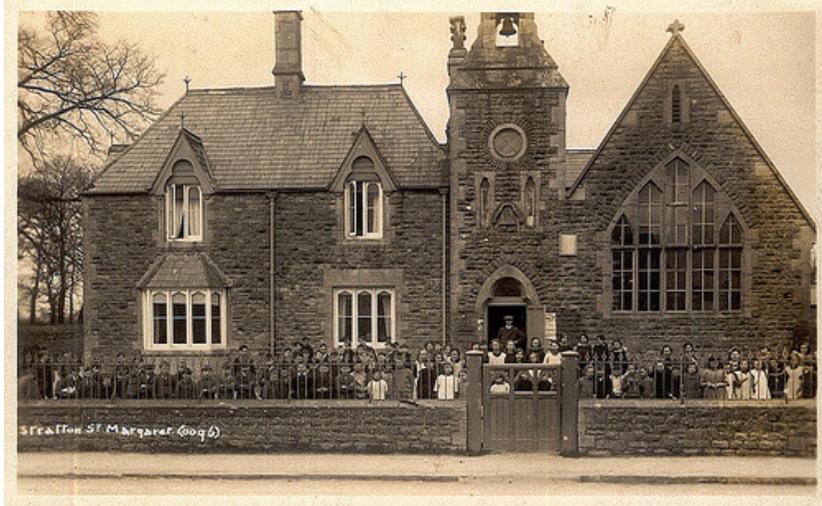
The tiny County Ground was packed to its capacity as the two teams emerged onto a badly cut up field in the glorious Spring sunshine, with the fans in good voice. The home side had a shaky start with Everton star Frank Jefferis missing a sitter. Swindon's opener was a classic counter attack with a forty yard pass finding Freddie Wheatcroft whose inch perfect through ball found Bob Jefferson, who scored. The second, came on twenty minutes, when Lamb's corner was met with a perfect unchallenged header by Archie Bown. Everton had many chances to score throughout the

rest of the first half and forced Swindon goalkeeper, Len Skiller into making several top quality saves. Within ten minutes of the restart, Everton managed to pull a goal back. Everton pushed up looking for an equalizer , with Swindon penned in their own half and with Wheatcroft left on the half way line as a virtual spectator., Swindon dug in and each Everton attack cleared, drew a huge cheer from the home support, in the near fourteen thousand crowd. Everton tired and it was Swindon who hit the post in the dying minutes of the game and eventually came out winners of this thrilling FA cup tie.

Sadly Swindon lost the semi final to Barnsley, when only a fingertip save from the Barnsley goalkeeper denied Wheatcroft a goal that would have sent Swindon through to the F.A. Cup Final instead.

Freddie represented England at International Amateur level and went on to play the best football of his career at Swindon.

Frederick was headmaster at Kingsdown School, Stratton St Margaret, Swindon.



Kingsdown School.

In September 1912 he married Susan Jessie Jobson, a fellow schoolteacher, daughter of Robert an engineer pattern maker from Croydon, and Susan Grace Crandon.

Their daughter, Muriel , was born in 1916.

They lived at number 18, The Mall, Swindon.

When war broke out ,league football was suspended for the duration ,although the club continued to play friendly games against local opposition during the conflict and also against military teams from the Wiltshire Regiment of Royal Engineers and the Army Flying Corp.

Frederick George Wheatcroft enlisted with the 5th Battalion (Territorial) attached to "B" Company, 13th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment.

Second Lieutenant Wheatcroft as part of the 40th division headed to Bourslon on 23rd November 1917. After two days and nights of ferocious fighting the 40th captured Bourslon Wood, a day later parts of the village were also under allied control. Victory came at a terrible price, more than 3,000 men had been killed, injured or captured.

To recall the gallantry shown over those three long days an acorn and two oak leaves were added to the divisional badge of the 40th division.

Near Bourlon, 23 November 1917.



On the 26th of November 1917, the order came to withdraw the 40th division, so that the weary and depleted troops could be replaced with men from the 62nd. Wheatcroft and his men had advanced ahead of the rest of the allied line and were in a very dangerous position. Tanks sent to support their advance never materialised. Troops sent to provide covering fire were forced back by the enemy. The 13th East Surreys had become totally isolated. They sought shelter in a deserted house on the edge of the village.

Constant artillery bombardment crumbled the walls of the house, a few men escaped into the woods, but many died, including 2nd Lieutenant Frederick George Wheatcroft.

He was buried in Anneux British Cemetery, Nord, France, Plot 1, Row F, Grave 12.



Grave of Frederick Wheatcroft

