

Destiny called for cup heroes who ended a 17-year wait

United chairman's vision realised

Single-minded ambition led to success for Aylesbury United FC. **Mike Snell** reports on the 1914 footballing team that delivered for their chairman.

Easter Monday 1914 began like most other holiday weekends for 55-year-old Thomas Kyle. The morning family chatter and clamour rose and filled the comfortable, eight-roomed house on the corner of Bicester Road and Mount Pleasant, Aylesbury. Thomas sat down to breakfast with his wife, Blanche, and five of their nine children.

But it was no ordinary holiday for Thomas. While his demanding job as Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures for Buckinghamshire County Council could be placed on hold for a day, there was something else pressing on his mind that morning.

Thomas was chairman of Aylesbury United Football Club. He was one of a small group of people who, in 1897, had persuaded three junior football teams in the town to merge in order to build a single, more successful, club. And, by 5.00 pm on this cloudy April day there would be justification for Thomas's single-minded enthusiasm nearly 18 years ago.

For today Aylesbury United



The 1913/1914 Berks and Bucks Senior Cup winners. The man in a pale suit (second from right) is believed to be club chairman Thomas Kyle. Photo courtesy of the Bucks Herald.

were playing in the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup Final – one of the competitions the newly formed Aylesbury club had targeted for success. The club had already enjoyed their best playing season yet in 1913/14, riding high in the Spartan League and likely to finish second behind Chesham Generals.

But it was the B&B Senior Cup that held a special place in Thomas Kyle's ambitions – a true test against the best teams in the region. Thomas was so enamoured with this year's competition that he donated – at his own expense – a new tall-handled trophy. That would sit very nicely with Aylesbury United's name engraved on it, he thought. He might also have mused on the relevance of the date too: the 13th – lucky or unlucky?

Thomas Kyle was not alone in his excitement. The match aroused extraordinary interest, not only in Aylesbury, but in other footballing centres of the two counties. Special trains from Aylesbury and Maidenhead United (their opponents) were packed with enthusiastic fans. The game was being played at Loakes Park, High Wycombe, the home of Wycombe Wanderers and the remarkable crowd of 8,000 was a record.

The correspondent for the *Bucks Advertiser* attempted to capture the scene as the game approached its kick-off:

“The entrances were thronged with would-be spectators. Dead ducklings

were sported as mascots. Imitation ducks were worn by thousands, whilst there were numerous umbrellas with panels of green and white, and a model duck sitting aloft. Maidenhead enthusiasts sported a banner in red and black and wore top hats adorned in these colours ... Cheers, counter cheers and the inevitable 'quack! quack!' marked the meeting of rival supporters, and the greatest good humour and enthusiasm prevailed."

The players

If his chairman, Thomas Kyle, was feeling nervous when he rose that morning, spare a thought for Oscar Horne. Oscar had played for Aylesbury for some seasons and was their established captain. He was a winger, with an eye for goal, but had so far not been able to realise the reward that usually comes with a successful team: a winner's medal. The Berks and Bucks Senior cup final represented another opportunity – maybe his last! - for glory.

Twenty-two-year-old Oscar was from a farming family. His father Edwin owned the 600-acre Cottesloe Farm at Wing, near Aylesbury. Oscar was one of eight – three brothers and four sisters who were all involved in running the farm. His brother Dennis – the youngest sibling – was also a keen footballer and had spells playing for United.

Aylesbury were undoubtedly the underdogs in the contest, with Maidenhead having won the senior cup for the third time in 1911/12 when they beat Aylesbury United 2-0. Today they were at full strength with both their star strikers W E Foss and K A M Inglis available (having chosen not to join a playing tour with Oxford City). Worse still Aylesbury had lost their regular full back, F Halsey, to injury in a recent game against Woodford Albion. At the last minute a young player, Albert Small, was drafted in from Aylesbury's Rivet Works FC where he was captain (Rivet won the Aylesbury and District League the season before).

Aylesbury United came into the cup final straight from a league defeat two days earlier at the hands of 1912/13 Spartan League champions, 2nd Coldstream Guards FC. They played away at Windsor, having travelled in a "motor car" to the Bridge Hotel (where they changed into their kit) and then travelled the short distance by launch on the Thames to the ground! Aylesbury went down 2-1, which was to be only their fourth defeat in their league campaign that season.



The entrance gates to Loakes Park, shortly before the ground closed in 1990.

When One Great Scorer comes
to write against your name
he marks, not that you won or lost,
but how you played the game.

Alumnus football - Grantland Rice (1880-1954)

The life of Thomas Kyle

Kyle was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1858. He moved to England when a young man and married Blanche Mary Boyd from Cockermouth in 1885. He worked for HM Customs and was a keen all-round sportsman, including cycling, rowing and tennis.

The couple, with their young family, lived a peripatetic life – including spells in London and Sussex – but in 1889 saw the establishment of Buckinghamshire County Council (which became Buckinghamshire Council, a unitary authority, in April 2020). In the same year increasing concerns over short weight and short measure had led to the Weights and Measures Act of 1889 and the newly-formed council needed someone to handle this important development. They called upon Thomas Kyle who accepted and moved to Aylesbury. He became a leader in his field – serving on three Government committees over the years – and was Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures for BCC for 38 years, until his retirement in 1928.



Kyle's enthusiasm for sport beyond his now home town was, seemingly, insatiable. He was appointed to both the Southern League referees and Football League linesmen lists in 1901. He took charge of four international matches in 1908-09, including the Denmark v France "B" game at the 1908 London Olympics. He was appointed a linesman for the 1910 FA Cup Final between Newcastle United and Barnsley. That year he was made an honorary member of the Belgium Union of Athletics Sports' Societies, a body that controlled all sport in Belgium. He received the honour because he was regarded as being "a

Despite the loss of Halsey they still had a very settled team with a good mix of experience and youth. The team followed the usual formation of the time:

In goal was **A E Carr**;

R A Dandridge and **Albert Small** were the full backs;

H Rhodes, **Joe Saunders** and **Wilfred Bateman** were the centre backs. Saunders, aged 32 and married, was an experienced footballer and former Aylesbury United captain who worked in the press room of local printers Hazell, Watson and Viney;

R V Ravenscroft and **Herbert Cook** were attacking midfielders. Ravenscroft was an experienced winger from Lancashire. Cook was a 26-year-old from Bletchley who played on the right wing. He lived with his widowed mother, Jane, and two siblings who worked at a brush manufacturing firm in Bletchley;

Aaron Ellis, **Charlie Perkins** and **Oscar Horne** led the forward line. Ellis was a talented winger who was born in Earlestown, Lancashire, and played for Lancashire and Cheshire county sides before moving to Aylesbury. For many years Ellis, aged 36, was an iron turner with the Bifurcated and Tubular Rivet Company in Aylesbury before becoming landlord of the Bricklayers Arms, Walton Street, in spring 1915, where he remained until the 1940s. He died in 1951 aged 73. Centre forward Perkins was a 26-year-old house painter from Leighton Buzzard and Horne was on the left wing.

For this match Cook was preferred to Joe Ginger, a 28-year-old carpenter from Leighton Buzzard, who had been in good scoring form (he scored 19 goals for United in the 1913/14 season). Fred Coleman, aged 23 from Wingrave, was new to the squad at the beginning of the season and was unlucky to be left out.

The match

Mr A C Hughes from Wokingham blew his whistle to start the game at 3.30 pm and from the off Ellis, Perkins and Horne made life difficult for Maidenhead with a series of promising attacks. Ellis had several powerful shots saved or beaten away. Soon, though, Maidenhead were themselves in the ascendancy and the Aylesbury goalkeeper Carr had to be on his toes. Aylesbury United came close to the opener when good work by Perkins put Ellis through on an open goal but the centre forward's shot was weak and the Maidenhead goalkeeper Gibson was able to recover and clear the danger. Throughout the first half the game was played at a fast pace.

friend of Belgium" after visiting the country for six successive years to officiate at the annual tournament of the Leopold Club.

On settling in the town Thomas lost no time in taking an interest in the local sporting scene. In particular, he became chairman of Aylesbury Town FC, one of the town's three football clubs. He quickly decided that Aylesbury would be better served by a single, united club playing at a higher level. He made his views known at the first annual meeting of Aylesbury Town in May 1897 and, together with St Mary's Church curate, Rev Arthur Jones (regarded as the founder of Aylesbury United), planned the subsequent successful merger of Town FC, Aylesbury Night School FC and Printing Works FC.

Kyle was appointed chairman of the new, united club and went on to hold the reins until he resigned in 1922, citing his growing voluntary workload as a leading football legislator and administrator in the south of England. He was a member of the FA Council and the Berks and Bucks FA for 23 years up to his death, and was also chairman of the Spartan League.

At the time of his death Thomas Kyle was living at Prestwood Lodge, near Great Missenden. His demise came quickly: he was admitted to High Wycombe Memorial Hospital suffering from pleurisy following an attack of pneumonia at home. An operation was performed but his condition became critical and he died on the morning of 7 March 1932 aged 73. A funeral service was held at All Saints Church and he is buried in High Wycombe Cemetery.

The second half opened in sensational style. Before Maidenhead had settled down Ellis shot at goal, but directed the ball to the corner; here Ravenscroft retrieved it and floated in a great centre which an advancing Perkins headed home. Gibson grasped at the ball but couldn't hold on and, within 30 seconds of the re-start, Aylesbury United were in front 1-0. United fans were exultant and the cheering lasted for several minutes.

The pace of the football was cranked up further as Maidenhead chased an equaliser. Aylesbury's Carr, Dandridge and Small (playing out of his skin) continued to thwart their opponents' constant attacks. It wasn't all one way though with Aylesbury counter-attacking on a number of occasions and great work from Horne, Perkins and Cook came close to doubling the lead.

Maidenhead almost saved the match in the dying minutes; Inglis slipped through the defence in characteristic style and took the ball to the touchline where he placed it squarely across the goal. Wooster and Foss were waiting but Carr's hand shot out and deflected the ball away from

the Maidenhead forwards. Rhodes relieved the tension with a sensible boot up the centre of the field!

Aylesbury United survived the final seconds and club history was made. The crowd invaded the pitch and, cheering, carried Horne, Perkins and Carr shoulder high. Albert Small grabbed the match ball as a souvenir! Aylesbury's dressing room was besieged by crowds wishing to congratulate the players.

Outside the Red Lion Hotel in Wycombe town centre where the players and officials were entertained to tea, the lively scenes continued. Captain Oscar Horne came out on the portico above the front door and in response to calls for a speech, said that he believed Aylesbury United had never had a better team than the present eleven.

For the team, though, it wasn't over yet. Returning to Aylesbury by train at around 8.30 pm the players were met at the station by thousands more fans crowding Great Western Street. When the train came to a standstill and the players appeared there was tremendous cheering, and the Printing Works Band added to the welcome, playing Handel's "See The Conquering Hero Comes".

The *Bucks Advertiser* reported: "Members of the team were carried shoulder high, headed by Horne with the cup held aloft, and the progress through the town to the Red Lion Hotel was one of great enthusiasm. The large crowd in Kingsbury made repeated calls for the team, and they individually appeared at one of the windows of the hotel with the cup. Horne made a speech saying that no doubt the loyal support received by the club had

helped in a large measure towards winning the cup."

Halsey was awarded a winner's medal because of his service throughout the competition's earlier rounds.

The pundit's view

The *Advertiser's* sports pundit commented on the players' performances. Aylesbury's Rhodes was reckoned to be the best of the 22 on the pitch. Goalkeeper Carr had saved the game in the last minutes and, given the strength of the Maidenhead forward line, had not had a great deal to do.

Dandridge was the best full back on the field being sure in his tackling and fairly accurate in his passing. Newcomer Small, who had obtained a senior medal when still in junior football, came through a trying ordeal with great credit. He was unsettled by the immense crowd, the pundit thought, but quickly recovered and distinguished himself in the second half.

Saunders had a match-winning combination opposing him and he stuck to them like a leech. The occasions on which Maidenhead strikers Inglis and Foss beat Saunders could be counted on the fingers of one hand for he never gave them an inch of rope.

Bateman was equally good. He was unhurried in times of the greatest stress, and used his head to distinct advantage time after time. Ellis led the forwards with spirit, and kept the ball well distributed, but his shooting was not dangerous. It was singular, opined the pundit, that the worst shot of the game

should have paved the way for the winning goal, but this was the luck of the game. Horne and Perkins played attractive football on the left wing, and the latter was the best forward on the field and one piece of trickery, which left three Maidenhead defenders bewildered, certainly roused the crowd! Horne gave the Maidenhead defence a worrying time, and the Aylesbury captain produced his best form.

Cook worked with enthusiasm, but was over anxious in front of goal. He gave his partner some excellent passes and made the right wing a force to be reckoned with. Ravenscroft pleased all with his dash and manifest enthusiasm for the game. He frequently raised hopes of a goal by departing from the traditional wing game and by cutting in towards goal with the ball, but his shots were not effective.

The future

As the cheering and exultation for Aylesbury United's achievement died away late on that Monday evening, there remained only the ominous gathering clouds of political unrest over Europe. Within just a few months Britain and her allies would be at war with Germany; that joyous team of young Aylesbury footballers - described by Horne as Aylesbury's best ever - would be torn apart and would never play together again.

Sources and acknowledgements:

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