

NOSTALGIA

The lasting legacy of Frank Adams

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with Mike Dewey

A few weeks ago, in the August 16 edition of the paper, we looked at the early life of an iconic figure in the town for much of the 20th century, Frank Adams. We will now conclude the story of Frank's life, as a sportsman, businessman and benefactor.

After serving in the Army and then the Royal Flying Corps during WWI, Frank was appointed a Captain of the Army of Occupation in Germany. He returned home towards the end of 1919, and immediately resumed his footballing career with Wycombe Wanderers, once again as captain of the team.

Now playing at centre-half, he led the club to two consecutive Spartan League Championships and four Berks & Bucks Senior Cup wins. He also captained the Combined County side for five seasons, and led them to their first Minor Counties Championship in the 1923-24 season. By this time, WWFC had been elected to the Isthmian League, a move vigorously supported by Frank.

Frank also found the time to get married, to Kathleen Whincup. Her family farmed at the top of Marlow Hill, where the Girls High School is now located. The couple had two sons: Donald, born in 1918, and Jack in 1921.

Frank retired from playing football in 1929 at the age of 37, but continued his association with the club, serving on the Wanderers' committee. This was at the time when the Loakes Park ground was being developed into a proper football stadium.

For the town and Wycombe Wanderers Football Club, the lasting legacy of Frank is his great act of generosity in donating Loakes Park to the football club. This had been in the ownership of Lord Carrington, so how is it that Frank Adams was able to make this extremely generous donation? To answer that, we need to consider the career of Frank as a businessman.

After his WWI service, Frank resumed his career as a photographer. He soon decided to diversify the business and, by 1924, had established his first sports and games shop at 99 Oxford Road. These premises had been occupied by W. H. Hayter, newsagent and music seller. The shop also served as the local post office. Adams Studios became one of the main photographic agencies in the Wycombe area, undertaking a wide range of assignments in portrait, landscape and commercial photography. Frank also successfully developed his sports shop, of which his son Donald became managing director.

By the early 1950s, Frank had further diversified his business activities into property development and had a Frank Adams Real Estate office in Easton Street, next door to the Telephone Exchange. Clearly, proper-

ty development could yield greater profits than photography or selling sports equipment. This gives the clues as to how Frank was able to build up the funds to purchase Loakes Park from Lord Carrington. And how this came about is an interesting story.

Frank's property development activities started around 1930 and grew out of his friendship with Lord Carrington. The first evidence we have is a conveyance dated April 10, 1931, between Lord Carrington and the Carrington Trustees and Frank Adams. Frank purchased land on the south side of Daws Hill Lane for the construction of up to seven detached homes. This was followed by further deals in the 1930s with Lord Carrington, including the purchase of land on the west side of Marlow Hill, at The Turnpike in Cressex Road, and at the junction of Desborough Avenue and Marlow Road.

We have some idea of the full extent of Frank's property development from notes he made on a Christmas card. We can imagine Frank in old age sitting down one day in his favourite armchair, thinking back over what he has achieved, and writing on the card a list of the property he has acquired for redevelopment. There are around 100 properties listed, stretching far and wide throughout the southern part of the country.

It seems that Frank originally began discussions with Lord Carrington's Land Agent about the possibility of purchasing Loakes Park in 1939/40, but these were cut short by Frank's service in WWII. Nearing 50, he was too old for active service, but he had a very important part to play in the war effort.

He served in the RAF and was granted a commission on July 26, 1940, "for the duration of hostilities" as a Pilot Officer in the Administrative and Special Duties Branch. He was appointed Command Physical Training Officer. This involved organising physical and recreational training on a large number of RAF stations throughout the country. Then with the approach of the Normandy Landings on June 6, 1944, D-Day, he was attached to the 2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF) with the rank of Squadron Leader. In this role, he was responsible for the entire organisation of the recreation of RAF personnel on the continent. He was subsequently appointed to the rank of Wing Commander.

In this role, he followed the allied advance across France into Germany. On August 30, 1944, from somewhere in France, Frank wrote a letter to Lord Carrington's Land Agent. In this, he states that he read in the local paper, referring to the Bucks Free Press, that the High Wycombe Cricket Club had purchased their ground along the London Road from Lord Carrington. Saying he had enjoyed many hours at Loakes Park and that he wanted to give other lads the same opportunity, he offered to purchase the site.

After a period of negotiation, Frank agreed to pay "3,000 pounds for a parcel of land containing 6 acres one rood or there-



Above: the shop of W. H. Hayter, newsagent and music seller, at 99 Oxford Rd, High Wycombe, c.1912. This was acquired by Frank Adams in the early 1920s. Below: a postcard by Adams Studios, showing the junction of Church St and Castle St c.1930. The buildings shown in Castle Street still stand, although no longer covered with ivy.



abouts situate in and forming part of Loakes Meadow in the Borough of Chepping Wycombe". A Deed of Gift between Frank Adams and the Trustees of WWFC for the above parcel of land was drawn up and the ceremony to formally hand over the land held on April 19, 1947. Frank was appointed Patron of the Club and played an active role in the 'behind the scenes' management, helping to bring top coaches to Loakes Park.

At around the same time, Frank's sterling work to ensure the physical fitness and bolster the morale of RAF personnel during WWII did not go unnoticed. In 1947, he was elected as a member of the Football Association, as a Divisional Representative. During the next 20 years or so he served on various FA committees before being elected a Life Member in 1970. He developed close friendships with Walter Winterbottom, the England manager in the 1950s, and Sir Stanley Rous, the president of FIFA. As a member of the FA Selection Committee and an England representative, he made a number of tours worldwide to promote the game.

Ever the benefactor, Frank himself came up with the idea that after the abolishment of the distinction between amateur and professional football and the consequent ending of the Amateur Cup competition, smaller clubs should have the chance to play in a cup final at Wembley. So he personally donated a new trophy, the FA Challenge Vase, to the Football Association. The first competition was in the 1974-75 season.

Frank's wife Kathleen died in 1961 after a long illness, through which Frank nursed her. He married for a second time to Muriel Sirett in 1964.

In retirement, Frank moved to live at Lattice Cottage, River Road, Taplow. He died on September 19, 1981, two weeks after he had celebrated his 90th birthday, so bringing to an end a highly successful sporting and business career. A memorial service was held at All Saints parish church on November 5.

Frank's life is a true rags to riches story. His remarkable achievements will never be forgotten and are embedded forever in the history of Wycombe Wanderers.



A group of ex-Wycombe Wanderers footballers at a reunion in 1962. Frank Adams is seated in the front row, fourth from the right.

Do you have a WWI story to tell?

Did you have ancestors who served in WWI and survived, perhaps to recount some of their experiences? The Bucks Free Press is planning a project to research and record the lives of local men and women who participated in and survived the conflict. This is a potentially mammoth project, which will take several years to complete. Therefore we invite local people to participate by researching their ancestors who fought in the war. And also local organisations who would be prepared to research the lives of those who lived in their area. Summaries of the biographies will be published on this page.

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