

Acknowledgements & Bibliography

Jeff Brown, BBC Television

Phil Curtis, Sunderland Antiquarian Society

Mike Gibson, Sunderland AFC Historian

Keith Graham, “Statcat”

Dave Harrison, Sunderland AFC Supporter & Collector

Paul Joannou, North East Football Historian

Rob Mason, Sunderland AFC

John Musgrove (RIP), Sunderland AFC Historian

Paine Proffitt, Artist

Alan Readdie, Local North East Historian

Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette

Newcastle Daily Journal

Newcastle Daily Chronicle

Newcastle Daily Leader

Daily Gazette, Middlesbrough

Dundee Courier

Introduction

I have now written approaching 40 books on the subject of football and in doing so have chronicled the tales of not just my club; Sunderland AFC, but also a host of others including Millwall, West Ham United, Celtic and Durham City when they were in the football league.

On my travels and discussions with other football historians I always come across, somewhere and from someone, an additional piece of information that adds to my knowledge of The Black Cats.

It was around 2007 when I published the first in the trilogy of Sunderland AFC's *Finest Matches* that I received an envelope of material from a local North East historian and Sunderland fan Alan Reddie that contained information on the history of Sunderland AFC that I had never come across before.

The information both excited me, as it was new information, but also from a footballing perspective left me slightly perturbed. What I had been given was a series of documents and notes that redefined a lot of the early history of Sunderland AFC. In reading the material it did not read like an SAFC that I had ever read about.

I pondered why this information should be so new to me; after all hadn't I been reading and writing about the history of the club since 1979? Hadn't I read all that for example Arthur Appleton had researched and written about?

It became clear to me that a lot of the knowledge base around the club's formation and also pre war days had been handed down verbatim from previous publications. A lack of independent research was evident and initial errors relating to the club's history had been accepted without critical appraisal and repeated over and over again.

Finally and after some 8 years of mulling Alan's script, I decided that I would research and write about Sunderland AFC's pre league days. Therefore this book starts with the founding of SAFC and ends just before the clubs first season in the Football League in 1890/91.

This book tells the actual tale of the pre league days of one of England's finest and best loved football clubs from a standing start.

The input for this book has relied on original information, taken directly from newspapers, primarily the Sunderland Daily Echo and other articles of the day.

I have not used content from any previously published books on Sunderland AFC for any material in this book.

Football research has now been made much easier through access to the online British Newspaper Archive that effectively turns a study in your own home into any central library in the country. No more wading through microfiche or hard copies of hundred plus year old newspapers, physically travelling through to libraries, paying parking charges and taking up valuable research time.

It became pretty clear right from the outset that the online archive was revealing much about the pre league days of Sunderland AFC that had simply never been chronicled before. If you do look through various books previously published on the club you will find that in the vast majority there is little more than a page or two covering the entire pre league period in any of them.

It became evident that a book such as this would end up re-writing the history of Sunderland AFC.

BBC television took an interest in the discovery that the accepted date of the founding of SAFC looked to be wrong. Many other errors were revealed.

Essentially though and having exchanged views with a number of historians and interested experts I have arrived at a logical conclusion that Sunderland AFC was formed at Rectory Park School in the then town on Saturday 25 September 1880 and announced to the world two days later.

The football club is 11 months younger than we thought it was. For the first time in history we now have a definitive date for the clubs formation.

However the book also gives a context for the established and previously accepted October 1879 foundation date and invites you the reader to judge for yourself how you think it all panned out.

For the Sunderland fans who will read this book, especially the younger ones, there is an important message. Although it may be published in the 21st century which is, footballing wise, light years away from the formation of the codified game in the 19th century, the contents of this book tell the tale of the same Wearside club that is still around today.

This is the story about the start of your club.

These were the up and coming Premiership equivalent players of yesteryear and these pre league days set the scene for a glorious run of success for the club that only WW2 could end.

This is a tale about our club and these are our Founding Fathers. Without them we would perhaps not be sitting in the Stadium of Light next Saturday.

We have waited nearly 140 years to read the definitive account of the formation of The Black Cats. That wait is over.

You are about to read about The Men Who Made Sunderland AFC.

Paul Days
Chester le Street, County Durham, 2016

1879/80

A False Start?

“Killed at football.”

Thus died Richard Walker of Sunderland. He was no modern day soccer hooligan, far from it, and three centuries and more ago he met his untimely death in January, 1667.

The burial register of Bishopwearmouth church, in recording his fate, provides perhaps the earliest mention of football on Wearside. Richard Walker died two centuries before the birth of the Football Association, two hundred years before Sunderland Association Football Club was formed by a group of school masters. No other details of his death are known, but we can guess that football at that time must have been a game of some savagery, an impromptu affair a mixture perhaps of kicking and handling the ball.

Many years after Richard died, the building of docks at the mouth of the Wear in the 1850's attracted hardy and rough Irish labouring men, 'navvies', to the town. Sometimes their leisure hours were filled with a form of football on Sunderland Town Moor and the Sunderland Herald, a paper now long defunct, noted that these "Hibernian" gentlemen, dressed in orthodox navy style with the inevitable hob-nailed boots, had some talent in running with the ball, in dribbling and in long kicking. It noted too that their exertions often lasting for hours and with as many as 300 involved, ended more often than not in fisticuffs and brawling. No doubt both players and onlookers relished the fights as much as the football!

Nothing more formal or organised sprang from these crude beginnings of football on Wearside. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, only the public schools provided any organised football, each of them clinging jealously to its own form of the game. And there were no public schools on Wearside in the throes of the Industrial Revolution. No doubt, like boys everywhere, the youth of Sunderland would kick a ball about the streets, on the spare ground with balls made of whatever material

happened to be available. But it was the handling code, Rugby, which first introduced organised 'football' in the town through clubs like Sunderland Cricket and Football Club and Sunderland Rovers.

The club which is now Sunderland AFC was the pioneer of the round ball game and it was the first club in the town to play the 'association' type of football which became the Soccer of today.

October 1879 is the date usually given; Sunderland AFC itself saluted the centenary, in 1979, with a gala dinner and other events. So 1879 has an official blessing. But an objective review of the tangled confusion of alleged facts shows that its foundation was almost a year later, in September 1880.

It has had a certain and continuous existence since, overcoming dire poverty and a nomadic lifestyle in its first years, facing internal eruptions in 1888 which could have led to extinction but instead provided the impetus which led to 'League' status in the third season of that competition. Then it confirmed its place among the elite with four Championship wins in a dozen years in a spell of consistency and dominance which it has never since equalled.

James Allan was the father figure. That much seems certain. He was a Scot, appointed second assistant master at Hendon Boys School in April 1879 at a salary of £60 per annum rising to £90. We can be fairly precise with the date as the Sunderland Daily Echo reported in its Wednesday 9 April 1879 edition on a meeting of the Sunderland School Board. This was a usual monthly meeting and was presided over by a Mr R Cameron. A brief discussion took place over the previous minutes of the March meeting and then they turned to rubber stamping various recommendations. One of which was "that James Allan be appointed as second Assistant Master in Hendon School on the usual terms". It was a lengthy meeting but the important part, as far as the history of Sunderland AFC is concerned, was over.

The original board schools were formed as a result of the Elementary Education Act 1870 following intense campaigning by the National Education League. They were ultimately abolished as part of the Education Act 1902 which replaced them with local education authorities.

James Allan was born on 9th October 1857 in Green Street, Ayr,

Scotland, to father William (a shoemaker) and mother Hellen. These details are available from the 1911 Census return. It is universally stated that he arrived in Sunderland from Glasgow University, sometimes indicating that he was a graduate; however investigations provide a slightly different story. There is record of him enrolling for the summer term at Glasgow University in both 1877 (to study medicine) and 1878 (to study botany), but there is no indication that he was a permanent student, and no record of him graduating.

It would appear his association with Glasgow University was a temporary one only, a means of supplementing his studies whilst pursuing his chosen career, teaching. The University of Strathclyde Archives have provided a very detailed description of his successful completion of Teacher Training during the years 1876 and 1877:

“... a student called James Allan does appear in the ‘Register of Students’ Certificates’ for the Glasgow Church of Scotland Training College (archive reference: CSTC/2/3). He was born on 9th October 1857, and passed the College’s entrance examination for male candidates at Christmas 1875. The teacher training course took two years, and covered science subjects (magnetism and electricity, physiology and geology) as well as drawing. James Allan completed the course and left the College at Christmas 1877, having obtained final marks of VG [very good] for Arithmetic, G [good] for Geometry, and VF [very fair] for Algebra. Unfortunately, the Register does not indicate where he went on to teach after he finished the course.”

Without doubt then, Allan had qualified as a teacher at the end of 1877, aged 20. We have no track of him in 1878, but it is reasonable to assume that he was probably gaining experience as a teacher in a school in Scotland, probably in the Glasgow area; and topping up his knowledge with lectures in Botany given at Glasgow University during May, June and July of that year.

The legend is that Allan returned from a holiday in Scotland bringing with him a round football and teachers alike joined him in kicking the ball around in the Hendon school yard. At the school with James Allan was another teacher, John Grayston, who wrote an unfinished series of articles in the short lived Sunderland Weekly News in September 1931, half a century later. He reminisced about the early years and claimed that he had clear memory of kick abouts in that school yard, a yard he calls

the “actual and spiritual home of Sunderland.”

Allan, disappointed at the lack of football in his adopted town, proposed to another teaching colleague, Walter Chappell, that they should form a club. “Well”, said Chappell, “I know nothing about the game but I’ll do the talking-for you.”

In Grayston’s series he states the following; “Jimmy must be “blamed” for the inauguration of the association game in Sunderland”, restating this with another salient point “of course Jimmy conceived the idea of forming a football team and I became secretary and convener”.

John Grayston had left Crossley School in Halifax, Yorkshire in 1877 and took up a position at Hendon Board School as a pupil teacher. The school was then under the headmastership of John Ramsay, who co-incidentally died aged 79 in the year that Grayston wrote his six articles. By 1931 Grayston himself was probably in his late sixties or early seventies and was being asked to recall events of half a century ago. No mean feat, but a feat nevertheless that was prone to error.

The “Pupil Teacher” system worked as follows; at age 13, pupils could stay on at school as probationers to help with the teaching of younger pupils. After two years, they would spend another three years learning the job, before taking a final exam. If they passed, they would be paid to go to training college in order to qualify as a teacher. Throughout they would still have to continue with their own education.

And so, a meeting allegedly took place at the British Day School in Norfolk Street, Sunderland (although we will disprove this in the next chapter). A group of teachers attended. John Grayston names some of them in his articles whilst in a history of the club which appears in the Herald in December 1887, sadly an inaccurate account; we are also given a few names. Apart from Grayston himself, James Allan and Walter Chappell; all teachers at the Hendon Boys School, those present included; Robert Singleton, Ted Watson, William Elliott and a handful of others. Grayston’s account, admitted by him to be based on memory, also named J Jardine, J Coates, J Andersen and J Sewell.

So these worthies, teachers all and perhaps a dozen or so of them, are the founding fathers of Sunderland AFC, for at that meeting they followed Allan’s bidding and formed a football club which they called

Sunderland and District Teachers FC. They elected Bob Singleton as captain, because of his status as a headmaster rather than because of his knowledge of the game; Jimmy Allan became vice-captain. William Elliott was Secretary. There was no Treasurer for there were no funds to be looked after. Apart from Allan, the only one of them who had played the game was Elliott and his experience was limited to two or three scratch games while at college.

As we have noted October 1879 is the date this momentous meeting is alleged to have taken place, the precise date not being stated. But no record of that meeting has been found. The log book for Hendon Board School, where it might be expected to appear, fails to mention it. There were more important matters to record. A circus was in town, and many boys were late for school as a result and George Burns was to be admitted to school free until his father found work. If the football club meeting did take place at Norfolk Street in October 1879 it was, surprisingly, too trivial a matter to merit a mention.

Let us digress briefly to take a brief look at early Association Football, in the north east in particular. The Football Association itself had been formed in October 1863 and by 1870 it had 39 members, long forgotten names like Wanderers the first winners of the FA Cup, Clapham Rovers and Hampstead Heathens, as well as the early pioneers of Nottingham and Sheffield. Soon they were joined by more familiar names; Everton, Blackburn Rovers and a club formed by the young men of the Aston Villa Wesleyan Chapel in Birmingham. Over the Border, the Scottish game was already flourishing under the lead of the great Queen's Park club, still surviving in the 21st century, still amateur.

But in the north eastern corner of England there were few clubs. Middlesbrough, the oldest of today's senior clubs in the area, dates from 1876 and in the same year, in Newcastle, a scratch team played a match under "Association" rules with Northumberland Rugby Club. The first Newcastle club was Tyne but apart from tussles with Middlesbrough, the members had to rely on Rugby clubs and scratch sides for their sport. Nevertheless Tyne entered the FA Cup and on 1 November 1879, just about the time of the alleged meeting in Sunderland, they played host to Blackburn Rovers in the first round. The first FA Cup tie on Tyneside merited only the briefest of reports in the press but we know it was a cold day, only a few spectators bothered to watch and the Blackburn men won.

So the game was very much the poor relation of Rugby and when Major Francis Marindin, President of the Football Association visited Newcastle in December 1879 he offered encouragement to the local “Association” men but was most careful to add that he would be sorry if the new game should be detrimental to the Tyneside Rugby clubs.

January 2nd 1880 saw a significant, step forward. At Northumberland Cricket field, the home of the Tyne club, a ‘Tyne a District’ side met ‘Scotch Canadians’. The visitors were described as the ‘crème de la crème’ of Scotland, and they were indeed a seasoned side, with six internationals, on tour prior to a North American trip, and including the stars of the day, like Queen Park centre forward George Ker, described as the grandest exponent of dribbling in the United Kingdom. Two thousand people came to see them, some of them arriving in carriages which were allowed on part of the field. The Tyne club looked after the ladies too and boards were provided for them to stand on. Tyne played in orange and black quartered jerseys and stockings but the pitch was soft and the players “fell upon mother earth oftener than was beneficial to their limbs or to the permanent whiteness of their knicker bockers.” The Scottish side with “extraordinary skill and smartness in using the legs and head and body, without ever bringing the hands into requisition” won in comfortable fashion by 5 goals to 1. The home men were not disgraced, though, despite the Rugby players among them forgetting themselves in their excitement and frequently using their hands.

Thus ended the first big game in the north east and a few days later Mr Alfred Harrison of the Tyne club wrote to the press exhorting young men to take up the new game, listing the clubs in Northumberland & Durham, Tyne and Rangers, both of Newcastle, Corbridge, Burnopfield and a railway club, North Eastern, and asking to be told of any others. Note that no club at Sunderland was mentioned by the worthy Mr Harrison.

On 23 January 1880, the inaugural meeting of the Northumberland and Durham FA was held at The Turks Head Hotel in Grey Street, Newcastle. Six clubs enrolled, but the absence of a club in Sunderland was mentioned. If Jimmy Allan and his friends had formed a club by then they were unknown to the powers that be and yet it would have been natural for a new club, playing a new game to start looking around for kindred spirits. They would have heard of the big game on Tyneside and of Mr. Harrison’s pleas for new players and would have made contacts. It looks distinctly possible that there was no Sunderland club at this time. The

press too did not mention a Sunderland club, during the whole of the 1879/80 season although local rugby games were copiously reported on. It is not unreasonable to surmise that if there had been any games to report, or if a club had been formed, someone would have told the press if only to try to get a little publicity and yet there is not a word in the Newcastle papers or in the Sunderland dailies.

Sunderland would eventually join later that year in order to compete in the Challenge Cup competition, along with others such as Darlington Grammar School, Haughton le Skerne and Ferryhill.

The general meeting of the Northumberland and Durham Football Association was held in Newcastle, reported on in the Sunderland Daily Echo in their Tuesday 1 June 1880 edition, to pass the new Challenge Cup rules and also to pick a design for the trophy. From several cups and drawings exhibited;

“a very chaste trophy was selected”, the height being 24 inches (30 inches with the stand) and weighed 70 ounces of solid silver. It bore the face of the Northumberland and Durham arms with a centre medallion representing the game in full play, whilst on the reverse side were the Arms of England and St George. The top of the trophy had a “figure of victory”.

The minutes of the meeting stated that football had become very popular in the preceding 12 months, many new clubs had been formed and many were in the process of formation, but still no mention of Sunderland. It was hoped that a keen competition would result for the inaugural season of the trophy. With that the meeting was over.

1880/81

Club Founding

The first mention of association football in the Sunderland (Daily) Echo is the 1 June 1880 account of the Northumberland and Durham FA meeting reported in the previous chapter. Prior to that, the only football that was played in the (then) town of Sunderland was Rugby football. There were several sporting clubs playing Rugby at that time including the prominent Sunderland RFC, founded, according to their website, in 1873. Many column inches of print were regularly devoted to rugby and even when the association football club was formed and started to play its first matches the Echo was still overwhelmingly filled with reports and accounts of Rugby matters. It took time for the association game to establish itself in Sunderland.

On Monday 15 September 1879 the Daily Echo carried a report on the quarterly meeting of the Sunderland and District Teachers Association held at the King Street School the previous Saturday. An account of the meeting was published and it focused mainly on scholarly attendance which had plummeted to just 55%. Seven new members were admitted to the Association. James Allan was almost certainly one of these new members.

The next minutes we have of that group meeting again is on 15 March 1880. This time the subject of sport was discussed and minuted, but not football; that of the up and coming 37th Oxford v Cambridge Boat Race which was to take place on 22 March 1880 and would, for the record, be won by Oxford by a distance of three and three quarter lengths.

So who were the group known as Sunderland and District Teachers Association?

They were teachers who taught in the then district of Sunderland and they met to discuss educational matters, no more and no less.

Note that at neither the 15 September 1879 meeting nor the 15 March 1880 meeting was any mention made of football or of the Teachers

forming a football club.

Why is the above relevant?

On Monday 27 September 1880 there was a critical announcement, as far as the formation of SAFC is concerned, detailed in the Sunderland Daily Echo. It read as follows:

SUNDERLAND AND DISTRICT TEACHERS FOOTBALL CLUB

“The teachers of Sunderland and District have formed a football club and the office bearers have been appointed as follows: Captain and treasurer, Mr Singleton; Vice Captain, Mr Allan; Secretary, Mr Elliot, 4 Rudland Terrace; Committee, messrs Gibbons, Chappell, Coates and Sewell”.

Notwithstanding one or two spelling mistakes in the announcement it is clear that the date usually given for the formation of Sunderland AFC, October 1879, is not factually correct. It has now been established that SAFC were in fact formed on or around Monday 27 September 1880.

However we can go further than this and probably pin the formation date down exactly.

On page 4 of the same edition of the Sunderland Daily Echo the following was reported (extract only):

“On Saturday afternoon the Sunderland and District Teachers Association held a meeting in The Rectory Park School for the purpose of hearing MR TE Heller, secretary of the National Union of Elementary Teachers and a member of the London School Board on Union and educational matters”.

The article is a very long one and describes what was discussed. We can state that given the announcement on 27 September 1880 that representatives from the Sunderland and District Teachers Association formed the football club that would become Sunderland AFC, this probably occurred, after the meeting at Rectory Park School on Saturday 25 September 1880.

So where was Rectory Park School (it is believed that it was also known as Bishopwearmouth School)? Part of it overlooked Galley’s Gill where

the graveyard was, situated slightly to the West of the site of the old Vaux Car Park. The Ship Isis pub on Silksworth Row was clearly visible from the school.

It is ironic that this location in the now city of Sunderland is just the other side of the river to the present Sunderland Stadium of Light. Without realising it, SAFC when it left Roker Park moved towards the geographical location where it was formed. Take the river away and it's a mere few hundred yards. If the school was still in situ it would have been visible from the platform of St Peter's Metro station, the nearest Tyne and Wear system transit point to the now home of Sunderland AFC.

On the subject of where SAFC was founded there were two other locations mentioned in various dispatches, so let's take a look at them:

1. British Day School/British School/Boys British School, Norfolk Street; mentioned in James Allan's obituary in The Sunderland Daily Echo on Wednesday 18 October 1911, the building and street are at one end of the town towards Hendon. If that had been the founding place rather than Rectory Park School then logically the following would have had to happen; either before or after Teachers meeting at Rectory Park then James Allan and the rest of the founding fathers would have met and discussed the formation of the club. Or perhaps on the Sunday the founding fathers met separately in Norfolk Street. You would have to ask yourself why you would do this. If you knew that you were all going to meet up anyway on one location, in this case Rectory Park School on the Saturday, why would you go to the trouble of setting up a meeting elsewhere and perhaps also on a different day and date?

2. Cameron's School, Vine Place; mentioned in John Grayston's 1931 account, he places Cameron's School in Norfolk Street. However that school appears to have been in Vine Place, in what is now Holmeside. It's a similar scenario really to the above. Vine Place is of course, for those that know Sunderland, closer to where Rectory Park School once stood, perhaps just 350 yards away?

However no mention is made of either of these two locations as being a meeting place for the Teachers on the weekend that the football club was formed in September 1880, so either they met and the meeting was never chronicled or we can be fairly certain that the meeting that formed what became SAFC was at Rectory Park School. Clearly nearly 140 years

has elapsed and so all we can go off now are newspaper reports and in this case best guess as to what is logic and common sense.

On Monday 11 October 1880 The Sunderland Daily Echo reported as follows:

SUNDERLAND AND DISTRICT TEACHERS FOOTBALL CLUB

“The first game of the season was played in the grounds of this club (Blue House Field, Hendon) on Saturday at 2.30pm. The teams were selected by the captain and the vice captain, and the game resulted in favour of the vice captain’s team by 5 goals to 0”.

Essentially this is the first ever recorded match played by a team representing what we now know as Sunderland AFC. It took place on Saturday 9 October 1880, roughly two weeks after the clubs formation.

It has always been mooted that SAFC were formed in October 1879, yet the first previously recorded match was the 13 November 1880 encounter with Ferryhill. But the near 140 year old question remained; if the 1879 date of formation was accurate, then why had Sunderland AFC not played any football matches in the first thirteen months of existence?

Not only that but any football matches that precede the formation of Sunderland and District Teachers Club were not Sunderland AFC football matches. Only matches played following the formation of Sunderland and District Teachers Football Club count, as that club was the forerunner of Sunderland AFC. If the Sunderland Daily Echo deemed it newsworthy to print details of a practice match that took place on 9 October 1880 then why did they not report on friendly matches if any had been played in the area during 1879/80?

They weren’t reported because no association football matches were ever played either in the district or by Sunderland and District Teachers FC during the 1879/80 season as the club simply didn’t exist during that time period.

Given what we now know about the organisation that was the Sunderland and District Teachers Association there was a chance for the Teachers to form a football club and play football matches after their 15 September 1879 meeting, they didn’t take it. There was a further chance

to form a football club and play football matches after their 15 March 1880 meeting, they again didn't take it.

They waited until 25 September 1880, probably as a result of the formation of the Northumberland and Durham FA and their Challenge Cup competition (see previous chapter).

On Saturday 16 October 1880 the Newcastle Daily Journal carried the following article;

“New Club; A club has been started at Sunderland, playing under the Association rules, the name being “the Sunderland and District Teachers Association Football Club”. The club, though got up by teachers, is not confined to that profession. A suitable ground, the Blue House Field, has been secured at Hendon. The colours chosen are navy blue and it has been decided to join the Northumberland & Durham FA. The team will probably take part in the Challenge Cup competition. Mr William Elliott, 4 Rudland Terrace, Sunderland has been elected Secretary”.

Essentially the Daily Journal was perhaps 20 days behind with the news? Another interpretation could be that following the 9 October practice match and with few teachers turning up perhaps a decision was made to advertise more widely i.e. in Newcastle and state that everyone was welcome.

Two days later, on the Monday following the above report, the Sunderland Daily Echo states that:

SUNDERLAND AND DISTRICT TEACHERS ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB

“The members of this club had a practice game on Saturday. Afterwards a meeting was held and it was determined to change the name to Sunderland Association Football Club. The captain of the club, Mr Singleton, was elected to stand on the committee of the Northumberland & Durham Association”.

The result of this second practice match is not given and there are no details regarding who played in the game.

So the football club we know today was named on Saturday 16 October 1880 and we also now know that the club known as Sunderland and

District Teachers Association FC, the original name for SAFC, existed for little more than 20 days.

It was always stated that the name change was due to the club opening themselves up to non teachers and the article from the Newcastle Daily Journal perhaps bears this out.

A near 140 years old mystery has now been solved and it rewrites the history of the beginning of Sunderland AFC.

It is only fair to record what evidence there is of an 1879 beginning, and to ask how that date came to be accepted.

The first brief histories of the club appeared in the two Wearside dailies, the Echo and the Herald, in December 1887, by which time the club was well established and important enough to have its history recounted. Both of these reports tell of the meeting in “late 1879” (note not October 1879). A serious error really when you consider that all the sports journalist had to do was look back on the archives of his own newspaper to find out the correct date of formation. This was only a few brief years after the formation and yet both reports contain inaccuracies, jumbled facts and confusion. We shall come to that three part series when we look at the 1887/88 season, where the text from the three articles will be published in full. A critique of the first article in the three part series, in particular, is both illuminating and quite scathing.

Before we leave the subject of that three part series published in 1887 it is worth recording that the text was consolidated and sold as a booklet by The Echo that could be purchased for a nominal sum by members of the Sunderland public. Therefore hundreds or perhaps a couple of thousand of these might have been distributed, all with the erroneous details in them. There are no known surviving 1887 booklets. However this was essentially the first publication of the history of Sunderland AFC. Many copies would still be on shelves in personal and newspaper libraries in the town just 8 years later in 1895.

So where do we find the first mention of October 1879 as a founding date for SAFC?

In the Wednesday 27 March 1895 version of the Sunderland Daily Echo, “Referee”, who was effectively a forerunner of “Argus” who later

became the well known authoritative Sunderland Echo journalistic voice on all things SAFC related, wrote the following:

THE LATE COUN. SINGLETON AND FOOTBALL

Our “Referee” writes us as follows: “It may not be generally known to your readers that the late councillor R Singleton was one of the founders of the now famous Sunderland Association Football Club. He presided over the first meeting held for the purpose of forming a club, the other gentlemen present being Messrs J Allan, WC Chappell, E Watson and W Elliott. The meeting took place at the British School, Norfolk Street in October 1879. A club was then formed under the title of “The Sunderland Teachers Association Football Club”. Mr Singleton was appointed captain, a position he filled for several seasons. In the season 1881/82 the word “Teacher” was dropped from the title owing to the extension of the club. In 1882, the late Councillor Singleton was a member of the Durham team that played against Cleveland. He also took an active part in the formation of the Durham County Football Association, and was for some years one of its most useful members”.

Referee states the place of formation as the British School, Norfolk Street and he gets the original name of the football club wrong. You will note that the formation date of the club has now gone from the rushed December 1887 “end of 1879” history article to “October 1879”. Thus October 1879 is entered into legend and why not; “Referee” was judged to be the fountain of knowledge on all things SAFC and his word would have been taken as gospel. However not content with embellishing the “end of 1879” with a now definitive month of “October 1879” Referee then tells the reader that the term “Teacher” was dropped from the clubs name in the 1881/82 season “owing to the extension of the club”. You have just read that the club changed its name to Sunderland AFC on Saturday 16 October 1880 and if by “extension of the club” Referee implies that the membership of the football club had at some point been restricted to Teachers only, then as we have read previously that was never overtly stated and is open to interpretation.

Many years on, in 1931 we have the writings by John Grayston, who was present at the opening meeting. But by then he was an old man and as we have already read he admitted he was relying on memory. Fascinating though his articles are they contain many factual errors mistakes of dates as well as of names and it seems very likely that he

followed the, by then, established tradition of a birth in 1879, a tradition established, by the three press histories of 1887 (part 1 specifically), the 1895 article and followed by a succession of writers since then.

For the record it is assumed that James Allan was a member of the Sunderland and District Teachers Association. It seems reasonable to assume this, given that he was a teacher in the town. We can reasonably assume that at the 25 September 1880 meeting EG Watson was there. He played for SAFC in its very first game against Ferryhill. We can assume that he was at the meeting because the Sunderland Daily Echo states that Mr Watson (from Hendon) was present at the meeting. It only states 3 or 4 prominent members of the association so clearly as James Allan's name does not appear then we can assume that Allan was not a prominent member of the Teachers Association and neither was John Grayston.

Grayston does however, in his 1931 SAFC memoirs, tell us that at that first meeting; "as far as I remember there were present Robert Singleton, master of Gray School and councillor J Sewell, head of the Wesleyan School in Robinson Street who was later drowned in New Zealand, J Coates, assistant at Rectory Park (where the first meeting took place) and later tutor in College, Lynn Marr and his brothers, Ted Watson, master of Monkwearmouth National School now living in Montreal, Walter Chappell, Assistant at Hendon Board School; W Elliott, J Anderson, J Jardine, James Allan and J Grayston. The result was the establishment of the Sunderland (and District) Teachers Association Football Club".

If the above is correct then the aforementioned are the founding fathers of what became Sunderland AFC. However we have a query with this account. You will note above that Grayston indicates that Lynn Marr and his brothers attended the inaugural meeting. However Marr was born in 1877 and would not have attended that meeting being just 2 or 3 years old. Therefore with 13 people named and presumably Marr having two brothers, then in the end the football club may have effectively started with perhaps just 10 people.

We are faced with another Grayston error. He was recalling matters from 50 years previous. Were there more people at the meeting or less? All we can do is run with the information we know and comment on it.

However there would have been some pupil teachers to add to the

numbers, including lads such as Woodward from Hendon Board School. How many pupil teachers were there? We don't know. We can also add a Mr Gibbons to the list as he appears as a committee member in the 27 September 1880 announcement.

Is it realistic to suggest that the founding fathers of what became Sunderland AFC had never kicked a ball around prior to the clubs formation in September 1880, other than perhaps James Allan? If you re-read the first chapter you will have noted that Chappell quotes to Allan that he knows nothing about the game, yet plays in the first match against Ferryhill; we shall come to that game soon.

Furthermore you have just read that the club held practice matches as soon as they were formed. Therefore there may well have been just 10 players who featured in the first practice match on 9 October 1880. Perhaps that's why the 16 October 1880 announcement in the Newcastle dailies appeared; to drum up support and more players.

With no football matches recorded up until 9 October 1880 in The Sunderland Daily Echo and an advert to drum up more players appearing a week later, we can clearly see that the club was struggling to raise a team. That does raise a question of how many a side featured in the first practice match won 5 v 0 by Allan's team. Five a side? Seven a side? Clearly there were not many footballers knocking around the streets of the district of Sunderland.

If Chappell's experience is anything to go by, then many of them quite simply might not have known much about the association game prior to the first practice game. According to Grayston, Chappell openly admits this to none other than James Allan when he was asked to help form a football club in or around September 1880 and let's remember this is an admission from a teacher at Hendon Board School! Does this imply that if association football was being played in the yard of that school at that time then Chappell was completely unaware of it? How could that be? It suggests perhaps that at the time the club was formed, a recognised form of football was not being played in the school yard at Hendon Board School. Remember that Chappell was friends with both James Allan and John Grayston, fellow founder members of the club who all worked at Hendon Board School.

Furthermore, to back up Grayston's account regarding Walter

Chappell, the obituary for James Allan printed in Sunderland Daily Echo on Wednesday 18 October 1911 states the following; "...his original idea being the formation of a football club for Teachers. He prevailed upon seven friends to join him although all, with the exception of Mr Allan, were unacquainted with the mysteries of the Association code".

However is Grayston referring to perhaps kick about games, with coats for goalposts, that may have been played in September or October 1879 or is he talking about the formation of the club in September 1880? It's all very unclear.

If only 13 could be bothered to turn up for the clubs first meeting and 3 didn't take their interest any further then had he been kicking it around at Hendon Board School, who do not play their first recorded match until February 1881 (read on)?

If the 1879 narrative is followed through to a logical conclusion then there would be a clear implication that from October 1879 to September 1880 James Allan could only drum up to 12 or so players plus himself.

Who were they supposed to be playing matches against during 1879/80? Were there half a dozen teams with up to 60 footballers and then when a meeting is called of what became SAFC only 13 turn up and 3 disappear before a ball is kicked? Not only that but for some of SAFC's early games they could only muster 10 men i.e. they were unable to field a full side.

To probably totally blow the 1879/80 theory out of the water, Sunderland, in the 1881/82 season play one of their games at Whitburn to try and spread the word of association football in the town. They couldn't muster any Sunderland based opponent to play and therefore brought the railway team North Eastern over from Newcastle. Sunderland would not play any team from what could be classed anywhere near the Sunderland district until they played Jarrow in October 1883 i.e. three years after the clubs formation. Opposition in the Sunderland area is finally found one week after the Jarrow game, coincidentally in a match against Whitburn.

Clearly therefore it is just not tenable to stick with an unproven 1879/80 narrative that there had been practice matches played against other teams otherwise it looks as though all of those outfits – all of them – had disbanded as soon as SAFC was formed and stopped playing football!

Not only that but none of the games was ever reported in the newspapers?

If all of the teams did disband then surely rather than having just 10 to pick from SAFC would have had up to 60 or 70 players to choose from at their first practice match in October 1880?

Given Chappell's statement then it appears more not less likely that of the 10 who presumably played in the first practice match of 9 October 1880 that this may well have been for some of them their first exposure to the game certainly in any form of organised fashion.

In justifying the continual 1879 references you would put forward this likely scenario. James Allan arrived in Sunderland from Glasgow University, Scotland, in April 1879. Having observed that there was no association football being played he brought a ball back in 1879 from his holidays to his Scottish homeland and started kicking a ball about in his adopted home in the September or October of that year (the "Local Gossip" section of The Echo on 27 September 1880 does make mention of a September rather than October 1879 coats and jumpers for goal-posts approach). It then took Allan nearly a year to convince his friends to form a football club, hence the reason why we have no record of matches in the intervening 12 to 13 months.

Clearly though, kicking a ball around for 12 months in a field, a back lane or a school yard is very different to actually forming a football club and it is certain that they did not play any formal games of football against any teams as there simply weren't any to play in the Sunderland district. Not only that but they seemingly weren't particularly serious about playing anyone else as they never advertised for games or travelled, for example, over to Tyneside to play established clubs there. So if they were kicking a ball around it must have been purely for enjoyment, nothing more. It was literally coats and jumpers for goal posts. A kick about with your mates.

Founding fathers such as Grayston were also attached to other sporting clubs in the town, in the latter's case Sunderland Rovers Rugby Club, therefore he would have to pave the way for an amicable parting from them before he got stuck into association football. It looks like it took 12 months to get a critical mass of people sufficiently interested, motivated and available to give up their spare time to forge a forward and sustainable path for the club.

Perhaps with the Northumberland and Durham FA being formed in early 1880 and the formation of its Challenge Cup competition having been decided on 31 May 1880, especially the latter, it was more likely this that prompted Allan to finally persuade his pals to form a football club, in the summer of that year. It would certainly fit the September 1880 founding date. It is also interesting to note that the Athletic News newspaper on 22 September 1880 stated that entries for the aforementioned competition closed on 25 October 1880. Sunderland was then formed just 3 days after that announcement.

The preceding paragraphs bring together both narratives which is a jumpers for goalposts informal story to place the September or October 1879 part of the tale into context and the more formal part which is the impetus for the actual formation of the football club in 1880.

Ultimately we can all play a game (pardon the pun) of supposition and guesswork to try and fit or disprove whatever September 1879, October 1879 or similar narrative we like until we are all faced with just about the only consistent stone wall fact in the previously and largely jumbled and confused tale of the foundation of SAFC, which is that the club we know and love today emerged out of the formation of Sunderland and District Teachers Association FC. No one denies that. That fact is absolutely proven and is backed up by an announcement in the local newspaper.

Sunderland and District Teachers Association FC was formed on Saturday 25 September 1880 at most likely Rectory Park School in Sunderland and it was announced to the world on Monday 27 September 1880 by the Sunderland Daily Echo. That club changed its name to Sunderland AFC on Saturday 16 October 1880 and it was announced to the world by the Sunderland Daily Echo on Monday 18 October 1880. They are the facts.

Once the founding fathers finally put their marker down and got serious, everything that you would expect quickly follows: a home ground, appointed officers, a realisation that a few teachers will never be able to keep those rent payments up, adverts for players and of course some opponents, most of which were also in their infancy. Basically, what anyone setting out would do.

The club's formation seems to have revolved about one man, James Allan and his passion for the game. The rest appear to have followed his

lead and together they formed the club in September 1880. Allan was clearly a leader, was driven, tenacious, self motivated and he and his family had settled well into his new life in Sunderland. His career was progressing. He was determined to give the town its own football team. He achieved just that. He could never have seriously dreamed that in the years to come that millions of us would benefit from his legacy (with a few tears and some frustration thrown in along the way!).

Grayston tells us that the new club was to play its games at The Blue House Field in Hendon, in a traditionally working class area of Sunderland. The field itself is a stones throw from the North Sea; the pitch survives to this day and is maintained by the city council. Rent was £10 per annum and it was hard work we are told for SAFC to find this money, particularly as it was unable to 'take a gate' owing to the low height of the surrounding wall.

The Raich Carter Sports Centre is now situated right next to The Blue House Field. Carter is of course perhaps the football clubs biggest icon, a majestic footballer, captain of the club's 1937 FA Cup winning side and fittingly he hailed from Hendon, the very place where the club first played.

So by 27 September 1880 there was a club, a ground and a navy blue strip. There was to be no change to the red and white for a few seasons yet and by a strange quirk of fate, on 16th October 1880 there was another notable event in local football circles taking place. A few miles North West (Newcastle) Rangers inaugurated their new ground by a game between their first team and 15 of the 'others.' The club's new ground 120 yards long and 60 yards wide was close to the town centre, in Leazes Terrace. It was called St James' Park. The use of that now famous ground for football, and the announcement of the naming of Sunderland AFC both date from precisely the same October day over a hundred and thirty years ago.

On Monday 8 November 1880 it was reported that the draw for the first round of the first ever Northumberland and Durham Football Association Challenge Cup competition was made. In one of the ties Ferryhill were drawn to play against Darlington Grammar School but for whatever reason the latter declined to play and so Ferryhill were effectively given a bye to the next round. This was of significance to Sunderland AFC.

Sunderland AFC o v 1 Ferryhill FC, Friendly Match
Blue House Field, Hendon; Saturday 13 November 1880

Without a fixture for Saturday 13 November 1880, Ferryhill hastily arranged a game against Sunderland AFC for that day. This was Sunderland's very first 'competitive' football match and the venue was their home ground at Blue House Field, Hendon.

Sunderland lost the toss and had to face a strong wind. Very soon they 'scored' but the "point" was disallowed. Play was of 40 minutes each way and before the first half was over Ferryhill 'cleverly kicked' a goal, the only one of the match. The scorer is not recorded. Perhaps it was J McCutcheon, one of Ferryhill's six man attack, and a man who two seasons later became a Sunderland regular. The teachers tried hard in the second half, but to no avail. The first match against another club had ended in defeat.

Ferryhill, the village side from South Durham were a club which was to fold after only a season or two because of lack of interest. However on that day they proved too good for the Sunderland men. The Monday press report, doubtless written by a Sunderland official seeking an excuse for the o v 1 defeat, alleged that Sunderland was "unfortunately represented by a very poor side, no less than five of their best men being absent."

The club, in that historic match, had captain Bob Singleton in goal, T Taylor and Shirlaw as backs, J Gibbons and W Andersen as the two half backs, and a six man forward line of EG Watson, J Barron, P Dove, F Woodward, Walter Chappell and Jimmy Allan.

Ferryhill were represented by; WJ Kitching (goal), E Letheron, J Hodgson (captain); (backs), J Soulsby, J Barry (half backs), T Field, J Mann, F Devine, J Oliver, J McCutcheon, M Carney (forwards).

Some of the Sunderland players that day were shadowy figures. Shirlaw and Gibbons seem never to have appeared again, for their names do not gain a mention in later reports. Possibly even the names are wrong as no initials appear before Shirlaw's name and a teacher called Thurlow, not Shirlaw, appears in school records of the period. Others are better documented. Goalkeeper and Captain Bob Singleton appears in an early photograph as a tall impressive figure with thick bushy

sideburns, a moustache and a receding hairline. A master at Gray School at the time he later became superintendent of a local charity, a councillor, a member of the School Board and of the Board of Guardians. He turned out for Sunderland for two seasons, sometimes in goal but more often as a full back and later served on the club committee. He met a tragic death at his Peel Street home in March 1895. During a drinking bout he fell and struck his head against the bed. A coroner's inquest decided that alcoholic poisoning had killed Sunderland's first captain. A police band, a posse of constables and the Mayor were at his funeral at Ryhope Road cemetery. He was only 27.

Walter Chappell and Frank Woodward were two more who were to die in their prime. Both were colleagues of Jimmy Allan at Hendon Boys School. Indeed the staff list of that school includes five Sunderland players; Chappell, Woodward, Allan and also John Grayston as well as a pupil teacher Charles Funnell, so it was a real source of talent in those early days.

Frank Woodward, another pupil teacher, was just two months-past his fifteenth birthday when he turned out against Ferryhill. We know little about his footballing talents but he was a teacher of considerable ability and an affable and courteous man. He trained for the teaching profession at Durham and took a degree at London University. When he died, aged only 32, on 4th September 1897, he was in charge of the instruction of pupil teachers under the Sunderland School Board and those pupils thought highly of him for they subscribed over £40 towards the cost of an 11 foot high dark red Aberdeen granite monument still to be seen in Bishopwearmouth Cemetery in Sunderland.

Walter Chappell seems to have come from a Newcastle school to become first assistant master at Hendon in January 1879. He taught for a while at Dr Barnardo's and in 1894 became head of the Moor Board School. Pneumonia and paralysis caused his death aged 45 in November 1898.

The father figure, James Allan was a complex and often unpopular character but successful in his teaching career. After his spell at Hendon he moved to Thomas Street becoming headmaster at Hylton Road School in September 1888. He held this post until his death on 18 October 1911 aged 53. He took an active interest in football all his life. He held the post of treasurer to Sunderland AFC for some years and then

in 1888, led a breakaway movement which created Sunderland Albion, a move which almost caused the demise of the senior club. After Albion, the second club formed by Allan foundered, the rumbustious Scot maintained his links with the game and was chairman of the Wearside League for some years. Always a very fit man, in 1890 he actually attempted to cycle to Glasgow to watch an international match there only to be thwarted when the machine, less fit than its owner apparently, gave up near Edinburgh. As a player, usually at outside left, he was a prolific goal scorer. Indeed one source credits him with 12 goals for the club, in a game against Castletown in 1884. Sunderland won that game by no less than 23 goals to nil so it does seem quite likely that Allan hit the dozen and if so he remains to this day the holder of the record number of goals in a game. It is fitting that the club's founder should have that honour. In strict surname and then forename alphabetical order he is also placed player number 1 for Sunderland AFC in a competitive match.

A fine dribbler as well as a goal scoring winger, Allan was no saint on the field. Too often he was guilty of dirty play, of a niggling underhand type, which seems needless for a man of his undoubted skill. The 'boneless wonder', as one report called him, could be selfish too and was sometimes unpopular with his team mates because of this trait. He played several times for Durham County in those early days of soccer in the north east.

Sunderland AFC 4 v 0 Ovingham FC, Friendly Match
Blue House Field, Hendon; Saturday 27 November 1880
Scorers: Elliott, Watson, James Allan (2)

There was no game on the following Saturday, but Jimmy Allan turned his hand to refereeing in a Northumberland & Durham Cup tie between Tyne and Corbridge, but he was on the Sunderland wing again on 27th November 1880 for the club's second recorded match, again at home at Blue House Field, against Ovingham from Northumberland. John Grayston turned out in goal that day and he recalls in his six part memoirs that the match ended in darkness.

Bob Singleton moved from his goalkeeping slot to a full back position and the Sunderland side was: Grayston, Singleton, Sewell, Elliott, Jardine, Watson, Coates, Roberts, Anderson, Chappell and Allan.

Ovingham were represented as follows: J Storey (goal); B Wright, R Hall

(backs); J Dodson (captain), centre; W Turner, G Gibbons, left wing; M Elliott, C McEvoy, right wing; W Forster, T Cook, J Lennox, forwards.

“This match was played on Saturday at the Blue House Field, Hendon before a fair attendance of spectators. A strong wind was blowing down the ground and the Ovingham captain having won the toss elected to play with the wind. During the first forty the play was very even; the Ovingham men tried hard to score but the Sunderland team working well together repelled every effort, while Allan and Coates occasionally relieved their side by a good dribble and made some very narrow shots at goal.

After half time the aspect of the game was changed.

No points had yet been scored by either side but the Sunderland team who were wonderfully fresh at once went to work and in a few minutes had a goal in their favour, the ball being sent through by Elliot. The ball was again kicked off and was at once taken to the visitors’ quarters where another goal was obtained, this time by a shot from Watson. The game now assumed a very one - sided aspect. The remainder of the last forty was played around the Ovingham goal. Allan, who all along had been playing finely, added two more goals to the Sunderland score and the game ended in the favour of Sunderland by four goals to nil”.

So the club’s first Secretary, missing in its first match, was its first goal scorer. He is a man who played in all the reported games, after the first one, in season 1880/81, but then he vanished from the Sunderland team lists. A second goal came from Ted Watson; Edward Guy Watson, another teacher, and two came from Jimmy Allan himself to round off a 4-0 win. The club’s first win, in its second reported game, was a convincing one.

As yet there was still no mention in the Sunderland Daily Echo of any other association football teams in the district.

After a week’s rest, for everybody except the tireless Jimmy Allan who was again refereeing a Cup-tie, Haughton le Skerne v Ferryhill in the second round of the Northumberland and Durham Cup, 6 December 1880 was the occasion of the clubs first ever Cup tie. It was not in the English Cup, nothing so grand for such an infant club, but in the second round of the Northumberland & Durham competition. The club had been given a bye in the first round and Burnopfield, who had defeated Chester

le Street, were the visitors to the Blue House Field.

Sunderland AFC 2 v 2 Burnopfield FC,
Northumberland and Durham Challenge Cup, 2nd Round,
Blue House Field, Hendon; Saturday 11 December 1880

There were two changes in the Sunderland side, Taylor and Dove replacing Jardine and Chappell. Burnopfield held them to a 2 v 2 draw. Unfortunately the Sunderland Daily Echo neglected to produce a match report for this game so it seems that the Sunderland goal scorers shall forever remain a mystery. There are no details of the Burnopfield lineup.

On 13 December 1880 there is a report in the Daily Echo, tucked away on page 4, in with the rugby results, indicating that an association football match had been played between The Teachers And Scholars Of Rectory Park School v The Teachers And Scholars Of Diamond Hall School. Rectory Park won 8 v 0 and as far as we can tell this is the first report of an association football match being played anywhere in the town, outside of an SAFC fixture. You must remember that some of the Scholars would be perhaps just 14 or 15 years of age.

For those interested, Diamond Hall School was situated in Millfield, near to Pocket Park. It was subsequently rebuilt and in the years to come Sunderland AFC's Ernie Taylor would attend in the 1930s as a child. There was a Diamond Hall Infants and Diamond Hall Juniors but only the Juniors would have a football team. There is another school in close proximity - St. Josephs. School Leagues were ultimately formed and were organised in zones with schools close to each other being in the same league, to avoid having to travel across the town. Rectory Park would no doubt have been in the same league as Diamond Hall as the latter was just up the Hylton Road.

You will read of a further two fixtures played by Rectory Park in this chapter. Clearly this is the school where the formation meeting took place and one of their teachers John Coates was present.

Burnopfield FC 0 v 2 Sunderland AFC,
Northumberland and Durham Challenge Cup 2nd Round Replay,
Rowlands Gill; Saturday 18 December 1880
Scorers: James Allan (2)

Having drawn the first game it was competition rules that the Burnopfield captain, B Mason, had the choice of grounds for the replay. Unsurprisingly he elected to play the match on his home turf, so Sunderland made the journey to Rowlands Gill on the following Saturday for the replay.

The pitch was snow covered, Bob Singleton lost the toss and Sunderland had to face a strong wind laden with snow that was blowing into the Sunderland goal. The team played strongly and Jimmy Allan scored both goals in a 2-0 win, the second coming after ‘brilliant work.’

Sunderland were represented by the following team: Grayston (goal); Singleton, Sewell (backs); Elliott, Taylor (half backs); Allan, Chappell, Coates, Watson, Anderson, Roberts (forwards). Burnopfield lined up as follows: Graham (goal); Bewley, Mason (captain) (backs); Brown, Bukley (half backs), Harrison, Lown, Cawthorn, Rodham, Wharton, Fisk (forwards).

“During the first 40 Sunderland were not only able to defend their own goal but also to strongly assault that of Burnopfield. In the last 40 the Sunderland team fairly hemmed in their opponents who made the utmost of the adverse circumstances. Allan made several shots at goal and after 20 minutes play scored the first goal for Sunderland. The ball was well returned after the kickoff, and all the Sunderland forwards tried to score, Coates in particular playing well; but Allan, after brilliant work, registered the second goal for Sunderland, who, at the call of time, were declared victors by two goals to nil. The Sunderland backs played well. The Sunderland team will now have to meet the winner of Tyne v Rangers in the third round”.

Mr J Craighead officiated as umpire (linesman) for Sunderland AFC and Mr Gent as referee.

Following the Burnopfield game the new Northumberland and Durham Challenge Cup trophy was exhibited in Sunderland at Mr Hobourn’s shop, 205 High Street West, opposite Lambton Street where it remained for “about a month”. The trophy had cost £50 having been made in Kilmarnock, Scotland by Messrs. Cameron and Son.

Eleven teams had entered the challenge cup competition, and, as it stood, only three remained; (Newcastle) Rangers v Sunderland and

Haughton le Skerne v Bye. Effectively this was the semi final and Haughton le Skerne, a suburb of Darlington, was already in the final.

On Monday 20 December the Sunderland Daily Echo reported on what appears to be the second association match, outside of an SAFC fixture, played in the then town. The match again involved The Teachers And Scholars Of The Rectory Park School v Teachers And Scholars Of The British School;

“Played on the ground of the former and resulted in a victory for The Rectory Park, by two goals to one. Card played well for the victors and Gibbons and Croft for the other team”.

Given the match report on the next Rectory Park game (read on) it can be assumed that this match took place on the field of the Bishopwearmouth Mutual Improvement Association on Chester Road. Furthermore as Rectory Park would not only be involved in this fixture but one previous and a third still to come they seemed, for a while, to be a prominent team. This does perhaps start to dispute or at least conflict with the historical narrative that everything revolved around Hendon Board School. Not only would Rectory Park play in the very first three recorded non SAFC association football matches in the town but they were the formation place of SAFC.

John Coates, a founding member of what became SAFC was a teacher at Rectory Park and seemingly as enthusiastic about football as was James Allan.

Note that where football matches were played in the town, no matter how insignificant, they now seem to be reported upon. At this point in time it did though seemingly rely on someone from one of the teams handing in the details to The Sunderland Daily Echo. However if the latter were given details of an association match they certainly seemed keen to mention them. This surely now blows wide open any theory that SAFC played any games during 1879/80. None were reported upon and therefore it surely follows that none took place.

Rectory Park’s opponents on presumably the previous Saturday were The British School, who were also known as The British Day School. The significance here is that of course it was always mooted that this was the school in Norfolk Street, towards the Hendon end of town, where the

football club had been formed, now disproven.

Finally is this the same Gibbons playing for The British School, and seemingly a man of the match for them, who was named in the Sunderland and District Teachers Association FC founding statement issued by The Sunderland Daily Echo on 27 September 1880?

The Northumberland and Durham FA (N&DFA) announced that fourteen teams had joined the association in 1880/81 although it is not stated if this included or was in addition to the original six members. It was announced in the Sunderland Daily Echo on Friday 21 January 1881 that a county match would take place on 29 February between Durham and Northumberland at Newcastle. A second fixture between the N&DFA and Cleveland had been arranged and the game would be played in Middlesbrough on 5 February. Later in the season there were to be return fixtures of both of the above matches played.

On Saturday 23 January 1881 a meeting of the N&DFA took place at The Temperance Hall, Ferryhill to choose the Durham team for the up and coming county match against Northumberland. Eight Durham clubs were eligible to put up players, seven had done so and there was good news for Sunderland with the selection of Singleton and Sewell as the backs, Roberts as one of the half backs, Coates on the right wing and James Allan as left wing.

No more Sunderland games are reported until the next Cup-tie, the semi final, on 12th February 1881 when the club went to the home of Newcastle Rangers, St James' Park, Newcastle, the first of many visits to that now famous ground. As North East football historian Arthur Appleton pointed out in 1979, Sunderland played there long before The Magpies, still almost a dozen years from foundation, and the men from the Wear were the first of today's League clubs to play there.

Newcastle Rangers 5 v 0 Sunderland AFC,
Northumberland and Durham Challenge Cup Semi Final,
The Leazes (St James Park), Newcastle; Saturday 12 February 1881
Scorers: Mitchelson, Simms (2), Lockhead, Bain

The game was barely mentioned in the Sunderland Daily Echo on Monday 14 February 1881. The fairly curt comment was that "this match took place at The Leazes, Newcastle on Saturday afternoon before a

large gathering of spectators. The Sunderland men were completely outmatched by their opponents, suffering defeat by five goals to nothing”.

The Newcastle Journal tells us that;

“Very little was known of the Sunderland form, owing to it being a comparatively new club, but as it was rumoured that in the team were several crack players, one having taken international honours and it was thought it would be a very stiff match.”

The Sunderland side, none of them internationals, for sure, was Grayston, Singleton, Sewell, Chappell, Taylor, Watson, Coates, Roberts, Anderson, Elliott and Allan, and a “goodly company” went along to see them. Sunderland even then had a good away support.

Rangers cannot have been much impressed by their visitors’ reputation for they galloped to a 5 v 0 win on a two inch carpet of snow. The Journal, having printed the rumours, for they can hardly have been based on much evidence about the young club’s reputation, decided to be patronising. They “want the combined action which alone ensures success. As they are however only a young club, they will no doubt come by experience and we expect they will yet give a good account of themselves”.

The Rangers goals were scored by Mitchelson, skipper Simms and Lockhead to give the Tynesiders a commanding 3 v 0 lead. Second half strikes by Simms and Bain sealed the rout.

One consolation for Sunderland is that they lost to the eventual winners of the trophy as Rangers would go on to defeat Haughton le Skerne 1 v 0 in the final played at the Northumberland Cricket Ground.

However the club was out of the Cup. Its supporters, and its equally few players, were no doubt disappointed. If it was to survive, despite setbacks on the field, it needed cash to pay the ground rental and other necessities, although the players paid their own travelling costs and there were certainly no wages to pay at this early stage.

On the morning of Saturday 20 February 1881 the third recorded association football game in the district of Sunderland (not involving

Sunderland AFC) took place. Ironically but perhaps unsurprisingly it was between Rectory Park School and Hendon Board School. Given the association that Sunderland AFC has with both institutions it was almost a tribute match! The game was played between combined teachers and pupils teams on the field of the Bishopwearmouth Mutual Improvement Association on Chester Road. Goalless at half time Hendon Board School opened the scoring but a last gasp goal from a Rectory Park free kick meant that the game ended honours even.

Clearly a fixture involving Hendon Board School would immediately raise questions about who played in the match but unfortunately no details are given of either the lineups or the scorers. It is almost certain that a good sprinkling of SAFC players took part.

Not only that but it raises an interesting question of when lads started to kick a ball around on the playground of Hendon Board School? It is commonly accepted that the school is the spiritual home of SAFC and it played its first recorded match on 20 February 1881. Therefore to once more challenge the 1879 narrative, with this evidence, it would be hard to dispute an assertion that football had only recently started to be played at that school, otherwise why isn't there any other recorded games mentioned in the press? It also follows hot on the heels of the formation of what became SAFC and both schools had founding members of the latter as teachers.

It is fair to assume that someone such as James Allan would have been the person to inform the Echo of this game and would have played in it. It is also interesting that Hendon chose to play its first recorded match against Rectory Park; in homage perhaps to the place where SAFC was formed, although as we know one of SAFC's founders, John Coates, was an assistant at Rectory Park.

Given that this is the third recorded match involving Rectory Park School one might wonder if Coates were alive today whether he would argue that place had just as much claim as the Hendon Board School to be the spiritual home of SAFC?

With founder members on both sides we can see that following the formation of the football club in September 1880 both schools were introduced to the game of association football very soon after that by their SAFC founding member teachers. Within five months both

educational establishments were confident enough and skilled enough to turn out teams bolstered by the experience gained by James Allan and his team mates playing for SAFC.

On Friday 4 March 1881 the Newcastle Courant reported on another footballing event in Durham, at Chester le Street, where the long established Shrove Tuesday football match took place between the 'up street' and 'down street' teams. The former team appears to have won a lively encounter, the match report is jumbled, probably similar to the game which started at one o'clock and ended at six o'clock. No doubt there will have been a few bruises and black eyes to nurse after what was always a rough house of an annual encounter in the town!

To raise some funds for SAFC, a concert was held on the evening of 8 March at the Hendon Church Institute. Mr John Wright Wayman, the vice president of the club was indisposed so his place as the chair for the evening was taken by Mr Robert Hudson the Traffic Manager of the River Wear Commissioners Works:

"The programme was a carefully selected one and was executed throughout by the different participants with much success. The pianoforte solos by Miss E Lord and Mr Greenhalgh were skillfully executed, and the songs "Kathleen Mauvorneen" and "Caller Herrin" by Miss Auld; "Fishers of St Ives" and "The Lass o'Richmond Hill" by Miss H Morgan; "The Wood nymph's Call" by Miss Forster were tastefully and sweetly rendered, the audience expressing their warm appreciation. The duet "Home to Our Mountains" by Misses Forster and S Davison was excellently given. "Come Into The Garden Maude" and "Tom Bowling" by Mr J Hudson, "Beloved Star" by Mr Howgate; "Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead" and "The Anchor's Weighed" by Mr D Gillies; "Jack and I" and "The Happy Muleteer" by Mr J Bentley. "Call Her Back and Kiss Her", by Mr Greenhalgh, were sung with much power and ability; most of the songs on the first part of the programme being warmly encored. Mr Brockbanks reading of "Helen's Babies" created much amusement; while Mr Jardine's Scotch story "Jumpin Geordie" and his humorous oration were warmly appreciated, as was also the recital by Mr WC Chappell of "the Fireman's Wedding".

Interestingly, legend has it that the football club, in its early days, once raffled a canary at such a meeting to keep it afloat. If the canary was raffled at this meeting it wasn't recorded. So where did the canary story

come from? What is the source for this brilliant and quirky tale? James Allan, the clubs de facto founder died on 18 October 1911. Within hours of his death it was being reported upon by The Sunderland Daily Echo. As part of that homage the following was written;

“The new organisation had many ups and downs (in reference to its early years) and for a long while a treasurer was not needed and on one occasion the funds were so low that one of the members offered a green canary to be raffled for the benefit of the club. This realised 17s 6d and the member who won it, not wishing to be undone in his zeal for the clubs success offered it again to be raffled. It was agreed that the tote should be half the original price and the result of the second raffle was that the bird was won by a prominent member who did not happen to be present but in whose name a number had been drawn. In the end some trifle was sent to the winner and the bird remained in the possession of the original owner”.

James Allan’s obituary is the only trace of this story to be found but it is so specific and so quirky that it might indeed be true! However it is not possible to say at which meeting this event occurred.

There is however a further thought on this story. You will note that Mr John Wright Wayman, the vice president of the club was indisposed at the aforementioned and recorded meeting so his place as the chair for the evening was taken by Mr Robert Hudson the Traffic Manager of the River Wear Commissioners Works. We might just wonder if, given the canary story, it was Wayman who “did not happen to be present” which would make 8 March 1881 ‘the canary meeting’.

Essentially it looks like a canary did indeed save the day.

Ferryhill o v o Sunderland AFC, Friendly Match
Ferryhill; Saturday 2 April 1881

The footballing activities ended for the season on 2 April when Sunderland went to Ferryhill. There was a cold wind and less than 50 people saw a goalless draw. The side for the final game of that first season was Grayston, Singleton, Sewell, Dunnavon, Chappell, Watson, Elliott, Anderson, Roberts, Allan; only ten named and perhaps, as often happened, they played a man short.

The Echo posted two match reports, both were brief, the longest of them read; “the return match between these clubs was played at Ferryhill on Saturday and an interesting game resulted, ending in a draw. Allan played well for Sunderland, making some good runs and shots at goal”.

The first season had ended with only six games recorded. Two wins, two draws and two defeats is hardly the stuff which moves mountains but the club seems to have become reasonably well established, with a ground, a nucleus of regular players (almost all teachers), but no spare cash. Prompted by the enthusiasm of the irrepressible Jimmy Allan the club had survived. The young teachers cannot possibly have dreamed that their club would be still living in the 21st century.

On Monday 12 April 1881 a Football Association event was held at The Freemasons Tavern in London and Mr CW Alcock second son of the late Charles Alcock JP of Sunderland was presented with a silver inkstand, a pair of silver candlesticks, a cheque for £330 and a vellum containing the resolution of the committee of the FA in recognition of his services to that organisation.

Charles Alcock is also known as “The Father of Modern Sport”. He captained Wanderers in the very first FA Cup final at the Oval cricket ground, led the England national team against Scotland and it was he who dreamed up the idea of the FA Cup, also refereeing in two cup finals. He helped to found county cricket, promoted international football and instigated the first test match between England and Australia. He championed the birth of professionalism in sport, whilst being secretary of the Football Association for 25 years and Secretary of The Oval Surrey County Cricket club for 35 years.

Now largely forgotten he is to those that know of him one of Sunderland’s favourite sons. Born in Norfolk Street (the place where SAFC was mistakenly thought to have been founded) in 1842 his dedication to both cricket and football, particularly as an administrator, led to a legacy that to this day reverberates around the world of sport.

With the season now over Sunderland AFC and its growing band of followers looked forward to its second season. However, in the lead up to 1881/82 the life of the clubs founder James Allan was about to change.

On Tuesday 17 May 1881 a meeting of the Sunderland School Board was held in John Street, Sunderland. Mr R Cameron was once again the presiding Chairman. A number of items were on the agenda and discussed starting with the report of the Finance and Works Committee. Next the Educational Committee report was presented and discussed but it was the third item, General Purposes Committee matters that would have a bearing on Allan. It was recommended that “Mr James Allan be appointed first assistant master in Thomas Street Boys School and that the clerk be instructed to advertise for a second assistant master at Hendon Boys (sic) School”. On the motion of a Dr Morgan and seconded by a Mr Kirk the General Purposes Committee report was adopted. After little more than 24 months since his arrival in the then town James Allan career in Sunderland was on the move upwards.

At its next meeting on Tuesday 14 June 1881 the details of Allan’s new salary were revealed. His starting salary would be £90 per annum, rising by £5 per annum to a maximum of £100.

On Thursday 30 June 1881 Allan was presented with a “handsome silver watch” by both the teachers and scholars of the Hendon Board School in appreciation of his endeavours with and for them. It is fair and logical to presume that this was his formal leaving event and his last day as second assistant master.