

Gone and Forgotten - The latest instalment of our series focuses on the forgotten minnows of Glossop by Stuart Fuller

The smallest town in England to have a Football League side is the legacy of Glossop FC. Sitting on the A57 running between Manchester and Sheffield, the Derbyshire town has a population of just over 32,000, less than that of Clacton-On-Sea, Craigavon, Whitstable and Barry. Yet for 17 years, the town supported a Football League side.

Glossop North End were founded in 1886 as a recreational side for the local mills, and the club soon became one of the most feared in the Midland League. In 1897, with the backing of local cotton mill owner Samuel Hill-Wood (he of the Arsenal family fame), the club applied to join the Football League, after finishing as runners up in the Midland League to another provincial side – Manchester City. Both clubs were duly elected into the Football League for the start of the 1898/99 season after the Football League added a second tier.

Hill-Wood's investment enabled Glossop to gain promotion to the top tier of English football in their first season, when they promptly dropped the "North End" tag in honour of the achievements of Preston North End.

Their stay in the top tier of English football was brief. Four wins was their return from that single season and they were relegated long before Aston Villa won the title. Hill-Wood's involvement in the club waned as his interest in politics grew, and the local businessman was elected as MP for the town in 1910. By the time war broke out in 1914, the club were short of funds and struggling to hold their own in the second tier of English football. In May 1915 the club finished in last spot in the Second Division. Whilst in normal situations the club would apply for re-election, the Football League suspended the competition until 1919.

On announcement that the Football League would recommence for the 1919/20 season, clubs were invited to re-apply for their position. To some surprise it was announced that Glossop's place in an expanded Second Division would be taken by South Shields, amongst others. Hill-Wood severed ties with the club soon after, concentrating on his political career until 1929 when he joined the board at Highbury.

Today, the club are known once again as Glossop North End, plying their trade in the North West Counties Premier League. In May 2009 they hit the headlines when they reached the final of the FA Vase at Wembley Stadium, losing 2-0 to Whitby Bay.

It is incredibly hard to imagine the club ever managing to rise to the levels they hit a century ago, but they will always be the smallest town to have hosted League football... unless Nailsworth earn the honour with Forest Green Rovers at some point.