

Gone and Forgotten – South Shields FC by Stuart Fuller

Continuing our look at ex-Football League sides that simply faded into obscurity, we head up to the North East, home of David Milliband, the birthplace of Ridley Scott, the legendary night club Glitterball and the mosque where the great Mohammed Ali had his wedding blessed. Today, it is best known for being at the end of the Metro line, where many a pissed-up person has woken after a night out in Newcastle and having missed their stop. The faded dignity of a once prosperous seaside resort are all too clear to see as you drive through the streets today, but it wasn't always that way.

There had been various incarnations of a team in South Shields since 1889. First was South Shields Athletic, then one with the unusual name of South Shields Adelaide formed in 1899 by Jack Inskip who took the team into the Northern League. In 1913 the club applied for election to the Football League but received no votes.

Ten years later after a successful local campaign where they garnered the support of Newcastle United and Sunderland they were elected into the extended new second tier of English football, making their debut in August 1920 with a 1-0 defeat at Craven Cottage to Fulham. Despite the proximity of Newcastle, Sunderland and Gateshead, who they had replaced in Division Two, the club often got five-figure crowds at their Horsley Hill ground. They finished eighth in their first season, following it up with a sixth place finish the following season, their highest league position in their history. Despite finishing in the top half of the table in the next six seasons, they finished bottom in 1928 and were relegated to the Third Division (North). By this time the crowds, and investment, had started to desert the club.

They only lasted two seasons in the third tier before the club called it a day. They had finished in an respectable seventh place in 1930 but the crushing realism was that football had moved on significantly in the ten years they had been in the Football League and were "absorbed" the following season by rivals Gateshead. The stadium was finally converted into a greyhound track before making way for a housing estate in the 1970's in an all-too familiar tale.

A new club were formed in 1936, thanks to the backing of the local newspaper but they never hit the heights of the Football League days and history repeated itself in 1974 when they relocated to Gateshead and became Gateshead United. Today, the third iteration of the club are back in the Northern League. However, for a glorious decade ninety years ago they stood on the brink of being the third team of a football-mad region.