



For Whom The Bell Tolls

Walter Tull's brief but incredible existence continues to serve as an inspiration to a whole new generation as they discover a tale of bravery and fortitude that deserves to be re-told and cherished. Because Walter was a true hero. This month we celebrate 100 years since he became a professional at Spurs as **John Fennelly** recounts the life and times of a man who only played 10 games for us yet warrants a unique place in our history.

It was a special day when a young Walter Tull walked through the gates at White Hart Lane on July 20, 1909.

He was now facing a new life where he would succeed or fail on his own merits. He had just finished his four-year apprenticeship as a printer and had already impressed the Spurs management enough in 'A' and Reserve team games for them to take him on a tour to South America.

Now he had been asked to become a full-time professional footballer. He had his doubts as he had enjoyed his time as an amateur with Clapton and had originally planned to get a printing job on a newspaper.

There was also the moral dilemma of being paid to play, a conflict with Edwardian attitudes and at a time when the game had many critics for its off-the-field double standards.

But it was a chance for Walter to lift his head above the dross and use his natural talents to excel against the odds. It was an opportunity – and opportunities had been few in the early life of Walter Tull.

By the end of this day he would be £10 better off. That was the maximum signing on fee allowed and that in itself showed how keen we were to sign him. He was also on a wage of £4 a week.

Tull had enjoyed mixed fortunes in Argentina, playing at centre or inside-forward. But the fact that he'd been invited to sign as a professional and played in the first League game of the season showed his merit.

At 5'8" and 11 stone he was both mobile and

strong. He was also clever in his play and those talents blossomed with full-time coaching.

However he was asked to replace the great amateur and England international V.J. Woodward at centre-forward. Woodward was one of the best players

of his generation and left us with an exceptional scoring record of 100 goals in 197 appearances. He had also ended the previous season as top league scorer with 18 goals as we finished second in Division Two to gain promotion to the top flight for the first time in our history.



It was a tough challenge but the 21-year-old Tull, with all the optimism of youth, was up for it.

His debut was also our Division One baptism and 32,000 were at the Lane to watch our opening home game against FA Cup holders Manchester United when Tull was brought down for a penalty in a 2-2 draw. Newspaper reports now introduced the prefix 'Darkie' to his name – but they were also full of praise for the man who appears to have been an instant hit with Spurs fans.

He had just become the nation's first black professional outfield player.

As the Daily Chronicle reported on September 13 that year: "Such perfect coolness...and such accuracy of strength in passing. He defeated (defenders) by side touches and side steps worthy of a professional boxer. Tull is very good indeed..."

He scored his first goal against Bradford City a week later but then lost his place and played 16 games for the Reserves. The following season was to be his last at the Lane. He was scoring regularly in the Reserves as they won their league but first-team chances were few.

Percy Humphreys had taken his place, scoring 18 goals in 24 league and cup appearances that term. An experienced goalscorer, he had been signed from--

Walter's arrival overshadowed

Walter Tull arrived quietly at White Hart Lane. But Tottenham was very much an area in the national spotlight at the time.

Indeed if Walter had travelled by train and had the opportunity to read, the story that dominated the newspapers that whole year was the 'Tottenham Outrage.'

This concerned an armed robbery in the January of 1909 by two Latvian immigrants.

It was not so much that they stole £80 from a rubber factory in the High Road but that there was a great distrust of anything Russian at the time due to the insurrection and anti Tsar rebellions that threatened the political status quo.

The two men were believed to be from Riga, when Latvia was under Russian domination. They were also often unemployed, regularly of no fixed abode and left wing enough to worry the state.

As Janet Harris points out in her excellent book 'Outrage – An Edwardian Tragedy:' "Both the Government and the popular press saw there was considerable benefit in pandering to the public idea that the alien presence was unwelcome."

So the incident received massive nationwide coverage with a great deal of colour being added by the subsequent

pursuit across the Marshes in which police and many members of the public gave chase despite, quite literally, a hail of bullets from their quarry.

One young policeman and a 10-year-old boy were shot dead with seven other policemen and 17 local people wounded. The robbers both attempted suicide when cornered, one dying on the spot and the other later in hospital.

Such was the country's fascination with these events that an estimated 50,000 people lined the funeral route through Tottenham, standing six deep on the pavements from early morning.

The Spurs squad held a collection that raised £2.12.6 for the policeman's widow and the boy's parents. And Tottenham Town Band added an extra £5.11.0 from a collection at our match with Hull City.

In addition, just two days before Tull turned professional there had been a memorial service for the dead policeman so the story was still running and no doubt part of the conversation when he met up with his fellow players.

To a man of Walter's sensitivity and religious upbringing, it renewed the certainty that life – and death – would always be bigger than football.

Chelsea in the December and hit the ground running. Tull could not dislodge him.

In only his fifth game for the club Tull had been racially taunted at Bristol City but was instantly supported in the newspapers of the time. The Football Star described him as: "a model" and "the best forward on the field," pointing out that the offenders had been in the minority.

Had this caused Walter to lose confidence? It seems unlikely after all

First impressions

When Walter Tull first arrived in Tottenham the area was beginning to take shape as we know it today.

The rows of terrace houses were already there with light industry, mainly on the River Lea side of the district, including a pencil factory, a boot and shoe manufacturer and a cabinet works.

The area was well served by the railways and that helped open it up for housing to serve London's insatiable demand for workers. This growth in population would also provide the bedrock of the Club's massive support from day one.

In addition to their football, the residents of Tottenham could attend the old Palace Theatre where Music Hall was king and sometimes the stars from the stage would play Spurs in special charity games at the Lane.

The Palace Theatre was situated opposite the current police station, alongside an ice rink.

By 1909 mechanisation was beginning to grow and electric trams were running alongside those drawn by horses while motorised vehicles were becoming increasingly popular. The telephone existed but was not in common use.

On his way into White Hart Lane, Walter may have stopped at Caldecourt's Bakers, on the corner of High Road and Paxton Road. Or there was Murphy's sweet shop plus the tea rooms at number 748.

Other shops on the High Road between Paxton Road and Park Lane included a stationers, a linen drapers, a timber merchants, a furniture store, a cycle dealer, auctioneers, watch maker and greengrocer.

that he had gone through in his life beforehand. And he was reportedly popular with the Spurs fans having scored twice in 10 senior appearances – plus five goals in eight non first-class outings.

There is also no evidence of racism at management level at Spurs or why would they have gone to so much trouble to sign him in the first place? Other clubs had seen his potential and wanted him at the outset but he must have felt comfortable at the Lane since he opted for Spurs.

But it is known that we coveted Northampton Town defender Charlie Brittan, then rated as possibly the best right-back in the Southern League, and when we made a move for him, wily Town manager Herbert



Percy Humphreys

Barbados to Folkestone

To get a better perspective on how tough life was for Walter Tull, we take a look back at the determination – but ultimate premature demise – of his father Daniel and of the Tull family's early days together.

Walter's father Daniel was a carpenter from Barbados, the son of Anna and William Tull who were born as slaves on a local plantation. He had one brother and one sister.

With slavery abolished in 1833, Daniel left for St Lucia in 1873 where wages were higher. He had been educated to a good standard by missionaries and in 1876 took the long sea journey to England, settling at Folkestone where he married local woman Alice Palmer whose family worked on the land.

They regularly attended Grace Hill Wesleyan Chapel and the 1891 census lists the Tulls as living at 51 Walton Road, a working class area.

Walter Daniel John Tull was born on April 28, 1888.

Sadly, after four years together and five children, 42-year-old Alice died from cancer. Daniel quickly re-married Clara and the couple had one more child but then Daniel passed away just over two years later from heart disease.

Clara was aided by the Wesleyan Chapel who had good links with the London Children's Home and Orphanage run by a Methodist preacher in Bethnal Green.

It was decided Walter (nine) and elder brother Edward should be sent to the orphanage.

William, the eldest boy, was working and contributing seven shillings a week to the

family and Cecelia, the eldest girl gained work as a domestic. Elsie (7) had the job of looking after baby Miriam while Clara took in washing to supplement the Poor Law parish relief she received.

Walter and Edward arrived at the home on February 24. Clara no longer had any rights over her two sons but she stayed in touch as best she could. She later re-married.

At the age of 14 Edward was sent to Glasgow. That was in November, 1900, when he was adopted by the Warnock family who had seen him on a fund-raising singing tour organised by the Home. Subsequently Mr. Warnock, a dentist who dealt mainly with poorer people, trained Edward in his trade.

Edward graduated from the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, in 1910, registering as a practising dentist in 1912. He took over the family practice when Mr. Warnock died.

Left behind, Walter spent seven years in a tough, cold and austere environment of the Home where he was apprenticed as a printer. He played for the orphanage football team at left-back and, at the recommendation of a friend, wrote to top local amateur side Clapton FC.

By October, 1908, just 10 weeks after sending that letter, Walter was in the first-team. Clapton won three cups in his debut campaign; Tull was described as 'catch of the season' ... and, four months after playing his first game for Clapton, we made our move.



Chapman demanded Tull as part of the deal and paid 'a heavy transfer fee' into the bargain.

So, by October, 1911, he was a Northampton player. Chapman, who was later to have much success with Huddersfield Town and Arsenal, had been impressed by Tull in our Reserves and had subsequently seen off Aston Villa, Leicester Fosse and Clapton Orient in the battle for his signature.

Walter switched positions to wing-half and went on to play 110 senior games for the Cobblers. Rangers were subsequently reported to have opened negotiations to sign him.

But by now an even bigger challenge was looming – a world war, and Tull's instant response was typical.

On December 21, 1914, he became the first Northampton player to join the 17th (1st Football) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, nicknamed 'The Diehards.' The infantry Battalion was commanded by Major Frank Buckley, ex-Manchester United and Aston Villa, later

to famously manage Wolves.

He served with another ex-Spurs player, his predecessor in the club's forward line, Vivian Woodward. Walter's brother William also enlisted.

After training on Salisbury Plain, during which time he played as a guest for Fulham, the battalion became part of the 33rd Division, 100th Brigade and was sent to France on November 18, 1915. Soon half the battalion was on the front line and, in January at Festubert, Woodward, already a captain, was wounded.

Still Tull was impatient for action. Front line duty lasted a month or more but Walter did not enjoy the wait when pushed back into the safety zone. As he wrote in one letter home: "It is a very monotonous life out here when one is supposed to be resting and most of the boys prefer the excitement of the trenches."

The 1st Football fought in the infamous Battle of the Somme, between July-November, 1916. Almost 20,000 allied troops were killed on the first day, the

On the field...

Walter Tull's first campaign as a professional was not a great one for Spurs.

Promoted from the Second Division the season before, we were optimistic about 1909-10 and our first taste of the top flight but it took five games for us to register a win.

Walter made his debut at centre-forward on the opening day but we lost 3-1 at Sunderland. He scored in our fourth game but we lost 5-1 at Bradford City and after seven outings he did not play another first team game beyond October.

He did turn out twice in the London FA Challenge Cup, scoring once in a 7-1 victory over Croydon Common.

Yet he had scored twice in his first game – a friendly at Clapton Orient on April 29, 1909/10.

We finished 15th in the Division One table, three points ahead of relegated Chelsea, who we beat on the last day of the season to preserve our top flight status. The Blues went down.

Walter was one of 14 debutants that season. In those days we operated without a manager. The side was managed by the Board of Directors who also granted first outings to Percy Humphreys, Archie Lyle, Frank Bentley, Ivor Brown, Frank Drabble, William Harris, John 'Tiny' Joyce, Bert Elkin, Alex Steel, Jimmy Kennedy, David Brown, Tommy Lunn, Ernie Newman and Arthur Kerry.

Ever-present Billy Minter (15 goals) was our leading league scorer followed by Humphreys (13).

As the Directors chopped and changed the following season with another nine debuts, Tull found his chances limited to just three league games, scoring in the 1-1 home draw with Manchester City. We again finished 15th.

He left us for Northampton Town – then in the Southern League - in 1911 in a deal that brought full-back Charlie Brittan to Spurs.

worst ever in British military history, and in one action by the battalion itself, just 79 men returned from 400.

By now a sergeant, Tull was invalided out of France with trench fever and on recovery was sent to the officer cadet training school at Gales, Scotland. While he was away the 17th suffered such heavy casualties in the Battle of Arleux that the battalion was disbanded.

Walter was commissioned as second lieutenant on May 30, 1917 – contrary to

Our 1909/10 Spurs side



regulations he had now become the first British-born black combat officer in the British Army. He achieved this in the face of the 1914 Manual of Military Law, which specifically excluded black people from exercising 'actual command.'

He joined the 23rd (2nd Football) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and was posted to Italy with the 41st Division. At the first Battle of Piave in January, 1918, he was mentioned in dispatches by Major General Sydney Lawford for his 'gallantry and coolness' while leading a raid in the face of heavy fire and bringing all his men back safely.

Tull returned to France to fight in the second Battle of the Somme and was leading his men in 'No Man's Land' when his short life ended. He died near Favreuil, in the Pas de Calais, on March 25, 1918, at the age of 29. He was reported to have been shot through the head and died instantly.

So popular was he that two soldiers attempted to carry him back to their own lines but German soldiers were advancing so they had to leave him. His body was never recovered.

Walter's commanding officer broke the news of his death in a letter to elder brother Edward, saying 'how popular he was throughout the battalion. He was brave and conscientious...the battalion and company have lost a faithful officer, and personally I have lost a friend.'

Edward was devastated, describing it as "the worst moment of my life."

Walter had served and survived for almost the entire duration of the war and was posthumously awarded the British War and Victory Medal. He was also recommended for the Military Cross but never received it.

Roll of Honour

Fourteen players with Spurs connections died in World War One.

They were: George Badenoch, John Fleming, Fred Griffiths, Alan Haig-Brown, John Hebdon, Alf Hobday, John Jarvie, Ed Lightfoot, Harold Lloyd, Alexander MacGregor, Walter Tull, Finlay Weir, Archie Wilson and Norman Wood.

He has no grave, only an inscription on the memorial wall at the Fauborg-Amiens war cemetery and memorial at Arras.

Yet his memory and inspiration live on – as they certainly should. As a pioneer and role model, his merit transcends football as the ultimate example of how to triumph in adversity: to refuse to be pigeon-holed and follow your own path no matter what obstacles you encounter.

Had he lived who knows what Walter Tull would have gone on to achieve.

* Grateful thanks to author Phillip Vasili and Spurs official historian Andy Porter for their help.

Walter Tull Memorial Cup

Our pre-season friendly with Rangers at Ibrox on July 28, 2004, saw the home side win 2-0 and receive the Walter Tull Memorial Cup. A crowd of 35,750 saw Nacho Novo (25) and Dado Prso (45) net for Rangers.

Our team that night was: Robinson, Carr [capt], Bunjevcevic, Davis (Doherty 79), Gardner (McKie 84), King, Ricketts, Mendes (Mabizela 65), Defoe, Keane (Marney 30 (Hughes 77)), Jackson. Substitute (not used): Keller.

The respective supporters' trusts also competed for the Walter Tull Trophy with the Rangers fans winning the game 6-2.