

FEATURE: MODERN SPORT: SOCIETY AND COMPETITION

The Origins of Football: History, Ideology and the Making of 'The People's Game'

by Gavin Kitching

October 2013 marked the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the English Football Association (FA). It was an occasion fraught with ambiguity and contradiction. Some hailed its establishment as the official beginning of what is now the most successful participant and spectator sport in the world. But the contemporary sport – 'association football', 'soccer' – whose beginnings were so celebrated, has little or nothing in common with the football for which twelve upper-middle-class gentlemen adopted that first 'universal code' of rules 150 years ago. In fact the game we now call 'association football' would be unrecognizable to those men. They would perhaps recognize the physical setting in which the game is still played – some of the pitch markings and the goals – but everything that now happens between those goals would be strange to them, the positions which contemporary players occupy, the way they pass and move the ball, the way they dispossess opponents, even the very way matches are scored.

That first set of draft rules for football adopted by the FA in November 1863 allowed a free kick at goal after 'fair catch' of the ball ('provided he claims it by making a mark with his heel'), throwing of the ball to a team mate, and running with the ball in hand after a fair catch or a catch of the ball 'on first bound'. Not only that, but the earliest football rules did not recognize a specialist goalkeeper (the 'goal keepers' simply being those players nearest to the goal when it was under attack) and also allowed scoring when the attacking team kicked the ball behind their opponent's goal or 'bye' line (called a 'touchdown' or 'rouge') as well as when it was kicked into the opponent's goal.

In fact, these official FA celebrations remind us how often the search for *the* (singular) 'origin' of any human activity is epistemologically odd, because always conducted through the same bimodal logic. There was a time when something that now 'exists' did not 'exist'. Hence it must have been 'invented', and that invention must have been a discrete act by somebody,

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or bodies, at a discrete and identifiable moment in time. What such a logic occludes of course is the possibility (which is so often the actuality) that what now 'exists' was developed, not invented. It came into existence not at one moment in time but through an incremental process. And processes precisely defeat the 'either/or' antinomies of bimodal logic.

In the current case, the football for which rules were laid down in November 1863 not only had little or nothing in common with present-day football, it actually had rather little in common with the football that was actually played around England in the 1860s. Moreover the game played in the 1860s had little in common with the football that became a mass participant sport from the mid 1870s onward. And that 'association football' in turn was further changed when football was professionalized in the 1890s.

In the early period, 1863–80, association football developed through a combination of rule changes and changes in play. From the 1880s onwards however the rules of the game were largely fixed, but play continued to evolve significantly, especially after professionalization. And that evolution in play has continued (more or less rapidly at different periods) throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

It is hardly news to any historian that innovation, especially in cultural matters, is more often a matter of development than invention. But in the history of currently popular sports myths of origin are especially tenacious. They are found in rugby and baseball, for example, as well as in association football. This may be partly explicable in terms of the desire to mark and celebrate (processes cannot have anniversaries), but also by the human love of stories and story-telling. William Webb Ellis 'inventing' rugby at Rugby school, or the 'inventing' of baseball by Abner Doubleday or Alexander Cartwright, are more compelling tales than some complex narrative of accident, emulation and social influence featuring a cast of tens of thousands and having no readily identifiable heroes.

In the case of association football however, the search for origins is further compounded by ideology. Until a decade or so ago, the historical narrative of association football was more or less settled. Both rugby and association football had their origins, as codified sports, in a handful of major 'public' schools in England – Eton, Rugby, Harrow, Winchester, Westminster and Marlborough – in the 1840s. The Football Association itself was formed by a small group of ex-public-school boys with the original idea of creating a 'universal code' for football. The need for such a code emerged in the late 1850s. Former pupils of those elite schools, and of a number of grammar schools, living (mainly) in London and the home counties, were frustrated in their desire to play because different football clubs played by different rules depending on the school composition of their memberships. A way of getting round this was to create a single code of football by a melding of the different school codes. But some of the enthusiasts for such melding also thought that, over time, it might allow football to become as popular a winter game as cricket was in summer. In fact the original idea

of a Football Association was to be the 'MCC' of football. The FA was to play the same regulating and standardizing role for football that the MCC had earlier done for cricket.¹

All the standard histories of football as a modern sport begin with its public-school codification, even if they then go on to trace the remarkable processes of development, popularization and professionalization that made it something very different from what was originally envisaged by these pioneers.²

About ten years ago, however, John Goulstone and Adrian Harvey challenged this narrative.³ They claimed that the standard histories proceeded in blithe disregard of the fact that football, or different varieties of football, had been popular pastimes in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland for centuries before their codification, and indeed for centuries before being played by public-school boys. And they also suggested that a profound upper-class bias was built into the original Victorian accounts of the origins of football, a bias subsequent historians had either disregarded or actively shared. The 'People's Game', they asserted, was not only now the favourite game of poor people the world over, it had actually been invented and played primarily by poor people – by the plebeian 'folk' – from the start. And not only this, it had also been played for centuries by agreed rules, even if those rules were occasion or match-specific, and only rarely written down.

Clearly anyone who accepts this 'revisionist' story will be disinclined to mark October 1863 as football's beginning, even if they are as keen on the contemporary game and its global popularity as any conventional celebrant of its 150th birthday. The game which Harvey and Goulstone wish to celebrate however has 'always' been a people's game, while the devotees of the traditional account see modern football – 'a gentleman's game played by ruffians' – as a wholly unintended consequence of an original desire to create a gentleman's game for gentlemen.

The aim of this article is not to vindicate either side in this dispute, but to suggest that Harvey and Goulstone are as much in the grip of a myth of origin about football as the supposedly 'class-biased' histories they attack. They, as much as their opponents, radically underestimate the extent to which the development of modern football was an incremental but discontinuous process. In that process the inheritance of popular 'folk' forms of football certainly played a part, along with public-school codification. But the process of making modern football continued long after the period (the 1860s) when those two elements were put together, and it incorporated many subsequent playing innovations that owed nothing either to folk football or to codification. In short, the developmental history of football is a lot richer than either the 'standard' or the 'revisionist' account suggests, and a history inadequately explored to date. Using some hitherto underused sources I suggest that 'The People's Game' as we have it today, is indeed predominantly the product of the actions of poor people (of 'working-class' people, one can properly say). But its structural fundamentals were produced in the

half-century or so after 1863, not in 1863 and not (*pace* Harvey and Goulstone) in some rustic medieval and post-medieval past.

FOOTBALL NARRATIVES AND THE ISSUE OF SOURCES

When upper-middle-class men in Victorian Britain wanted to play football the first thing they did was to form a club, and the second was to inform the local and (occasionally) the national press that they had done so. As a result it is usually easy to say when and where a football club was formed, down to a precise address, a start time of the founding meeting, and even a detailed list of founder members and their occupations. In that respect the 2013 celebration of the foundation of the Football Association was of a piece with the regular celebrations of the foundation of football clubs, and of local or regional football associations, that mark the football calendar up and down the country every year.

However, in the history of football as a whole this abundance and precision of sources is anomalous. For if one wants football to 'begin', not on a specific evening in October 1863, but either centuries before, or in the five or so decades after 1863, there is a major problem of source materials, although that problem is rather different in the two cases.

'Folk' Football: a Narrative of Fragments

Those who wish to trace the origins of football back into medieval history, or even to Roman Britain, face the familiar problem of fragmentary and chronologically 'spotty' sources. The most comprehensive survey of them, by the medievalist Francis Magoun, was published in the 1930s.⁴ One can read it from cover to cover and still be radically uncertain what kind of game, or family of games, is being described as 'football' or 'foot-ball' in the sources he cites and quotes. And it is impossible, either from Magoun or from any of the other historians of football who use antiquarian sources,⁵ to know how widely football was played in the British Isles either at one time or through time, or how its popularity fluctuated.

It is tolerably clear that, right up to the late eighteenth century, we are dealing not with one game, but with a loosely linked family of pastimes (not all of them even bearing the name 'football'). Some were relatively small-scale team games, others were large-scale 'mass or melee' games occurring on feast days and holidays (most notably at Shrovetide). Also, while all of these games featured the use of a ball, not all were pure 'kicking' games. In some the ball appears to have been moved primarily or entirely by kicking, in others it was thrown or carried in hand, and in yet others (possibly the majority) play consisted of a promiscuous mixture of handling and kicking.⁶ About the only thing that all these games had in common (and the one thing they undoubtedly bequeathed to the modern sport) was the scoring of goals. In field-and-team versions of these games the 'goal' was some marked or informally agreed area at each end of a field or open space.⁷ In Shrovetide and other feast-day games (which often featured hundreds of participants on

each side, and could be played over miles of roads or open country) the 'goals' were either a natural feature of some kind, or parts of local buildings or structures – mills, wells, churchyard walls, bridge supports etc.⁸

It is not surprising that we can learn so little, in detail, about the predominantly rural, plebeian pastimes that were 'football' between the later medieval period and the eighteenth century. They were an amusement of the poor primarily, and unless they threatened disorder, or were passingly regarded as undesirable by monarchs or other notables, they rarely rate a mention in written sources. All that one can say with certainty is that this group of pastimes formed a regular, taken-for-granted part of life for the poor and (occasionally) the not-so-poor for many centuries, that they were generally rough-and-tumble affairs in which injuries were common and death not unknown,⁹ and that prowess at football seems often to have been identified with prowess at fighting and wrestling.¹⁰ These pastimes were sufficiently commonplace to have entered both popular ballad and other literature – including Shakespeare¹¹ – and to have generated a frequently used metaphor for exploitation and abuse. To be 'used as someone's football' was a common form of complaint and allegation (against politicians, for example) and the phrases 'kicked like a football' or 'kicked about like a football' are often heard in relation to assaults or fights.¹²

What is more surprising is that the sources for popular or folk football do not improve significantly between the late eighteenth century and the mid-Victorian period. This is despite the fact that newspapers and periodicals increased considerably in numbers during this time, and that the first specialist sports periodical in Britain (*Bell's Life in London*) appeared in 1824 and, until its closure in 1886, gave regular attention to both popular and club-based football.

While the occasional references in *Bell's Life* (and in other periodical and newspaper sources of the Regency and Victorian periods) tell us that popular or folk football continued between 1780 and 1860, they provide no more detail than earlier sources.¹³ Moreover some football historians, following the lead of many mid-Victorian writers,¹⁴ have argued that popular or folk football actually declined as a pastime from the late eighteenth century onward, which is why we find far fewer press and periodical mentions of it than one might expect. They believe that, aside from the mass Shrovetide and other feast-day matches, folk football was a rarity by the mid nineteenth century, and small-scale 'team' variants of it almost unknown. On this account then, the upper-middle-class 'club' football that began in the late 1850s and expanded in the 1860s, entered a kind of 'football vacuum'.¹⁵

Whatever the reasons, the paucity and brevity of references to folk football in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century sources pose a particular problem for the revisionist historians. For they wish to argue, not merely that football was a popular pastime long before its adoption by the public schools or its codification by those schools and the FA (for that is readily acknowledged by many older histories), but that folk football actually

influenced modern football in some way. And they also wish to argue that the memory of that group of pastimes, their centuries-long interment in popular culture, accounts for the speed and alacrity with which working-class men and boys took up the new, codified games (both rugby and association football) when, from the 1870s on, they gained some time free from the crushing labour demands of the industrial revolution.

Mid-Victorian Football: Clubs, Rules and Play

For mid-Victorian club football the problem of sources is at once different and similar. Here an abundance of written sources concerning rules and institutionalization coexists with a continuing paucity of descriptions of play. Hence it remains very unclear how the playing of club football accorded with its formal rules. As a result there is a tendency in the standard histories to present a post-1863 chronology of rules and their changes and simply assume that play followed those rules and changed as they changed.¹⁶ There is also a tendency to treat the public-school and FA codifications as 'givens' and not to question precisely what they were codifying, what their historical antecedents may have been.¹⁷

But for the revisionists, too, the lack of detailed descriptions of club play is a handicap. After all, the first two decades of club football stand nearest in time to the folk heritage. So if the modern game was marked by that heritage, it would have been at this initial stage. And in the absence of any direct evidence linking the two,¹⁸ anyone arguing that folk football influenced modern soccer (or rugby) must try to show that their early *playing* had characteristics that can at least be plausibly explained as 'residues' of the older games.

AN UNDERUSED SOURCE: THE MATCH REPORT

As one species of the genus 'Club', football clubs were possessed of the standard institutional apparatus. They had members who paid fees both to join and remain. In the beginning those members were overwhelmingly young men joining to play football, not to spectate it, and not (except as an unavoidable necessity) to organize it. Very many early football clubs played on cricket grounds, and many were offshoots of pre-existing cricket clubs. Indeed many of the gentlemen footballers of mid-Victorian Britain also played cricket in the summer.

As well as handling its official correspondence, the secretary of a Victorian football club was responsible for writing a report on each 'home' match played by the club's team, or teams, and sending it to the local press. In the earliest years of club football local newspapers were often less interested in publishing these reports (from self-styled 'football correspondents') than were national sports periodicals like *Bell's Life* and *Sporting Gazette*, both London based. This is why the former publication in particular is a better source for early club football, even in the provinces, than the provincial press – a situation that only begins to change in the 1870s.

These first football correspondents were not professional journalists or press employees, but often were highly educated and literate young men, and their match reports were as varied as their producers. There was, at this time, no standardized ‘patois’ or ‘argot’ of football play, and one sometimes has the impression that the honourable secretaries (or their stand-ins – the reports are always anonymous) were comparative novices to the game. All this makes these early reports much more idiosyncratic and amusing (both intentionally and unintentionally) than their present-day counterparts, but it can also make it difficult to determine whether something which sounds odd to a contemporary reader is an oddity of the play or of the describer.

Despite such shortcomings, these first football-match reports do provide a means by which changes in early football play can be tracked. In fact they are the first detailed descriptions of football *play* – albeit without photographs, or even drawn illustrations for the first twenty or so years – in the entire history of the game. Their sheer number and variety, and the challengingly small typeface in which they are set, have made them difficult and enormously time-consuming to use. But the digitization of *Bell's Life* and other Victorian newspapers and periodicals has allowed these press archives to be mined electronically in a depth and detail that could never have been attempted manually.

There follow twenty-eight passages from football-match reports dating from the beginning of 1865 – just fifteen months after the formation of the FA – to the end of 1878. They have been selected from some 395 reports (dating between 1860 and 1880) that I have either noted verbatim or downloaded in their entirety. By 1880 both the English and Scottish FA Cups were well established, association football was becoming a mass spectator sport in Glasgow and western Scotland, and there were eight well-supported regional football associations in England and Scotland as well as a Welsh association. And, as Appendix 1 demonstrates, by the end of the period covered in these reports football play was much more standardized than it had been at the beginning.¹⁹

EXCERPTS FROM MATCH REPORTS

The excerpts which follow are numbered in chronological order. These numbers, placed in square brackets, are then used to refer back to them in the subsequent analytical sections.

1 ‘The CPC [Crystal Palace Club] soon obtained a touch down, but the place kick was unsuccessful. The CCC [Clapham Common Club] then pulled themselves together, and succeeded in gaining two touch downs behind the goal of the CPC . . . but they were at too great a distance from goal to allow the place kick to come off.’

Bell's Life, 15 Jan. 1865, p. 7.

2 ‘Barnes now kicked off and the game became hotter than ever. The ball having for a while hung about the Crystal Palace goal, Drake made a catch and taking a place kick in a slanting direction drove the ball over the heads of his adversaries between the Crystal Place goal posts.’

Bell's Life, 5 March 1865, p. 6.

[A 15-a-side between Barnes and Crystal Palace, two founder member clubs of the FA, and both committed to playing FA rules.]

3 ‘In spite of the heavy rain, . . . and the Wanderers’ inexperience at the school rules, which were a happy mixture of Rugby, Charterhouse and Harrow, some good play was exhibited . . . The illustrious Wanderer who attempted to run with the ball and signally failed in the attempt, having his shirt sleeve torn off, has promised not to do it again.’

‘Wanderers v Forest’, *Bell's Life*, 2 Dec. 1865, p. 7.

[The thirteen men of Wanderers beat the eleven of Forest School by ‘two bases to nil’.]

4 ‘The score was one base each . . . [but] . . . The Crystal Palace got more touch downs than their adversaries who were unaccustomed to association rules.’

‘Harrow Chequers v Crystal Palace 15-a-side match’,
Bell's Life, 30 Dec. 1865, p. 6.

5 A match between Nottinghamshire and Sheffield began at 3pm and continued until ‘a few minutes before four o’clock’ at which point ‘a second game was commenced’. Sheffield won 2–0, scoring ‘a goal in each game’. Each goal was scored following a ‘touch down’, but Sheffield’s second goal was disputed because ‘Chesterman, the Sheffield captain . . . [made] . . . a touch-down from the ball which he had picked up from the crowd’.

Bell's Life, 27 Jan. 1866, p. 7.

[Notts fielded fifteen players and Sheffield twelve.]

6 ‘The greatest license was allowed so far as rules were concerned; on the whole the Rugby game perhaps predominated, though the Eton system of ‘bullying’ was also practised.’

‘A 15-a-side match between the 8th Depot Battalion and Essex Calves’, *Bell's Life*, 29 Dec. 1866, p. 10.

7 In late January 1868, Walthamstow played South Park (Ilford) in an 11-a-side football match. It is reported as an ‘Association match’ but the correspondent noted that ‘knocking the ball on with the hands was a regular occurrence, a practice which is very doubtfully football’.

Bell's Life, 1 Feb. 1868, p. 8.

8 'No sooner was the ball kicked off by the R.E.s than the Barnes forwards, including Warren, Graham and others, started off on the road to fame. Their headlong course was soon impeded by the irresistible charge of Major Harrison and Lieutenants Johnstone and Daubuz. They in their turn, after a short spell of office, were ousted from their possession by Willis, then Willis was knocked down by somebody, who shortly afterwards was capsized by somebody else. Such is football. Now running gaily up with the ball, now rudely shocked by collision, now knocked on your back and kicked on your shin.'

'Royal Engineers v Barnes at Islington', *Bell's Life*,
3 March 1869, p. 3.

9 'The Newark team were much the heavier, but weight had no effect on their fortunes, for Notts succeeded in kicking three goals to Newark's none.'

'Nottingham v Newark', *Bell's Life*, 17 Nov. 1869, p. 1.

10 'A praiseworthy attempt was made to abolish all handling in this match, but owing to the general perversity of the two teams, but little success attended the movement, both sides using their hands throughout with all the freedom that has marked recent matches.'

'The Wanderers v Civil Service Club at the Kennington Oval',
Bell's Life, 4 Dec. 1869, p. 2.

[They were described as 'two well established association clubs';
Wanderers had eight men, the Civil Service nine.]

11 'The School won the toss . . . and at first the superior weight and fast play of the Wanderers kept the ball down in the vicinity of their goal.'

'Charterhouse School v Wanderers', *Bell's Life*,
23 March 1870, p. 1.

12 'The new rule of the association as to handling the ball was not so strictly enforced as it ought to have been, both sides frequently forgetting themselves.'

'A 10-per-side match between Leyton F.C. and the Trojans,
played at Leyton'. *Bell's Life*, 30 March 1870, p. 1.

13 'A match between Barnes and Crystal Palace . . . was remarkable for the style adopted by the players. "No hands" [*sic*] were allowed, but the new rule failing to meet with favour from either side the return game will be played under the old rules.'

Sporting Gazette, 19 Nov. 1870, p. 849.

14 'In matches of this description the rules played by the home clubs are generally adhered to . . . In the previous match between the clubs at Leeds

the rules played were “Rugby modified”, consequently the Garrick players were as much at a loss as Leeds were in the present match... The Rugby rules... required little or no place-playing, a goal-keeper being out of the question, as the goal is obtained by a kick over the bar, not under, as in Sheffield rules. The consequence was that the goal-keepers left their posts, and in two of the four goals obtained not a Leeds player was in or near the goal.’

‘Sheffield Garrick v Leeds Athletic’, *Bell’s Life*, 21 Jan. 1871, p. 4.

[Leeds had nine men and Sheffield twelve. The match ended in less than an hour, Leeds ‘having had enough of it’ by then.]

15 ‘On Thursday Jan 4 a match was played between 15 of the Lynn Club and 15 of the Norwich Football Club. The game which was played by the Norwich rules, lasted for an hour and a half... but no goal was kicked by either side till about 10 minutes before the end of the game, when a goal was gained for Norwich accidentally, the ball having been kicked by one of the Lynn men, and rebounding against another of his own side into the Lynn goal. One touch-down was made for Lynn, which was however, disputed.’

Bell’s Life, 13 Jan. 1872, p. 5.

16 ‘The English team appeared to be much heavier than their opponents but... what the Scotch lacked in weight... [was]... amply made up in swiftness and playing-together power... [they passed]... the ball, in several instances, in a way that completely astonished their opponents...’

With matters now square the Champions of England and Scotland faced each other for the third time... [The Scottish captain]... sent the leather to the heart of the forwards, and there followed a scene which can never be forgotten as long as international football matches are played. Little Harry (the *sobriquet* was created by the multitude) had a dodging run with the ball in the first place, but being challenged by Chenery, Heron and Ottoway, he passed it to the front centre (W. Mackinnon) and it seemed as if the centres of the English team would get up, ... [but] ... just as Edwards was securing the ball he was finely charged by Campbell, and Ferguson now bounded forward... [and] ... made tracks toward the English fortress. Angus Mackinnon soon shot out in front, and the pair, by “passing”, piloted the ball clean through the English backs, until the only opponent was Welch, the goal-keeper... With the intention of stopping Angus, whom he thought would make the final shot with his right foot, he went to the corner of his goal, but in an instant the ball left the toe of the left and went clean through the English goal.

It is scarcely possible to describe the scene which followed. The goal was taken so cleverly that it was actually a few seconds before the fact was fully realized, and loud and long were the cheers for Scotland. For several minutes the vast multitude swung to and fro, waving hats and handkerchiefs... the last scene on the ground was the form of Harry M'Neill being borne on the shoulders of four of his stalwart countrymen to the Pavilion.'

'Scotland v England at the West of Scotland Cricket Ground, Partick',
Bell's Life, 14 March 1874, p. 5.

[Scotland won 2–1, their first ever football victory over England. The 'huge multitude' referred to is estimated elsewhere in the report at about 7,000 people inside the ground, and a further 3,000 watching from outside. This was a very large crowd for the time. Ordinary club football matches in England in the 1870s were played before a handful of people, and 3–5,000 people was reckoned an exceptional attendance for FA Cup and other major matches. By the end of the 1870s, however, crowds of 15,000–20,000 are regularly reported for major matches in Glasgow.]

17 'The Newark forwards were far too heavy for the visitors and gradually forced them back into their own territory.'

'Newark v Lincoln, at Newark', *Bell's Life*, 14 Nov. 1874, p. 5.

18 'The Queen's Park again played the 'passing game' as brilliantly as ever, and although the Volunteers acted well in concert especially in the back department, they were unable to cope with such magnificent combined action.'

'Queen's Park v Third Lanark Rifle Volunteers',
Bell's Life, 19 Dec. 1874, p. 5.

19 'It appears that the Maidenhead goal-keeper struck the ball out of harm's way with his hands, and the Etonians immediately claimed a free kick. This the umpires allowed and the result was a goal. It is considered that the umpires were wrong in their decision; at any rate the goal-keeper in most matches often touches the ball with his hands and we never had the question raised before.'

'Football Notes', *Bell's Life*, 30 Jan. 1875, p. 5.

[In fact the FA had legalized the handling of the ball by a designated *single* goalkeeper at a meeting in March 1871. In Eton field football however, no handling of the ball was allowed by any player, and the 'goal keeper' was simply the defending player nearest the goal when it was under threat. So it appears that this four-year-old change in the FA rules had not yet reached Etonian ears, even when they were formally playing under association rules against an exclusively association club like Maidenhead.]

20 'When the ball was again started, it was taken close to the home goal, and a try obtained, which was not insisted upon as a cry of 'hand ball' was raised.'

'Report of what is said to be a rugby match between "London International College and Somerset"', *Bell's Life*, 23 Oct. 1875, p. 4.

21 'Nottingham Castle v Burton-on-Trent was another curiosity match, the Burton men reserving to themselves the privilege of handling the ball when the same was in danger of going through their goal. This sort of thing is all very well, but it is rather startling to find a whole team, without any previous notice, using the prerogatives of a goal-keeper. We should hardly think that the Burton men find many to play against them on such terms.'

Sporting Gazette, 25 Nov. 1876, p. 1,163.

[This sounds like Etonian goalkeeping with the interesting twist of allowing everyone playing the role of goalkeeper to handle the ball.]

22 'There is one thing... which... showed that both sides were well up in Association football, namely during the whole course of the game the ball was only "handled" or "fouled" five times: three times by the Cambridge men and twice by the Queens Park.'

'Queen's Park v Cambridge University in Glasgow', *Bell's Life*, 16 Dec. 1876, p. 9.

23 '... after the kick out charging became frequent on both sides, one of the Leven backs indulging in a new system of falling down and allowing his opponent to scramble over him... this was certainly a novelty in football, but whether tending to increase its popularity is another question.'

'Queen's Park v Vale of Leven', *Bell's Life*, 6 Jan. 1877, p. 9.
[Is this the first extant description of a slide tackle?]

24 'On the ball being kicked off, the Northumberland men, who were the heaviest team, made the most of their weight and bore down on their opponents' goal. The ball, however, was well returned by Cumberlege... The Northumberland men again brought the ball back, and had several shots at the Tyne goal... Bruce now made several fine efforts to get the ball through his adversaries, but his career was generally cut short by being charged over. Just before changing ends a scrimmage took place near the Northumberland goal, but by a united rush their forwards carried the ball away. After the change the Tyne goal was again in danger, and both Logan and Eicholtz had good shots at it. The Tyne men now began to play much better together, and for some time pressed the opposite side; Logan however carried the ball away, and was only stopped close to the Tyne goal. The ball was then passed to

Bruce and Cumberlege, who ran it down the field very smartly, and Blackburn secured the first goal for the Tyne...Just before time the Tyne forwards, playing together in excellent form, made a final effort and secured a second goal.'

'Tyne Association Football Club [TAFC] v Northumberland FC [a rugby club], *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 Nov. 1877, p. 4.

25 'The Tyne forwards, by a general rush, secured the first goal after about ten minutes play. The visitors, however, then mettled up and pressed the Tyne hard...Each goal was from this time alternately in danger from the spirited and judicious rushes of the forwards on each side, and this state of things continued to the end of a very fast game...Goals being changed, the match was again very even; but about a quarter of an hour before time a fast dribble on the left side was made by Fawcus, who was well backed up by Bramwell, Crawford and Fenwick. Notwithstanding the charge of Cumberlege, which disposed of Fawcus, the ball was taken on by Bramwell, who dribbled in very rapidly in front of the goal and shot it under the tape...The victory was well earned by the visitors who, in spite of their being accustomed only to Rugby Union rules, dribbled remarkably well; the majority of them being Tynemouth players, and in the habit of playing a loose forward game.'

'TAFC v G.D Fawcus's Team' [also a rugby club],
Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 11 Dec. 1877, p. 4.

26 'The ground was hard underneath from the recent frost, and the match in itself illustrates the fact that Association football could be played under those circumstances without an accident of any kind. There was little or no charging, the players on both sides preferring to tackle each other, and all through the game the play was really brilliant.'

'Vale of Leven v Queen's Park', *Bell's Life*, 19 Jan. 1878, p. 4.

27 '...although the reputed best Eleven ever sent to meet the Scottish champions on their own ground have been beaten by seven goals to two, the cause was not so much the want of English pluck and endurance as the superiority shown by the Scotch in playing-together-power and incessant practice...In point of weight (but that avails little in Association football) the Englishmen were far ahead of the Scotch, the contrast between Hight, M'Neil, M'Kinnon, M'Gregor and M'Dougall, with Wylie, Lyttelton, Heron, Jarrett and Hunter, being very marked...The match throughout was very fast, and chiefly remarkable for the excellent forward play of the Scotch who...were manifestly superior in pace, quickness on their feet, and dribbling.

Their tackling was also much better than that of the English forwards, who again and again missed their mark by aiming at the head or neck, rather than below the waist.'

'Scotland v England at Queen's Park, Glasgow', *Bell's Life*,
9 March 1878, p. 5.

28 'During the second twenty, Middlesbrough for some time had the best of the play, their passing being very good... On the game being again set going, the Middlesbrough men worked harder than ever, their passing being most unselfish, and Ewbank scored a goal for them after a good piece of play... The play of the Middlesbrough men was marked by the unselfish passing and the way in which each man kept his place. Had the Tyne men done the same the result might have been different.'

'TAFC v Middlesbrough AFC', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*,
25 Nov. 1878, p. 4.

THE MAKING OF MODERN ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL: THE MOTLEY ORIGINS

These reports make clear that modern association football was *not* created by a simple process of imposing the FA's code of rules then 'diffusing' it as the game expanded. Rather the modern game was gradually distilled out from pluralistic origins in which a handful of clubs playing by the FA rules coexisted with clubs playing by a variety of other rules. These included the public-school codes of football, encompassing Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Winchester and Marlborough rules, as well as Rugby [see excerpts 3, 6 and 19]; the rules of the 'Sheffield Association' of football clubs,²⁰ which continued to allow outfield handling of the ball after it was banned by the FA [5, 14]; and clubs playing by eclectic combinations of public-school rules or of the FA and public-school rules [3, 6, 15].

Moreover throughout the 1860s many supposed rugby clubs also played association forms of football. Indeed the distinction between association football and rugby was a very blurred and unclear one in these early years [2 and 6]. Many association clubs in the 1860s did not play with 'height-delimited' goals, and many rugby clubs did not play with the 'H'-shaped goals familiar today. Thus in both forms of football goals could be scored with high punted kicks passing between the 'goal poles' at any height. In addition, until 1868 the FA rules allowed scoring through 'touchdowns' or 'rouges', as well as through goals [1, 4, 15, 20]. Most remarkably of all, many association clubs played matches in which outfield players handled the ball, and were doing so fully four or five years after the FA had banned the practice [19, 21].

In short, right through the 1860s and early 1870s, 'association football' was the name, not of a specific form or code of football, but of what Shakespeare

would have called 'a motley'. And in the 1860s at least, this motley did not invariably exclude rugby. It is true that, at a famous ill-tempered meeting of 28 November 1863, the representatives of Blackheath and other rugby clubs left the FA in protest at the ban on tripping and hacking just passed at that meeting, and the split between rugby and association football is conventionally dated to this time. But this conventional story overlooks the fact that many of the football clubs in and around London, and the handful of early football clubs in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, simply did not treat this split as definitive or even important. They did not feel bound by the decisions, or affected by the quarrels, of twelve men making up an obscure organization based in a London tavern. In fact throughout the 1860s the FA had no greater importance in regulating football than the Sheffield Association of football clubs, or than an individual club for that matter.²¹

So this leaves two questions. First, how did proto-modern association football distil itself out of this 'motley', if not simply by the 'spreading' or 'adoption' of the FA code of rules? And second, did older forms of folk football play any part in influencing or structuring that original motley? We will take the second question first.

MODERN FOOTBALL AND THE FOLK GAMES

If early club football was influenced by folk football, that influence must have been mediated through the various public-school codifications. Certainly all the public-school codes originated from scholars bringing folk football into the schools from their surrounding hinterlands.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when public schools were much less regulated institutions than they were to become from the late eighteenth century, their scholars readily joined in local pastimes, including hunting and boxing, as well as football. But when the institutions became more physically and class-segregated the scholars were compelled to play football as an exclusively intra-school pastime, and it was as such that football was first formalized and codified in the 1840s (as 'Eton' football, 'Rugby' football, 'Harrow' football, etc.).²²

As already noted, the FA itself came into existence with the aim of creating a 'universal code' to overcome the major incompatibilities between these public-school codes that made inter-club play difficult. Or at least that is the view promulgated by most press writers and correspondents in late 1863 and early 1864 when the FA was being set up. It is also the view that finds its way into the standard histories.

And yet, as we see from the match reports, many 1860s football clubs seem not to have experienced this 'problem' at all. They seem in fact to have operated on the advice that one public-school writer, 'The Old Boy', gave to schoolboys in 1868:

It is very easy to start a game of football without insisting upon intricate rules and technicalities. The great object is to kick the ball from goal to

goal; and although some insist that the ball shall be carried, and some maintain that hands should not be used under any pretence whatever, we should all put our shoulders to the wheel and start a game as best we can, giving and taking, as the case may be.²³

On the face of it, and starting from present-day rugby v soccer distinctions, ‘The Old Boy’s’ advice seems good-natured but intellectually flaccid. But perhaps it is not quite so flaccid as it appears. Because one way of ‘giving and taking’ in practice, was to agree to play by some *combination* of kicking and handling, and/or kicking and carrying. And this is just what many early football clubs seem to have done. And significantly the balance of evidence about folk football suggests that most forms of it were indeed ‘combination’ games of this kind. In such games ‘the great object’ was indeed to get the ball into the opponent’s goal, and this could be done by kicking it, running with it, and even throwing it.

Not only this however, much early association football is also distinguished by the following characteristics. First, a strong emphasis on player weights, and on strength and physicality generally. This is most clearly manifest in the use of charging rather than tackling as the main way of arresting and dispossessing opponents [see excerpts 8, 9, 11, 17, 23, 24].

Second, scoring by kicking the ball behind the opponent’s bye-line – as a touchdown or rouse – as well as by kicking the ball into the goal space [1, 4, 15, 20]. Third, strong emphasis on ‘pack’ forward play (with the lead forward dribbling the ball and his co-forwards ‘backing-up’) rather than on dispersed and individualized ‘positional’ play [7, 24, 25]. And fourth, a tendency to use goals not only as a form of scoring but as a means of ‘time-dividing’ a match. Thus a match is described as divided into ‘games’, each game ending when a goal is scored. This is often reflected in the use of ‘goal’ and ‘game’ as partial synonyms – so that teams can win by ‘two goals or games to none’. It is also embodied in the FA rule, which remained in force into the 1880s, that teams should change ends on the scoring of a goal as well as at half-time [5, 16, 24, 25].

All these practices were also common in folk football. We have already seen that the latter was long regarded as a rough and dangerous pastime, in which direct physical clashes of players were common and the superior weight of one team could be a considerable asset. We also know that in smaller-scale team-and-field-based forms of folk football, the goals were often demarcated areas of the field rather than upright structures, which would have meant that much ‘goal scoring’ was more like the scoring of touchdowns or rouses. Such descriptions of folk football as we possess also suggest that most forms of it featured pack rushes against pack defences.²⁴ Folk football games were not, it seems, dispersed ‘positional’ games. And finally, there is a reasonable abundance of evidence that, from the late eighteenth century at least, a division of football matches into discrete

'games' (with each game ending when a goal was scored, and the winner of the match being the team to score two 'goals or games' out of three, or three 'goals or games' out of five) was a very common form of folk-football organization.²⁵

MAKING MODERN FOOTBALL: THE ROLE OF CUPS AND CLYDESIDE

The fourteen famous 'rules of football' adopted by the Football Association on that celebrated evening of 28 November 1863 were not its only contribution to the making of modern football. In fact those initial rules were amended several times in the 1860s and early 1870s. The most significant of these amendments were the outlawing of the 'fair catch' at an AGM of February 1866; prohibiting the stopping of the ball with the hands (and thus all outfield handling of the ball) in 1870 and the creation of height-delimited goals, through a tape or bar, at the same meeting; the outlawing of scoring through touchdowns or rouges in 1868; and the creation of a designated role of 'goalkeeper' with the exclusive right to handle the ball, at a meeting of 1871.

Although, as the match reports show, these rule changes did not lead to instant transformation of playing practices, play did gradually and unevenly follow them. As a result, by the late 1870s most playing of association football did generally accord with FA rules (see Appendix).

However, it was not those original rules, nor the changes in them, that increased the influence of the FA's code over football play, but its creation of a challenge-cup competition in 1871. The important role played by challenge cups (not only the FA Cup, but the Scottish FA's cup competition of 1873 and the local association challenge cups which sprang up right across England and Scotland in the 1870s) in increasing the popularity of association football was regularly commented on by contemporaries, and is a staple of all histories of the game. Less noticed is that such competitions were also powerful influences in the standardizing of code and play. Clubs entering a cup competition had to agree to abide by the rules of the association sponsoring it, and all the new regional football associations which emerged in the 1870s tended to play either by the FA code, or by a code which differed from it only in minor ways.

So by the late 1870s players of association football knew that they were not to handle the ball, knew what constituted a goal in their game, knew that only a single 'goalkeeper' could handle the ball, etc. However, none of that actually told them how to *play* the game. Rules provide games with an objective to achieve ('win by scoring more goals than the opposition'), but in regard to play their role is primarily negative. They say what cannot be done, what is foul or illegal, but they say nothing about what *can* be done, what constitutes good or effective play.

As the match reports suggest [8, 24, 25], in early association football the main attacking strategy was a group or pack of forwards running together

toward the opposing goal, dribbling the ball as they went, and passing it (if at all) only very short distances within the pack. And the main mode of defence was for a group of the opposing team to bar the way, while one or more of their members barged into whichever opposing forward was dribbling the ball. Once in possession, this defending group would in turn become a forward pack, and the whole process would be reversed. Thus early football tended to involve groups of defenders and attackers following the ball around the pitch, and massing in battling 'clumps' around it. And since matches amounted to a continually-moving collision or confrontation between two groups of players, weight and size mattered a lot, because it often determined whether body or shoulder charges would be successful.

However, in the mid 1870s, around Glasgow and western Scotland, a number of physically slight Scottish footballers, of mainly working-class backgrounds, discovered that by dispersing themselves across the pitch rather more, passing the ball greater distances, and dribbling by manipulating the ball right and left in space (rather than straight ahead at the front of a pack) they could both 'outflank' pack defences and compensate for their lack of height and weight by speed of movement – of both players and ball. They also discovered that by 'tackling' an adversary in possession rather than charging him – that is by approaching with feet and legs advanced and aiming at the ball rather than the body – they could dispossess an opponent, even a much heavier opponent, quickly and cleanly, and commence their own counter-attack with a quick pass to a colleague.²⁶ Indeed one of the major advantages of the slide tackle (which appears to have originated in Scotland) was that, in certain circumstances, one physical movement could be both a dispossessing tackle and a pass to a colleague [16, 18, 23, 26, 27, 28].²⁷

In addition, as football was developed in ways which made passing more important and pack dribbling less so, the skill of passing itself was developed in new ways. Players had to learn to pass in different directions by the use of the instep and the outside of the foot, and, if they wished to pass accurately over longer distances and avoid opposing players, they had to learn how to hit the ball cleanly through a variety of trajectories.

As forward play dispersed so as to outflank defences, so defences had to disperse in order to counter that threat. So both forwards and defenders began to occupy individualized 'positions' on the pitch, and confrontations between a specific defender and a specific forward replaced the group confrontations of early football. This also meant that both attack and defence could be seriously compromised if players drifted away from their positions. In particular, simply 'following the ball' became a dangerous tactic for defenders, because rapid passing of the ball around them soon left them stranded and 'out of position' [16, 27, 28].²⁸

'Opening up' football in this way meant in turn that quick, small players with a low centre of gravity and the ability to twist and turn sharply while in possession (so evading a tackle or shoulder charge), and to control and pass

FOOTBALL MATCH,
WANDERERS, London, v. QUEEN'S PARK,
Played on Hampden Park, Mount Florida, Glasgow, on Saturday, 9th October, 1875

H. W. CHAMBERS,
Goal Keeper.

A. H. STRATFORD,
X Back.

<p>A. F. KINNAIRD, <i>Right X Half-back,</i> Blue and white cap</p> <p>J. TURNER, <i>Left X Wing.</i></p> <p>HUBERT HERON, <i>Left X Wing</i> Grey stockings, and orange, violet, and black cap</p> <p style="text-align: center;">UMPIRE—ROBERT GARDINER, CLYDESDALE CLUB REFEREE—THOMAS HASWELL 3RD L.K.V. CLUB UMPIRE—W. C. MITCHELL, QUEEN'S PARK CLUB</p> <p>HENRY McNEILL, <i>Left X Front</i> Orange and black stockings.</p> <p>M. McNEIL, <i>Left X Back-up</i> Blue and white stockings</p> <p>JAS. PHILIPS <i>Left X Half-back</i> Red and black stockings.</p> <p>R. W. NEIL, <i>Left X Back</i> Heather mixture stockings</p>	<p>R. L. GEAVES, <i>Centre X</i> Red and white cap</p> <p>C. W. ALCOCK, <i>Captain X and Centre</i> Cap—blue and white chequers.</p> <p>W. S. RAWSON <i>Left X Half-back</i> Blue cap</p> <p>H. S. OTTER, <i>X Centre</i> Pink cap</p> <p>W. D. GREIG, <i>Right X Wing</i> Blue stockings</p> <p>J. KENRICK, <i>Right X Wing</i> Green and French grey cap</p>	<p>W. S. RAWSON <i>Left X Half-back</i> Blue cap</p> <p>JAMES B. WEIR, <i>Right X Front</i> Red and white stockings.</p> <p>THOMAS LAWRIE, <i>Right X Back-up.</i> White stockings</p> <p>CHAS. CAMPBELL, <i>Right X Half-back</i> Red, white, and black stockings.</p> <p>JOSEPH TAYLOR, <i>Captain and X Right Back</i> Black and white stockings</p>
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JOHN DICKSON,
Goal Keeper.

Colours : Wanderers, White Jersey — Queen's Park, Black and White Stripe.
 Play will begin at 3.30 p.m. and end at 5 p.m.

PLEASE DO NOT STRAIN THE ROPES.

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Fig. 1. Match programme, Glasgow, 9 Oct. 1875: Wanderers, London versus Queen's Park. The Scottish team, which included 'dribble wizards' Harry McNeill and James Weir, won the match 4-0 in front of an estimated 16,000 people.

the ball with speed and fluency, made far more dangerous forwards than larger and stronger, but much less mobile and skilful, opponents. In fact the above is an abstract sketch of the attributes of what became known as the ‘ball-playing’ Scottish forward or ‘dribble wizard’, a type of player who became the first cult hero of association football – in England as well as in Scotland – from the late 1870s onwards.²⁹

The combined result of all these changes was that by 1880 football matches, at least between the most technically advanced clubs, looked completely different from matches played in the 1860s, and much more like the ‘soccer’ we know today.

Enthusiast historians of football, just like early football crowds [16] celebrate the early Scottish dribblers and ‘ball-players’ (such as Harry McNeill) as the heroes of this ‘new’ football, while sociologists and others of a speculative bent make connections between the new ‘combinatory’, ‘positional’ football and the highly organized technical division of labour with which players from an industrial working-class background on Clydeside would have been familiar.³⁰

However I am sceptical of both these explanations. Nothing is required to explain these developments beyond the intelligent adaptability of men taking up a game dominated by players who were bigger and stronger, but less mobile, than they were. It is not impossible, I suppose, that some individual hero invented the so-called ‘wall pass’ or ‘slide tackle’, but it is more likely that they were just improvised simultaneously by many players in the course of play. And if there was one distinctively ‘working-class’ characteristic that encouraged such improvisation it was surely poor nutrition (and hence reduced stature) not extrapolations from factory or shipyard labour processes.³¹

Finally, it should be emphasized that, in 1880, the changes anatomized above were seriously incomplete. Their epicentre was Glasgow and western Scotland, where, from the mid 1870s, working-class football clubs – or at any rate clubs with a significant working-class membership – sprang into being,³² and by the mid 1880s constituted a majority of Scottish clubs. In England, although a few of the more traditionally middle-class clubs – like the Wanderers and the Royal Engineers – began to follow the Scottish example, the older ‘group-rushing’ style of play remained common in any and all parts of the country where middle-class clubs predominated [24, 25, 28].

However, by 1880 working-class clubs had begun to appear in Lancashire and Yorkshire too, and they brought Scottish players into their clubs and games, and/or organized matches against Scottish clubs as part of a quite conscious attempt to learn and emulate. By the late 1880s working-class football clubs formed a majority of all football clubs in every region of England. This almost immediately brought in its train pressures for the professionalization of the game, pressures that came fully to fruition from 1890 onward.

CONCLUSIONS

Writing the history of football has significant challenges of both method and sources. The primary methodological difficulty is that one is studying a human activity which has combined extraordinary continuity and stability of nomenclature – ‘football’, ‘playing football’, ‘playing footie’, ‘a match at football’ – with considerable change and dynamism of practice, especially since the mid nineteenth century.

The main problem of sources is that, except for a crucial but brief period between about 1840 and 1880, this is an activity of poor people primarily and is little represented in written records. This is most obviously true of the medieval and early modern history of football as a set of folk pastimes. But it also applies to the early years of modern football, especially if one’s desire is to trace changes in patterns of play, rather than the institutional organization of the game or its broader social and economic impacts.

The extraordinary continuity of terminology constitutes a semi-permanent temptation to teleology, a temptation to which amateur enthusiast historians often fall prey, and not only they. One reads in the pages of Magoun that:

The game at which they had met for common recreation is called by some the ‘foot-ball-game’. It is one in which young men, in country sport, propel a huge ball not by throwing it into the air but by striking it along the ground, and that not with their hands but with their feet... The boundaries had been marked and the game had started; and, when they were striving manfully, kicking in opposite directions, and our hero had thrown himself into the midst of the fray, one of his fellows... came up against him in front and kicked him by misadventure, missing his aim at the ball.³³

Upon being told that this is ‘a chronicler’s description of events in the village of Caunton, near Newark, at some time between 1481 and 1500’, who might *not* be tempted to think that they had found a fifteenth-century soccer game?

But of course they have not, and I hope this article explains why they have not. However such is the love and esteem in which soccer and rugby are held today that the search for antiquarian legitimacy reproduces itself endlessly, and is immensely aided by the genuine antiquity of ‘football’ as a word, and by the tantalizingly vague descriptions in which it is employed for some 600 or more years.

In the case of the origins of modern association football the problem is at once very different and subtly related. For if by ‘the origins of modern football’ one means the origins of institutionalized and codified football, there is certainly no shortage of sources, and no real doubt what they tell us. However, if by ‘the origins of modern football’ one means the origins of the game of soccer as it is played today, there remains a considerable problem of sources, and considerable room for doubt about what they tell us.

In this article I have suggested that the foundations of the modern game of soccer were laid in Scotland and England in the thirty or so years *after* 1863, and I have exploited a previously underused source (early club-match reports) to trace the first twenty years of that process in a level of detail not previously attempted, and not found in the standard histories.

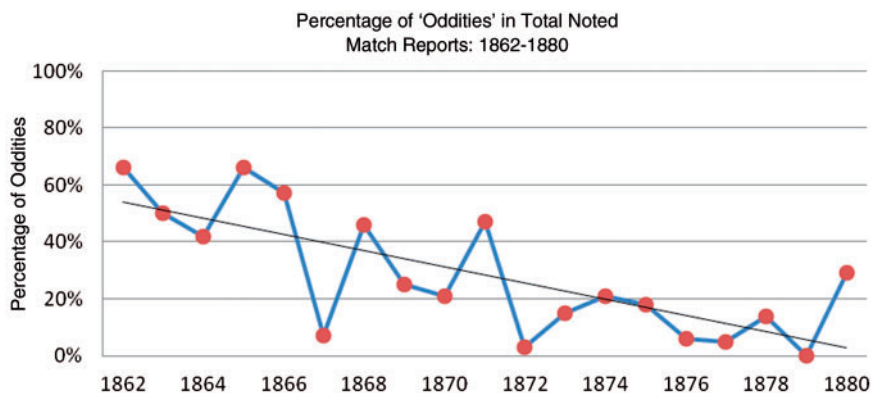
However, and more originally, I have also used those match reports to show that the family of loosely-related pastimes that bore the hallowed old name of ‘football’ did influence, did leave their impress upon, the first forms of codified football (although only in a mediated way through the public-school codification of specific playing and scoring practices). Those aspects of 1850s and 1860s codified football that most clearly bore the impress of the old world were precisely those that were radically altered, or removed in order to make soccer the extraordinarily attractive game, both to play and spectate, that it is today.

And, if I am right, it was working-class players above all who did that altering and removing. If one wants to push the irony, the working-class footballers of Scotland created the foundations of modern soccer by dispensing with all those aspects of play in which their plebeian forefathers had revelled and passed down through the generations. Those forms of play came down unto the late eighteenth century, even unto Victorian public-school boys. But, as a quintessentially plebeian bequest, they were politely refused by modern proletarian players.

Soccer is ‘the People’s Game’ *par excellence*. It is also (not least in this author’s eyes) ‘the Beautiful Game’, possessed, at its best, of a kind of bewitching liquid geometry that seems to appeal, irrespective of culture, class or even gender, to a huge number of human beings. But in order to ‘make’ soccer, and in order to make it beautiful, the modern ‘People’ (or some of them) had first to remove or transform virtually all of the elements that had come down to association football from ‘the People’ of pre-modern Britain. Quite why that was, and whether it had psychologically and emotionally deep connections – ‘sensibility’ connections – to other dimensions of modernity, it is beyond the purview of history to tell us.

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APPENDIX: GRAPH AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES



1. The graph plots the percentage of 'oddities' in 395 football-match reports appearing in *Bell's Life* and the *Sporting Gazette* between 1862 and 1880.
2. The sample was not randomly selected. On the contrary, all match reports appearing in the two journals over this period were 'scanned', but the 395 reports noted or downloaded were selected because they contained some details of play (no matter how brief) and/or contained 'oddities' of play, scoring, rules or other matters (for example, mention of player weights).
3. 'Oddities' here means observations which appear odd *from the point of view of association football today*. Some of them (for example, outfield handling of the ball, or scoring by means of touch-downs or rouges as well as by goals) would not have seemed odd to players or observers at the time, and some (such as scoring by touch-downs or rouges) were not illegal under FA rules until the late 1860s. However, since the idea is precisely to emphasize how different 1860s and 1870s 'association football' was from contemporary soccer, the graph embodies contemporary, not Victorian, standards of oddity.
4. The straight line is the Excel-plotted trend line. It shows that the percentage of 'odd' observations declined continuously over the period, their absolute level falling, first to below 20% and then to 10% or less, as the 1870s advanced. This is broadly as one would expect if the analysis in the article is correct. At the very least it suggests that the pattern shown by the sub-sample of twenty-eight reports is typical of a broader universe.
5. Note however the anti-trend observations for 1867 (just one oddity in fifteen reports) and 1880 (two in seven – or 29% – after three previous

years in which there had been none out of ten, two out of twenty-one, and one out of twenty-two). I am unable to explain the 1867 anomaly (it could simply be a product of chance), but the 1880 anomaly is more apparent than real. For 1880 I found only seven reports with details of play, and it happened that two of these contained oddities.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 See for example, 'A few hints to aid with the formation of the universal code' by 'A Lover of Football', *Sporting Gazette*, 19 Dec. 1863. Also J. C. Thring, 'Letter to the Editor', *Sporting Gazette*, 26 Dec. 1863. Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was founded in 1787 and came to codify and standardize national cricketing practices.

2 Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915*, Brighton, 1980; Dave Russell, *Football and the English: a Social History of Association Football in England 1863–1995*, Preston, 1997; and Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: a History of British Football*, Harlow, 2008.

3 John Goulstone, *Football's Secret History*, Upminster, 2001; Adrian Harvey, *Football: the First Hundred Years – the Untold Story*, London, 2005. See also Goulstone, 'The Working-Class Origins of Modern Football', *International Journal of the History of Sport [IJHS]* 17: 1, 2000, pp. 135–43, and Harvey, 'Football's Missing Link: the Real Story of the Evolution of Modern Football', *European Sports History Review* 1, 1999.

4 Francis Peabody Magoun Jr, *A History of Football from the Beginnings to 1871*, Cologne, 1938.

5 Percy M. Young, *A History of British Football*, London, 1973, chaps 1–3; Montague Shearman, *Athletics and Football*, London, 1881, chap. 1 and Charles Alcock, *Football: Our Winter Game*, London, 1874, chap. 1. Since Young however, football historians have tended to avoid the topic, which is why Harvey and Goulstone have been able to rediscover it as a 'secret history' or 'real story'. Taylor (*Association Game*, pp. 24–9), gives it a little attention, but only as part of a brief review of Harvey and Goulstone's revisionism.

6 'The original game from which both Rugby and Association football have been developed... was simply the getting of a ball to or through a goal in spite of the efforts of the opposite side to prevent it': Shearman, *Athletics and Football*, p. 260.

7 According to Goulstone, 'The boundary or goal was known as the "bye"... a "bye" or a "by-goal" denoted a ball kicked or placed over the opposing team's goal-line, from the dialect word 'bye' meaning the corners and two ends of a field impossible to be turned by any plough which instead had to be dug by hand. Similarly 'headland' was applied to the strip of land left unoccupied at the grassy or waste borders of a field close to the hedge. Thus in Rochdale in 1841 the ball had to be placed 'on the opponents' headland', which the report defined as 'each extremity of the field'. Goulstone, *Football's Secret History*, p. 39.

8 For good overviews of Shrovetide football, see Magoun, *History of Football*, chap. 9, and Harvey, *Football*, chap. 1. For a case study, see my "'From Time Immemorial": the Alnwick Shrovetide Football Match and the Continual Making and Remaking of Tradition, 1828–90', *IJHS* 6, 2011, pp. 831–52.

9 See Magoun, *History of Football*, p. 140.

10 See for example, '... an extraordinary match of football took place at Dunstable-down; a young gentleman took the hill for 200 guineas, against eleven of the best football players in the country, which was decided in his favour after a contest of four hours and a half': *General Evening Post*, 16 May 1789; or '... we live in hopes of seeing a manifesto published against the practice on the cricket ground of the exercises of wrestling and football, either of which have quite as much of the legal essence of an assault as a prize fight': *Bell's Life in London*, 15 March 1829, p. 6. One finds single-man challenges to a match at 'wrestling or football' in the columns of *Bell's Life*. The first of these (from 1847) even specified the maximum weight of the opponent – ten stone.

11 See *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 4:

Oswald: 'I'll not be struck my lord.' Kent: 'Nor tripped neither, you base football player.' [*Tripping up his heels.*]

12 See for example 'The Lord's Last Kick: Or Corporation Football', in *Figaro in London*, 9 July 1836, p. 113 (a lengthy analogy of a Lords-Commons dispute to a football match). Also 'the head of LOUIS SEIZE became the football of the Poissardes': *The Age*, 13 Sept. 1840, p. 291; and 'The motion of Lord Beaumont met with a very equivocal supporter, who may be considered the football (not a little inflated, by the way, notwithstanding the numerous kicks received) – of the contending parties': *The Satirist; or the Censor of the Times*, 22 Feb. 1846, p. 59. For many other examples (often reproduced) see Magoun, *History of Football*, pp. 38–44.

13 This oft-quoted description (*Bell's Life*, 29 Feb. 1852, p. 7) is typical in its brevity and vagueness:

Wigston won the toss and consequently had the wind in their favour. The play was excellent on both sides for half an hour. Wigston, finding they were losing, got out of temper, and began kicking the Blaby youths, but they smartly returned it. Blaby seemed to have the play entirely to themselves, winning the first goal. A rest then took place for half an hour, after which, the ball being put down, Blaby having the wind the contest was very short, they winning easily.

14 From *The Field*, quoted in *The Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 11 Dec. 1863:

The only reason why football has not long since become as generally popular in winter as cricket has in summer, is to be found in the diversity of the laws by which it is regulated in different centres, and the disputes which have in consequence arisen. It was at one time common to most village-greens, and a pastime of the people. It has now for many years languished almost everywhere except at the public schools, where, under peculiar forms, it has flourished, and still flourishes, in all its pristine vigour. This decay has not been unattended by murmurs of dissent and disapprobation, and these have at last arisen into a cry which promises now to be answered by a more general spread of the game upon better principles.

15 On this see Eric Dunning, *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence, and Civilization*, London, 1998, pp. 90–1, and especially E. Dunning and Ken Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: a Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, London, 2005. For reasons already given, it is impossible to know for certain whether folk football declined from the late eighteenth century (although that was the almost unanimous view of well-informed contemporaries). But the massively increased labour demands of the industrial revolution and the general social dislocation attendant upon rapid urbanization and rural-urban migration provide plausible reasons for thinking so. A well-known account arguing this is Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850*, Cambridge, 1973, especially chap. 5. See also Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: a Modern History*, Oxford 1989, pp. 38–40. For some qualifying comments around the paucity of evidence, see Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, London, 1980, chap. 2, pp. 60–5.

16 See for example Russell, *Football and the English*, chap. 1.

17 Mason, *Association Football and English Society*, chap. 1 and Taylor, *Association Game*, chap. 1, both exemplify this approach. The older histories do better in this respect. See for example Young, *History of British Football*, chap. 6, and Shearman, *Athletics and Football*, pp. 279–93, both of which discuss the public-school codes and their antecedents in some detail.

18 Richard Sanders attempts to make a connection between the early emergence of club football in Sheffield and a 'lingering' tradition of folk football in South Yorkshire, 'particularly the hill country around the villages of Penistone, Thurlstone and Holmfirth just a dozen miles north-west of Sheffield'. But he provides no convincing evidence of a direct link between the two, just inviting his readers to construe coincidence as causality. 'It is surely no coincidence that Britain's first modern football culture outside London should have emerged in a city so close to this hotbed of folk football.' Richard Sanders, *Beastly Fury: the Strange Birth of British Football*, London: Bantam, 2009, pp.48–9. Eric Dunning, 'Something of a Curate's Egg:

Comments on Adrian Harvey's "An Epoch in the Annals of Modern Sport", *IJHS* 18:4, 2001, pp. 88–93 identifies the same weakness in Harvey's account of the Sheffield club and Association.

19 The table and chart in Appendix 1 use my entire sample of 395 reports to provide a statistical confirmation of the increased standardization of football play in England and Scotland between 1860 and 1880. They show that this proceeded much more rapidly after 1872–3.

20 There is much debate about the Sheffield Association, and in particular how far it was or was not a 'public-school' institution. For the principal contributions, see Harvey, *Football*, chap. 4, and 'An Epoch in the Annals of National Sport: Football in Sheffield and the Creation of Modern Soccer and Rugby', *IJHS* 18: 4, 2001. For a critique see Dunning, 'Something of a Curate's Egg', and exchanges in *IJHS* 18: 4, 2001 and 19: 4, 2002.

21 On 17 November 1863 the FA received a request to join from the Secretary of Lincoln Football Club, whose letter noted that 'the laws by which we have hitherto played are drawn, I believe, from the Marlborough, Eton and Rugby rules'. Less than a year later however, Lincoln withdrew from the FA on the grounds that 'we played under the association rules last year but did not find them act' (*sic*). Meanwhile, Lincoln's neighbours, the Louth Football Club, determined at an AGM of 17 Feb. 1864 to adopt the 'the new [FA] . . . laws . . . with the following exceptions – The sentence in Rule IV with regard to the numbers of the sides to be expunged, the word *thrown* to be substituted for the word *hit* occurring in Rule XIII'. Rule 4 said, among other things, that 'the numbers on each side [were] to be settled by the heads of the sides'. Rule 13 stated that 'The ball, when in play, may be stopped by any part of the body, but it may NOT be held or hit by the hands, arms or shoulders'. So clearly Louth were playing a game in which the ball was 'hit' with the hands and arms, but was not 'thrown'. And they wanted to keep it that way. *Bell's Life*, 21 Nov. 1863, p. 1, 27 Feb. 1864, p. 7, and 24 Feb. 1866, p. 3.

22 See J. A. Mangan, 'Bullies, Beatings, Battles and Bruises: "Great Days and Jolly Days" at one Mid-Victorian Public School', in *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play*, ed. Mike Huggins and J. A. Mangan, London, 2004, pp. 3–34, for this transition at Marlborough School. See also Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, London, 1989, pp. 4–6, for pre-existing forms of folk football in the area around Rugby school. For more general assertions about the connections between the public-school codes and their plebeian predecessors, see Young, *History of British Football*, chap. 6, and Shearman, *Athletics and Football*, pp. 279–93.

23 The Old Boy, 'Football', *Routledge's Magazine for Boys*, 1 Nov. 1868, p. 4.

24 See for example my "'From Time Immemorial'", especially pp. 841–5, and also my 'What's in a Name? Playing "Football" in the mid-Victorian North-East', *Ethnologie Française*, 2011: 4, pp. 601–13, especially pp. 604–6.

25 See for example *John Bull*, 17 March 1828, p. 88. Also *Bell's Life*, 9 Feb. 1851 and 21 March 1852.

26 Cf. D. D. Bone 'Association Football in Scotland', *Bell's Life*, 2 Nov. 1878, p. 3:

The backs should be clever tacklers, able to kick with either foot, and take the earliest opportunity of retarding the progress of the dribbler . . . At close quarters they should avoid charging, for depend upon it, another of the opposing forwards, seeing a gap in the line of defence, caused by the time wasted in an attack of this kind, may get the ball through.

27 There has been some debate over who introduced 'the passing game' to association football, with the Royal Engineers and Sheffield teams sometimes being credited along with the Scots. See for example, C. W. Alcock, *Football: the Association Game*, London, 1906, pp. 33 and 35–6. Also Young, *History of Football*, p. 161 and Russell, *Football and the English*, p. 21. Here again the match-report evidence is helpful. Reports dating between March 1875 and March 1880, and including several matches between Queen's Park (and other Glasgow teams and clubs) and the Royal Engineers, Sheffield, and the leading English team of this period – the Wanderers – show clearly that the Scots were the pioneers here. In 1876 for example, after suffering a heavy defeat by a combined Glasgow XI, the Sheffield Association introduced trial matches (for the selection of its team for the return fixture) for the first time in its history. Those matches were explicitly designed to 'find out the best passing players' and to expel from the team 'any of the players exhibiting selfishness': *Bell's Life*, 11 March 1876, p. 5.

28 Alcock, *Football: the Association Game*, pp. 35–6, notes that, ‘the Scotch’ as well as pioneering ‘systematic passing’ were also the first to give ‘each player . . . his allotted station’. He also claims that the greater attacking threat posed by the passing game produced an answering shift in the structure of teams, with the numbers of forwards reduced (from seven to five) and the number of defenders increased (from three or four to five or six), and that this too happened first in Scotland.

29 On the evening of 30 Jan. 1886 some young men of the Morpeth Harriers Football Club in Northumberland were met in committee when they learned that ‘a Queens Park player was located at Pegswood and was in town that very evening. As soon as the Committee had recovered from the delightful shock of this unexpected news, the Secretary and Treasurer rushed off to capture this *rara avis*’: *Morpeth Harriers Football Club Minute Book 1884–7*, Northumberland Records Office, ZMD 156/1.

30 See, for example James Walvin, *The People’s Game: a Social History of British Football*, London, 1975, p. 77. For Harry McNeill, see Matthew L. McDowell, *A Cultural History of Association Football in Scotland*, Edinburgh, 2013, chap. 3, pp. 67–8. (I am deeply grateful to Dr McDowell for so generously making his pioneering work on the very early history of Scottish football available to me.) The McNeill brothers were members of the first Rangers team (1872), although Harry also played for Queen’s Park later in the 1870s, and is tagged as a ‘Queen’s Park’ player in the Scottish team lists for the 1874 and 1878 internationals against England: see excerpts 16 and 27 above.

31 For comments on the notably lighter weight and smaller stature of the Scottish players in the England v Scotland matches of 1874 and 1878, see *Bell’s Life*, 14 March 1874, p. 5, and 9 March 1878, p. 5. For data on the generally poorer nutrition and smaller size of all Scottish people vis-à-vis the English in the late nineteenth century, see Roderick Floud, Kenneth Wachter and Annabel Gregory, *Health, Height and History: Nutritional Status in the UK 1750–1980*, Cambridge, 1990, chap. 1 and Conclusions, and for data on working-class nutrition specifically in the late nineteenth century, chap. 5. It is unclear whether Scottish working-class men generally were smaller, or had poorer nutrition, than working-class men in Victorian England and Wales. But for our purposes this does not matter, since until the late 1880s the English national team, and all the leading English club teams, were made up entirely of men from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds.

32 For the very early (1870s) development of Scottish working-class football clubs, often though not always under employer auspices and control, in Dumbartonshire, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire (including Glasgow), see McDowell, *A Cultural History*, chap. 5, pp. 99–119; chap. 6, pp. 122–3, 129 and 135; and chap. 7, pp. 147–8, 152, 155–6, 160–1. For the rapid changes in the size, class composition and behaviour of Scottish football crowds with the appearance of working-class teams (notably Vale of Leven and Rangers) see *Bell’s Life*, 24 March 1877, p. 4 and 23 March 1878, p. 5.

33 Magoun, *History of Football*, pp. 14–15.