

Cuthbert Ottaway

by Michael Southwick

The man who captained England in the world's first ever football international (against Scotland in 1872) has been treated somewhat lightly by historians of the game. Very few people, it seems, have even heard of Cuthbert John Ottaway, let alone know anything about him. Yet the man was a sporting phenomenon.

Born into a well-to-do family in Dover in 1850, he went on to become the only student to represent Oxford University at 'Blue' level in five different sports, played first-class cricket at the highest level, appeared in three F.A.Cup Finals and, as a little side line (or so it seemed at the time), also happened to be England's first ever international football captain. He did it all as an amateur, finding time, also, to qualify as a barrister, before dying at the age of 27 in the spring of 1878. He missed out on all the things we consider ordinary – having a family, a career, and even so much as a middle-age – yet achieved more than a modern-day sportsman or sports fan could ever dream of.

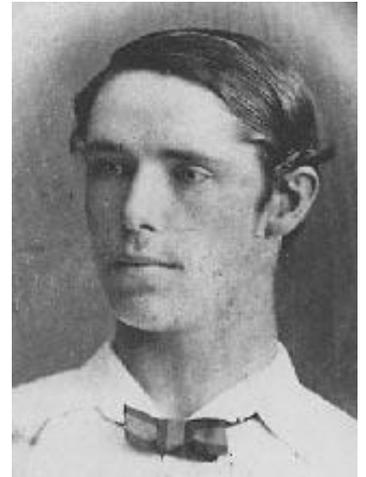
In an age in which the gentleman scholar-athlete was king, Cuthbert Ottaway reigned supreme, and helped pave the way for the next generation of more famous all-rounder superstars such as the great C.B. Fry. Ottaway, though, was there, performing, during the formative years of organised sport; untied by the contractual world of professionalism, he and his (mainly lesser) contemporaries were true pioneers.

Though a native of Dover and a student of both Eton and Oxford University, Ottaway's links with London are considerable. His cricketing associations are especially strong, having graced the city's arenas (Lord's and the Oval included) dozens of times – from his earliest days at Eton (where he visited Lord's as a boy on a day trip in 1867 and appeared there in the annual matches against Harrow in the late 1860s), through several first-class appearances for Middlesex, Oxford University and various 'Gentlemen' sides, until the crowning glory of his match-saving century for Middlesex in his final game in 1876. During this time, he played with, and against,



A baseball match at the Prince's Ground.

the country's top performers – including several opening century partnerships with the great W.G.Grace. He was noted for his fine defensive style of batting and agility as a wicket-keeper. Many of his appearances for Middlesex were made at the now long-gone Prince's Cricket Ground in West London.



Association football, then in its amateur infancy, was also a sphere in which Ottaway excelled – primarily as a nimble forward. He not only made two appearances for England (1872 & 1874, both as captain, and both in Glasgow against the Scots), but he appeared in three consecutive F.A.Cup Finals between 1873-75. The first, at the Lillie Bridge Grounds in West Brompton, was for the Oxford University side which suffered defeat at the hands of The Wanderers. After the match, Ottaway and the rest of the players strolled down the road to Hammersmith Bridge to watch the Varsity Boat Race.

The Cup Finals of 1874 and 1875 were played at Kennington Oval. The first brought Oxford University their one and only F.A.Cup Final triumph when Ottaway captained them to victory against the Royal Engineers. The 1875 Final saw our man turn out for Old Etonians against the Royal Engineers – a match which was drawn, with the Old Etonians losing the replay. An injury suffered by Cuthbert Ottaway in the first match of the Final caused him to miss the replay – and effectively ended his footballing career.

Ottaway also appeared on several occasions for Marlow FC and Crystal Palace FC in the early 1870s, indicating that he spent a good deal of time in the capital. Indeed, he is shown as living in Paddington at the time of the 1871 Census as a guest of his uncle.

On his retirement from the sporting scene in the autumn of 1876, Ottaway concentrated on his burgeoning legal career. He was called to the Bar by the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple on 17th November 1876 – officially becoming a barrister-at-law, taking up chambers at Lamb Building, Temple, London.

Within a year Cuthbert married Marion Stinson (in Canada) and they settled in London. Then, with his wife heavily pregnant with their first child, he died from pneumonia on 2nd April 1878 after having contracted 'a chill' during a night out. His place of death was given as "34 Westbourne Place" (now Cliveden Place), near Sloane Square. He was 27 years and 8 months old.

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Cuthbert Ottaway (cont.)

His neglected grave in Paddington Old Cemetery off Willesden Lane is all that is left of him. Sad though the plot now appears, the original monument was a good deal more lavish: “a granite ledger [stone slab] on marble plinths with iron standards and railings.” The inscription – now long-gone – once read:

“In memory of Cuthbert John Ottaway, only child of James Cuthbert & Jane Ottaway, born July 20th [error] 1850, died April 2nd 1878.”

Later inscriptions were added subsequent to the later burials of Cuthbert’s parents, Jane and James, in 1886 and 1891, respectively. The grand-sounding monument was dismantled in 1972 by Westminster Council, leaving the single (and rather sad-looking) unmarked base-slab which is all that survives today.

One may suggest that the multi-million pound extravaganza that is the modern English game of association football owes its first international captain a good deal more in the way of recognition.



Ottaway’s rather unsalubrious resting place, Paddington.



About Michael Southwick

England’s First Football Captain: A Biography of Cuthbert Ottaway, 1850-1878 by Michael Southwick is available from SoccerData (see www.cuthbertottaway.blogspot.com).

Michael also maintains the ‘British & Irish Genealogy blog’ at www.bi-gen.blogspot.com.

If you’re concerned about the condition of Cuthbert Ottaway’s grave please contact the author at micksouthwick@blueyonder.co.uk. It is possible that a campaign may be afoot to restore the same, and he’d like to keep folk apprised of developments – and to gather support.