

No.12 Alfred Thomas Lyons

During the first quarter of the last century, a pride of Lyons' was being raised in Hednesford, close to our old Cross Keys ground. Between them they would play in an FA Cup Final, two FA Cup semi-finals and serve seven different Football League clubs.

Alpha-male Tommy Lyons was born in Littleworth, Hednesford, 5 July 1888, progressing from Hednesford Town to Aston Villa, via Bridgtown Amateurs, in April 1907. Originally a centre-half or wing-half before becoming a strong tackling full-back, he possessed exceptional positional sense and a powerful kick.

Tommy made his Football League debut, at right back, in front of 30,000 spectators away at Liverpool, 7 December 1907, where the home team handed Villa a 5-0 thrashing, with several goals coming from crosses by the Anfield left-winger. A week later he was assisting in two of the goals in his side's 6-0 win against Middlesbrough. Apart from injuries and illness, the right full-back position would be his for the next seven years.

Outstanding performances during the 1909-10 season brought Tommy a medal as his team won their sixth League Championship. He had missed only three games all season. In 1912 he came very close to an England cap, being named as reserve for two internationals.

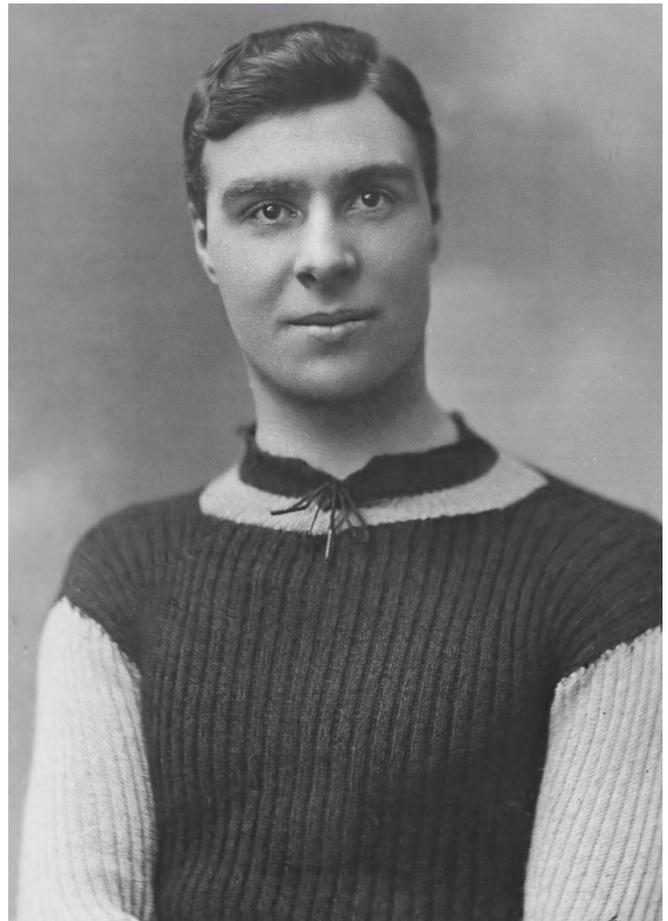
A year later and there was another 'gong' for Tommy as the FA Cup was won again, beating Sunderland 1-0 in the final at Crystal Palace. He also found time in 1913 to play wicket-keeper for Staffordshire in the Minor Counties Championship.

The next four years were lost to the hostilities of WWI and as Villa didn't play competitive football during that period Tommy guested for Port Vale, the club he would join in August 1919 when the Football League commenced. He had played 239 times for Villa scoring one goal...from the spot.

Competitive football had, in fact, begun in the March of 1919 when the Midland Victory League was introduced and, although a member of the Villa first-team squad, Tommy played in only one game. This competition was arranged so that players could re-establish themselves in readiness for the beginning of the Football League programme later that year.

Tommy turned out for Vale on 66 occasions in three seasons before becoming senior player-coach at Walsall in July 1922, making just one appearance, against Wrexham in February 1923, moving back to Hednesford Town three months later. He died in his home town, 4 October 1938.

Three of his brothers, James, William and Albert were to follow in the 1920s and 30s, all making outstanding contributions to local and league football.



Tommy Lyons (far left, back row) with the Aston Villa team and the League Championship cup at the end of the 1909-10 season.



Tommy Lyons (second left, back row) with Aston Villa's FA Cup winning team in 1913.

From the Dave Shaw archive.