

No.19 John Charles Ruskin Griffiths

Hednesford Town have had many very good players on their books since 1880. Some of the most popular of these have been strikers, but none have been more popular and few more successful than 'Tosh'. His deadly ground shooting and powerful overhead kicks were a feature of his play and he was a great exponent of the art of shooting on sight.

Born in Green Heath, Hednesford, 27 October 1890, Tosh played his early football for Green Heath Albion in the Church and Chapel league at the age of 15. By 1912, he had upgraded to the Hednesford team and immediately was one of the scorers at Cradley in an 8-2 win after the team had been 2-1 down at half time. At the end of that season he was on the score sheet as Cradley were again on the receiving end in a 5-0 win in the final of the Forresters' Cup.

Early in 1912-13 he got nine goals in six games, ending the season with 25 goals as Hednesford finished runners-up to Stafford Rangers in the Birmingham Combination. Tosh was well on his way to beating that tally the following season when he was transferred to Wolves together with winger Billy Hayes.

Tosh was the only Wolves scorer, on his debut, in the home win against Hull City, 11 April 1914 and again seven days later in a 2-1 defeat at Barnsley. Alongside Tosh were former Hednesford men Lloyd, Hayes and Smart along with future 'Pitmen' Peers, Collins and Garratley.

Then came the First World War and with 'normal' football suspended for five years, Tosh played regularly and successfully for the Hednesford Collieries side that was functioning at the Cross Keys. This was a team of Football League players who, during the hostilities, were working in the Chase coal mines and grabbing a game when they could. They carried off the Ansells Shield and were runners-up in the Black and White Cup and the Dewar Shield.

In 1919, Tosh was back in the Hednesford Town team which joined the Birmingham League, a competition with more prestige than the Birmingham Combination and contained the reserve sides of the major Midland clubs.

For Tosh, the goals flowed even more freely than in the pre-war games and helped the club to reach the first round proper of the FA Cup for the first time in 1920 and the final qualifying round in 1921. In the 1920 cup run Tosh got a hat-trick (his first after only five seconds) in an amazing 8-0 win at Shrewsbury (who were voted into the Football League the following season) and Walsall 4-2 in the same competition, just a fortnight later. He also netted a double hat-trick against his old club, Wolves. Inside-forward Jim Lyons also got one of the goals, moving to

Derby County soon afterwards for a £1,000 fee; Noel George was in the Hednesford goal against the team for whom he was destined to play in an FA Cup final just a year later.

1920 also announced the arrival of inside-forward Norman Whitfield from Leicester City to share the work-load with Tosh. The pair hit it off immediately and the team remained unbeaten in 22 successive League and cup games.

In the 1920-21 and 1921-22 seasons, the remarkable pair of strikers scored 126 goals in 64 league games. Amongst the teams to suffer was Walsall, beaten at the Keys and a draw at Walsall; in what was their last season before being elected to the new Division Three (North). Both games attracted close on 10,000 spectators – the game at the Keys broke the ground record.

Tosh spent 1922-23 with Wellington (Telford), but returned the following season to make a phenomenal start with 14 goals in only seven games. At the end of October, in a Birmingham Senior Cup match at Cannock, tragedy struck when he suffered a serious knee injury and his career was over. He was granted a benefit match at the end of that season and later served the club as trainer.

Tosh worked as a miner for many years and after his retirement continued to live in his Green Heath Road home until his death in 1956 in Cannock's Ivy House. He had played only 13 games in the Football League, scoring two goals, but his 150 goals in five years for Hednesford Town is why we remember him.



From a set of 24 by Dave Shaw

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1914-15 Wolves with future 'Pitmen' Garratley, Peers and Collins standing at the back. Tosh Griffiths is standing in front of them, third player from the left.



1919-20 Hednesford Collieries team.

From the Dave Shaw archive.