

No.27 William Henry 'Billy' Walker

Billy Walker was born in Wednesbury, 29 October 1897 and joined his first senior club, Hednesford Town, in August 1911. He made his debut and the first of 34 games for us, 2 September 1911, in the season's opening league game against local rivals Cannock Town at the tender age of 14 alongside his brother George. Their father (George senior) had been a full-back with Wolves from 1900 to 1904.

Billy possessed a wonderful right or left-foot shot and was a fine header of a ball. Even as a schoolboy, he was a prolific marksman scoring 80 goals in the Walsall Boys' League in 1910-11.

He had an unsuccessful trial with Aston Villa in 1913 but eventually signed for them as an amateur in March 1915, signing professional forms in June 1920. World War One put a hold on his career until the commencement of senior competitions in 1919-20.

Billy scored twice on his Villa debut against Queen's Park Rangers in a first round FA Cup tie, 10 January 1920, going on to help them beat Huddersfield Town 1-0 in the final at the end of that season. He would be disappointed in 1924 when Newcastle United reversed the result.

He was given Villa's captaincy in 1926, continuing in that roll until passing on the captaincy to another former Hednesford man, Alec Talbot, in 1931. He also scored nine goals in 18 internationals for England and captained the Staffs Jubilee FA XI against the Football League in 1926. Billy banged in 11 hat-tricks, including a four-timer at Arsenal in August 1920 and a hat-trick of penalties against Bradford City in November 1921.

By the time of his retirement from playing in November 1933, Billy had made 536 appearances for Villa and scored 244 goals – a club record. He had reached double figures in the scoring charts every season between 1919 and 1931, having his best campaign in 1920-21 when he scored 31 goals in 42 games.

Setting his sights on management, Billy first guided Sheffield Wednesday to FA Cup glory over West Bromwich Albion in 1935, and then left in November 1937 when the Owls were relegated. From January 1938 to February 1939, he was manager of Chelmsford City, resigning to take the same job at Nottingham Forest. However, within six months of arriving his plans were put on indefinite hold due to World War Two.

Billy was also a better-than-average goalkeeper, standing in for club and country on several occasions and, to prove the point, during the conflict, he played six games for Forest as emergency goalkeeper.

With the resumption of League Football in 1945, Billy set about rebuilding his Forest side and after a

very shaky start, including relegation to Division Three (South) in 1949, he was rewarded with promotion in 1951, repeating the feat in 1957 to climb into the First Division.

Two years later Forest won the FA Cup when they beat Luton Town 2-1, but at the age of 63 with health deteriorating and his team just avoiding relegation, Billy decided that he had done enough and announced his retirement, stepping aside to join the club's committee.

Only Brian Clough, with 18 years, can get close to Billy's record of 21 years for the longest-serving Forest manager. It is unlikely that another manager will get anywhere near it.

Billy suffered a stroke in 1963, from which he never fully recovered. He died in Sheffield, 28 November 1964.



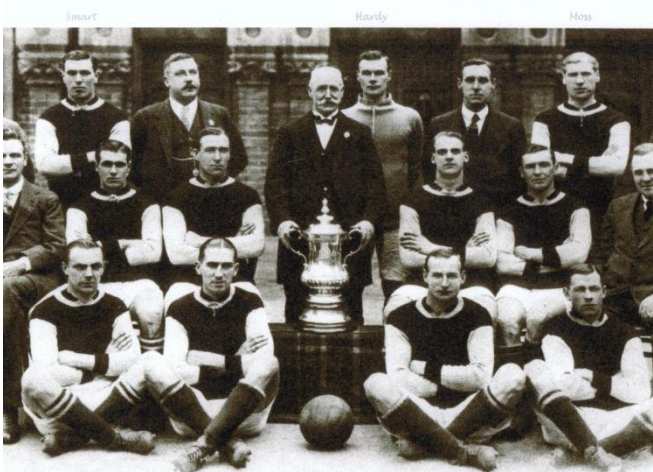
From the Dave Shaw archive.



The presentation prior to the 1920 FA Cup final. Billy is second from the right.



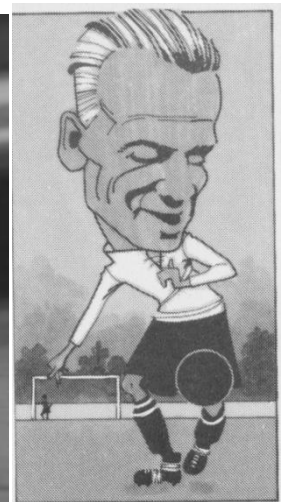
1922 England team v Scotland. Billy seated second from the right.



The 1920 FA Cup winning team. Billy is seated, next to the Chairman.



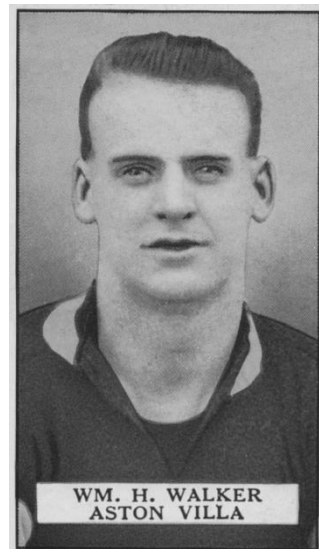
Billy in 1932, one year from retirement.



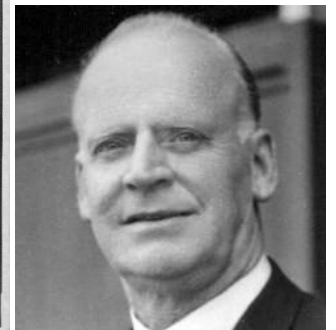
From a set of 24 by Dave Shaw



1924 England team v Belgium. Billy seated third from the right.



From a set issued by Gallaher.



Billy retires from Forest, age 62



Former Hednesford men, Alec Talbot (standing fourth from the left) and Teddy Bowen (standing extreme right), join Billy at Villa in 1925-26.