

## No.83 Vernon Allatt

Since the early 1920s when four, five or six local born players each season transferred from Hednesford to League Football, the procession had slowed to a trickle by the mid-1950s. Between then and 1977 only Brian Horton and Steve Biggins were considered good enough to make the grade.

It was hoped that Vernon, born in Cannock 28 May 1959, would be the next when he signed for Hednesford Town in the summer of 1976, playing his opening game against Lye Town in November. The following year, after scoring four goals in three games, he received a suspension for offences in Sunday football just when he had touched top form.

However, after a number of enquiries from several League clubs, 'Big Vern' was taken on a month's trial by Walsall in 1978 where he showed distinct promise in their reserve team, scoring a number of goals in Midland Intermediate League games but, as in the case of Brian Horton fifteen years earlier, he was not retained.

Nevertheless, George Kirby, himself an ex-Walsall player who once scored a hat-trick in five minutes for Southampton, signed Vernon for Halifax in November 1979. Debuting against Lincoln, he got the only goal as Town won 1-0. Vern was never a great scorer of goals, but he was a vital member of any side who fully utilised his great 'back against the wall' effort and his speed off the mark.

Having scored seven goals in 70 outings, plus four from the bench, Vernon moved to Bolton in 1981, returning to Halifax in November 1982 without being given a first-team game. 28 outings and seven goals later he found himself at Rochdale, 1 August 1983, where he managed 10 goals in 45 games before Crewe acquired him for a two-year spell, 1 June 1984, passing him on to Preston in 1985.

Vernon spent the 1986-87 season with Stockport, before returning to Hednesford Town for the start of 1987-88 when, completely unexpectedly, Crewe took him for a second time, in December 1987. One season with Dutch club Heracles followed by a return to the Keys to end his much-travelled professional career with 48 goals from 227 senior appearances in all competitions at seven different clubs, twice at both Halifax and Crewe.

In retirement, Vernon settled down to an enjoyable life looking after long-term inmates in the Prison Service until, in January three-years later, he faced death in a bone-chilling car accident when he collided with a brick wall while travelling at 50 mph. The Ford Escort disintegrated with the force of an incendiary bomb, and with a punctured lung together with smashed ribs and legs, he spent Five months in hospital as doctors' fought to save his life. Vernon recovered thanks to his enduring courage and indomitable spirit.



From the Dave Shaw archive.