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Memories of Mannion – South Bank's 'Golden Boy'.

Black Path Press
March 2020



W. MANNION
MIDDLESBOROUGH
English International, Forward

Introduction

Growing up in South Bank and attending St Peter's RC School as Mannion had many years earlier, I have always been aware of the esteem the 'Golden Boy' is held by the local community. I met Wilf only once when I was playing football (badly) as a teenager on a street corner in Hampden Street and that high esteem was evident. The legendary figure was revisiting his old street with a TV crew and was mobbed for autographs by youngsters like myself who had never seen Mannion play but appreciated his brilliance.

This publication is the result of a collaboration with the Black Path Press, based at Golden Boy Green Community Centre in South Bank. With the Black Path Press based at the venue named after the 'Golden Boy', it seemed appropriate that the series should celebrate South Bank's most famous son. The overwhelming response from the public sharing memories of Mannion has confirmed the adoration and respect for South Bank's Golden Boy has not waned over the decades. Space means only a selection of memories shared at a summer event at Golden Boy Green and submitted online for inclusion in the booklet can be included here. It is hoped those that do feature give a sense of Wilf Mannion's continued importance today.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank all who have shared memories and material for inclusion in this publication and also acknowledge the support of numerous organisations including Creative Factory, Golden Boy Green Community Centre, The Gazette, Manchester Metropolitan University, Middlesbrough FC, Middlesbrough Reference Library, MIMA and Teesside Archives.

– *Tosh Warwick*

A Word From Wilf's Family

The golden boy, a legend and a brilliant Footballer; all these phrases have been used time and again to describe Wilf Mannion – but to us he was just our dad.

He was a loving and caring Father, Grandad and a devoted husband to his beloved Bernadette (our Mother) and always put his family first. Dad had a wicked dry sense of humour and many nights were spent in laughter at his old South Bank tales.

Another fond memory would be when, dad on occasion joined us whilst we did our shop at the local Supermarket – Big Mistake – this would put an hour on our shop as he was stopped so many times to sign his autograph... and this was forty years after his football career had finished!

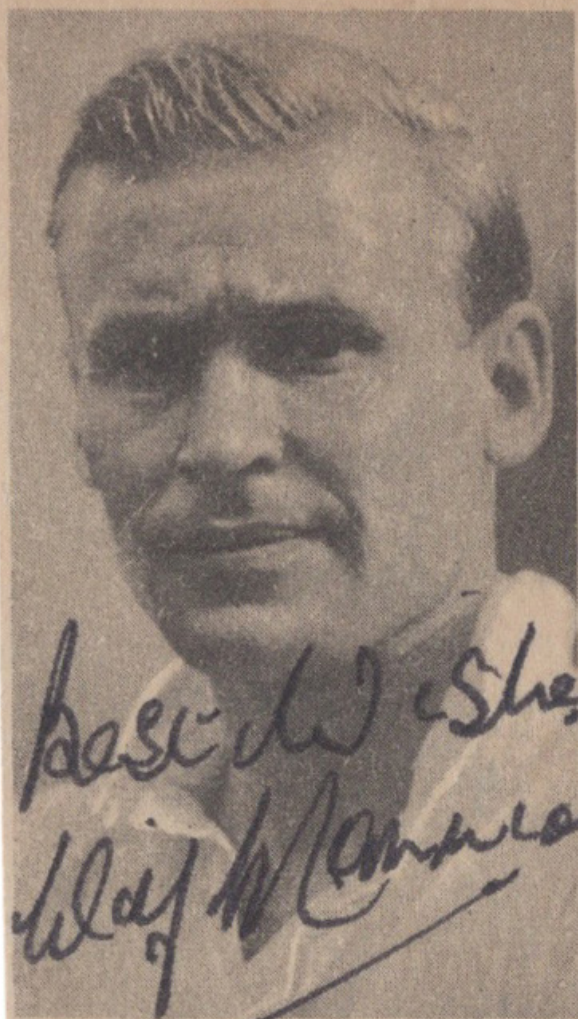
Dad is remembered not just through his statue outside the Riverside Stadium or the annual Wilf Mannion Cup football tournament, but more importantly for his gentle nature and unassuming manner that won the hearts of so many people.

Our grateful thanks and appreciation must go to The South Bank Black Path Press and to Dr Tosh Warwick for all their hard work and research in the publication of this book.

– *The Mannion Family*



MANNION



W. MANNION
MIDDLESBROUGH F.C.

Brilliant On And Off The Field

My Dad was very good friends with Wilf. They went to school together. He was a lovely fella. My Dad used to take us to the match especially when Wilf played. I can remember him playing because that was the only reason I used to go to the match.

When he was in the club in South Bank I used to go and see him and one of the biggest things I can remember about Wilf was in that club one night. I was having a drink and Wilf came round the back and one of the girls was coming the opposing way. Wilf shook his body and the girl nearly spilt her drink!

He was so good all the time. He never ever said a bad word to anybody. Yet when he was trying to leave the Boro and get better things people then started at him and that was wrong. People still wanted him here, I wanted him still but that wasn't my choice that was Wilf's choice. There was something about him. He was brilliant on and off the field. He should have played more games for England. He was superb, the nicest man I have ever known.

– *Barry Doyle*

Coaching Manuals Didn't Apply

Danny Blanchflower wrote a weekly article in The Daily Express and one week he said he wanted to throw out all his coaching manuals as they didn't apply to trying to stop this one player. That player was Wilf Mannion of Middlesbrough.

– *Daniel Mahoney*

The Sun Seemed To Shine On Him

The first time I saw Wilf play was when a lot of us kids from Haverton Hill got the bus down to the Transporter, went across there and up to Ayresome Park and in the Boys' End. It was breathtaking with the sun on the grass, the strips looked so red against the green and here was this guy with this blonde hair. The sun seemed to shine on him and just glow and he kept keeping the ball up and up and up and just when the referee blew the whistle for the match to start, Wilf kicked it right up into the air and right into the Trainers. It was breathtaking to see him play.

One memory I have of that game, a 4-4 draw with Wolves, is of Mannion looking as though he had lost the ball. Three players tried the same tackle and you thought he'd lost the ball. I don't know he did it but he hadn't he was round them. Amazing! Another thing that stood out for me was the height he could jump. When there was a corner, the ball would come over and his blonde head would be above everybody.

Many years later, I saw a little photograph of Wilf in The Gazette and I did a painting of it and presented it to Wilf. There was a lot of love and devotion that went into that. A while later there was a programme on the television about Wilf and they went to his house to interview him. Wilf was sat in the chair and there was my painting on the wall right next to him so he must have thought a bit of it.

– *Eddie Holroyd*



The Whole Of South Bank Turned Out

As a kid I remember Wilf Mannion's funeral hearse passing through South Bank. It seemed as though the whole of South Bank turned out to line Normanby Road and pay their respects.

— *Craig McKittrick*

Guest Of Honour

A number of years ago Wilf Mannion was guest of honour at the Middlesbrough Supporters South party and everyone started to chant “There’s only one Wilf Mannion.” There were tears in Wilf’s eyes and he was really moved. It was one of my proudest moments as a Middlesbrough fan.

– *Rob Nichols*

Trophies In The Porch

I grew up on the Lakes Estate in Redcar and Wilf Mannion lived over the road from my house. All the kids would knock on his door for his autograph. I still have mine. He was always kind and showed us his trophies in his porch too.

– *Emma Bennett*

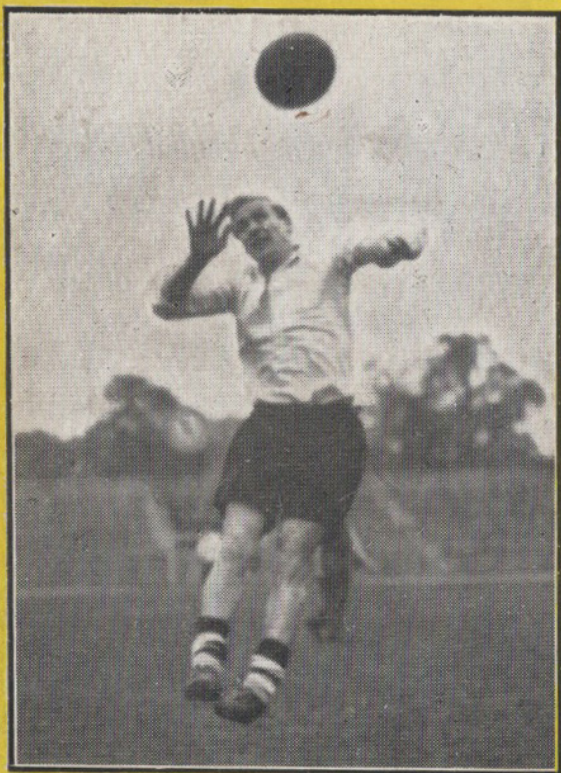
Kick Abouts

I went to Longmeadow Junior School in Stevenage with Wilf junior. After school, we would have a kick about in the back yard of the Pied Piper pub (which was opposite the school gates) with the great man himself!

– *Bill Bullock*



MANNION
ENGLISH INTERNATIONAL



MANNION

He Just Came From Nothing And Lit Up The World!

The 'auld fella' used to train with him on South Bank ground when Wilf fell out with Middlesbrough Football Club. I remember seeing this article in The Gazette that our Dad kept from George Hardwick's column when he played for Mannion's team in a charity game at South Bank against George Hardwick's team. Spuhler, Mannion, Hardwick and our auld fella!

Wilf Mannion was a legend. People in this area are very proud that he came from South Bank. People are proud of coming from South Bank and the fact that Wilfie came from such humble beginnings. From such a humble background, when you look at the privileged lifestyles of footballers nowadays, he just came from nothing and lit up the world. He lit up the football world.

– *Paul Kelly*

A Genuine, Lovely Man

My grandad, Charles Bainbridge, lived on Warwick Street in South Bank and used to play football with his cousin Wilf. They were part of a large Irish family who all lived close together. From talking with other relatives, what was mentioned again and again was how Wilf was a genuine, lovely man.

– *Jen O'Donnell*

Every Child In The School Is Told About Wilf Mannion

When I was a little lad Wilf Mannion came to do an opening at some kind of fete at St Peter's Junior School. He had a penalty competition and all the kids had to go in goal and Wilf Mannion would shoot some penalties at them. He was brilliant and a lovely fella. He had an autograph signing thing going on in the headmaster's office and I got Wilf's autograph from that occasion. They used this posh paper and the headmaster went crazy as it cost a fortune to make and all these kids were walking out with a Wilf Mannion autograph on the headmaster's official paper.

I have a photo of Wilf playing for St Peter's football team (right). I coloured it for our school and it is in one of the classrooms there. It has Wilf with a number of professionals - he must have got all his mates to come and have a game against South Bank or something and they are all wearing the green and white St Peter's shirts.

Wilf never forgot his roots, he really loved this area and loved the fact that he was from here. He was always here to support it, pop in the school and talk about his life. Every child in school is told about Wilf Mannion playing for Middlesbrough and Great Britain.

– *Dave Mackin*



Back Row: Norman Robinson – Boro FC, David Murphy – Boro FC, Jack Bishop – South Bank AFC, Tommy Dawson – Charlton Athletic, Player Unknown, Hughie Turner – Boro FC
Front Row: Gerald Murphy – Boro FC, Wif Mannion – Boro FC & Hull FC, Player Unknown, Hughie McMahon – Sunderland FC, Eddy Murphy – Boro FC, Halifax & Blackburn FC

For South Bank Wilf Mannion Is Definitely An Icon

When my brother was an apprentice at British Steel he used to have a Fitter's Mate and that was Wilf Mannion. My brother Malcolm wasn't a football fan – he had this wonderful historic figure and he was known but it wasn't a matter of hero worship. For South Bank Wilf Mannion is definitely an icon and you hear lots of stories about him. He was one of the few people to play football for Great Britain.

– *John Chilvers*

Footballer on the Corporation T Bus

I was working as an apprentice plasterer on Tollesby estate in the early 1950s and Wilf Mannion lived in a house nearby. As fans of the Boro, we used to watch to see if we could see Mannion in the area. One morning we saw Wilf walking up the road, wearing a gabardine Macintosh, go into the paper shop, come out and get onto the Corporation T bus. He was sat on the bottom deck chatting with the conductor. The bus route was into the town centre, passing the Cenotaph near Albert Park, which was the bus stop to get off and walk to Ayresome Park.

– *John Allen*

"TURF" CIGARETTES

WILF MANNION MIDDLESBROUGH
& ENGLAND



50 FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS No 30



W. MANNION

Autographs, chips and cigarette cards

In the early 1990s, my then eight-year-old son received a copy of Wilf's biography. We took it to his house in Redcar and asked him to sign it. We were invited in and he said, "Hang on a minute, I have a pan of chips cooking." We waited and he came back, signed the book and produced some old cigarette cards which he also signed. We chatted for a while and left. Walking away from the house, I asked my son what he thought. He said; "it's not very healthy for a footballer to be eating chips!"

– *David Baker*

Wilf As A Schoolboy

My Dad used to tell me a story about when he was sent off during a schoolboy match between Grangetown St Mary's and South Bank St Peter's. He said he got fed up of Wilf running rings around him, so clobbered him. Despite that, he and Wilf became good friends. Dad certainly worshipped Wilf as a Boro player. I remember him going berserk when we were listening to an England v Scotland match on the radio and Wilf got his jawbone fractured. I think that is where I got my habit of shouting at the radio! When I went to St Peter's, a photograph of Wilf (adorned in his schoolboy cap and medals) was proudly displayed in the headmaster's office. I used to admire it when I went in there to get the cane. I was also lucky enough to see Wilf play for a season and a half. There has still been nobody better.

– *Peter McCarthy*

A Lovely, Humble Bloke

When my late father was in Teesside Hospice he was visited by Prince Charles and Wilf Mannion. He was very honoured and quite excited to meet Prince Charles, but it didn't come close to how he felt about meeting Wilfy! He made a lot of patients very happy for the day. He was a lovely, humble bloke who had time for everyone.

– *Don Chesney*

The Great Wilf Mannion

Not long after I started my degree at Teesside in 1993, the graduation ceremony took place for that year and finding myself between lectures I wandered out to have a look at the procession. I found myself stood next to an elderly gentlemen in graduation regalia. Realising that he wasn't a student and knowing enough about football (even though I wasn't from Teesside) it dawned on me this was the great Wilf Mannion. I waited for his conversation to finish and then grabbed a quick handshake and congratulated him. His response was that he was completely overwhelmed by all of this as all he'd done was kick a ball and that it was I whom was doing the work! I gave a nervous laugh, picked up my rucksack and went on my way, with a memory I still cherish more than 25 years later.

– *Andrew Paterson*

Only One Star That Night

As a singer, I was booked to appear at a club near Catterick. It was around late 1992 or early 1993 and my partner, Diane, was driving and in the back was Dad, Wilf and I think young Wilf was also there. The place was packed and I decided

to introduce Wilf to the audience. After giving him the big build up, I realised he wasn't there. He'd got talking in the gents about football and didn't reappear for ages. I finally introduced him, he took a bow and I carried on with my act. Within five minutes, Wilf was the centre of attention with the older members of the audience, many of them remembering him from his playing days. At the end of the night, people were actually thanking me for bringing him to their club. There was only one star that night.

– *Scott Davis*

Acklam Hall Playing Field

I was thirteen-years-old in 1948 and lived at 15 Highbury Avenue just off the top of Tollesby Road. My father bought a “Casey” football for my birthday from Jack Hatfield's. Wilf Mannion lived at number 7 so I dashed across to show him and he immediately started heading it against the wall. He then took me down to the Acklam Hall playing field for a kick about. Within a short time the field was full of kids playing with Wilf, he loved it. It is something I have never forgotten.

– *John Muat*

Local Hero

From 1964 to 1969, I was an apprentice Welder at Smith's Dock and Wilf Mannion was employed there as a Plumber's Mate / Labourer. He was recognised as a local hero and a South Bank lad through and through and though I had been a Boro fan since the age nine, I never realised the scale of Wilf's achievements. Only in later years did I understand how blessed we had been.

– *Alan Spence*

An Icon Of Football In This Area

My father in law had been a taxi driver in the days when Wilf used to come back from international duty. He always spoke in awe of him and would often drive him home. Wilf was a legend and nobody could play football better than Wilf. For one Christmas when Wilf's book had come out I took it to a sportsman's dinner and got it signed for him and for a man who is now ninety he still holds it in high regard and won't part with it. He probably got it when he was around sixty-five and he was completely made up that he had got Wilf Mannion's autograph as part of his life and his collection. It is something that he treasures along with the memories.

I'm mindful of the fact that in later years Wilf Mannion was working as a fitter's mate at one of the works . One of the local TV programmes did an interview with him in the ICI in his overalls just chatting away. He had gone from greatness to him finishing his days with a job in the industry and having to work. He is definitely somebody who is always seen as an icon of football in this area, a true legend.

– *Mark Harkin*

An experience in itself

I live up in Cocker mouth now but for nearly 20 years, I lived in London and was a member of Middlesbrough Supporters South (MSS). I remember interviewing Wilf when we invited him to come down to see Boro play at Arsenal in 1995. That was an experience in itself! Sadly, the tape of that interview has long gone but the interview was in the MSS magazine.

– *Andy Smith*

CHURCHMAN'S CIGARETTES



W. MANNION (MIDDLESBROUGH)

10



W. MANNION ENGLAND

01

He Was Like A God

The very first time I ever saw Wilf play was as a kid when Alex Forbes was marking him when he played against Arsenal. He was like a God! Once I saw Wilf Mannion, I was hooked. Later I was office manager on the Concast and did Wilf Mannion's wages. Wilf brought in his cap from Great Britain against the Rest of the World for people to have a photograph taken with the cap.

– *Tommy Finegan*

We would all try and get the ball off him to no avail

As a child, I lived near the Mannion family but at the time I didn't know who he really was. We would play football all day long and at times this old duffer (Wilf) would come and join in. We would all try to get the ball off him to no avail. Wilf would eventually kick the ball up the road for us to chase after and left us thinking how he had spoilt our game. We would later wander off to stare in Heagney's shop window at all the England caps, shirts and cups that the local South Bank hero had won and wished we could meet him or play like him. We never once put the two together and he was too modest to let us know!

– *Alan Wyke*

Mannion To Finney, Finney To Mannion

I was at Wilf and Bernadette's wedding , married in St Philomena's Church (Bernadette lived in Kensington Road). Apart from his footballing career, Wilf stood out as a family man. I often stayed with his wife when he was at away games and the children were little.

I used to listen to the radio when internationals were on. It still goes in my head that "Mannion to Finney, Finney to Mannion" commentary. It went on and on. Wilf was also my Dad's idol. My dad was in the Forces and he saw Wilf play for the combined services and said he was outstanding".

– *Marguerite Cockett*

Black Path Press is a community publishing project, producing books with people in South Bank, Middlesbrough; an area surrounding the historical route known as the 'Black Path'. The publications made will explore subjects big and small, past, present and future.

Together, these books will form a collective document of the area – given out to local libraries, museums and individuals. They will also serve as a research and design tool for a public artwork, led by artists Foundation Press, on the site of the Black Path in October 2019.

This book was made in collaboration with Tosh Warwick, our thanks to Tosh, Wilf's family and all the contributors for sharing their memories of Mannion. Most images are taken from Harry Greenmon's collection of over 20,000 Middlesbrough FC cards and stickers. The image on the back cover is courtesy of Eddie Holroyd.

