

# **Billy Meredith**

## **A football superstar in Withington**

In 1904 the Manchester City player, Billy Meredith, was voted the most popular player in football. He became a national figure, written about, photographed, drawn in cartoons, and the subject of a popular song "I wish I was you Billy Meredith."

William (Billy) Meredith was born in Denbighshire in 1874, and began working in the local colliery, while playing for Chirk football team, and then for Northwich. He signed for Manchester City in 1894, eventually becoming captain, and led the team to its victory over Bolton Wanderers in the 1904 Cup final.

Billy married Ellen Negus in 1901 and the couple had two daughters, Lillian and Winifred.

He moved to Manchester United in May 1906 and they won the league title 1907-08 and 1910-11, and the FA Cup in 1909. His speed earned him the title the "Welsh Wizard". He also helped to organise the Players Union to gain better terms for footballers, which was a fore-runner of the Professional Footballers` Association.

He returned to Manchester City in 1921 and played a further 32 games before retiring in 1924, and was the oldest ever player for City, United and Wales.

Billy Meredith won every domestic trophy in the English football league and gained 48 caps for Wales. He scored 176 goals in 740 league and cup appearances. His favoured position was outside right, and his habit of chewing on a toothpick while playing, made him instantly recognisable.

He ran a number of businesses throughout his life, but with little success. In 1909 he opened a sportswear shop in Manchester, but it was damaged by fire, and he was declared bankrupt. He also ran a number of public houses,

although he was a teetotaler, including the Church Hotel, Rusholme from 1915, and the Stretford Road Hotel from 1930 to 1945. He later became interested in films and bought a share in several cinemas

In 1945 Billy moved to live with his daughter Winifred at 45 Burton Road, Withington. He retained his interest in football, and continued to look after his health and was a familiar figure walking in the local parks. Billy Meredith died on 17th April 1958 two months after the Munich Air Disaster, and is buried at the Southern Cemetery. A new headstone has been erected to mark his grave.

John Davies