

Dulwich Hamlet FC during the Second World War

By

Steve Hunnisett

I'm a member of the Guild of Battlefield Guides and regularly lead guided walks covering London's Blitz and wartime past, as well as having a fascination with military history generally. I'm a Dulwich Hamlet season ticket holder but must confess to also being a Charlton supporter. I still venture to The Valley on occasions but like many people, have become disillusioned with the professional game and especially with Roland Duchatelet's "vision" of how not to run a football club. My first visit to the old Champion Hill was in 1990 but my visits here became more frequent from 2013 and I've had the season ticket since 2016. As many of you will know, non-league football has a way of getting under your skin and so when I learned that Roger had written about the club's Great War casualties, it seemed a natural fit for me to try and tell the stories of those from the Second World War.

During the 1930s, the club had gone from strength to strength, winning the Isthmian League title in 1932-33 and the FA Amateur Cup three times during the decade, culminating in the 2-0 victory over Leyton at Upton Park in the 1936/37 season in front of 33,000 spectators. The retirement of the iconic Edgar Kail in 1933 could perhaps have been a cause for concern but the continued emergence of players from the junior section including Reg Anderson, soon allayed any such fears and the club's successes continued. By 1939, it would be fair to say that the club was on the brink of building another great side that would have been one of the strongest in the amateur game.

The Isthmian League was abandoned on 4th September 1914. During that conflict though, the professional game had continued for one further season but there was no such confusion in the next conflict. On 3rd September 1939 all events likely to attract large gatherings of crowds were suspended under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939. This applied to all senior competitive sports leagues and all places of entertainment such as cinemas, dance halls and theatres. Places of entertainment were allowed to re-open after a few weeks but senior football – both amateur and professional – was to remain suspended 'for the duration' as the phrase went.

The club's junior section was an integral part of Dulwich Hamlet FC and the juniors were to play an important part in the club's wartime story as without them, it is doubtful whether the club would have been able to fulfil its fixture obligations. Not all clubs were able to continue and in the Isthmian League, both Nunhead and London Caledonians folded, largely as a result of the war.

However, football was recognised as a morale booster for the public and was reorganised on a much more local basis during the war so as to keep travel requirements to a minimum. Dulwich Hamlet played in the South Eastern Combination, which typically consisted of teams such as Bromley, Epsom, Erith & Belvedere, Metropolitan Police, Sutton United, Tooting & Mitcham, Walton-on-Thames, Wimbledon and Woking. The league was too small

to ensure a full programme throughout the season and so, friendlies were arranged, often against locally based service teams and there was also still a certain amount of representative football played. The composition of the teams we fielded varied greatly and invariably consisted of a mixture of juniors, established players who were available and sometimes the treat of seeing a guest player who would be a locally based serviceman.

Champion Hill was in the old Metropolitan Borough of Camberwell, which suffered greatly during the Blitz as well as the later V-weapons attacks – it was in fact the fourth most bombed borough in London. Some 1,014 civilians were killed in Camberwell owing to enemy air attacks and the immediate area around Champion Hill was by no means immune from attack, with one particularly bad incident occurring on 5 August 1944, when a V-1 Flying Bomb hit the Co-op in Lordship Lane, with the loss of 23 lives. Dulwich Hamlet FC itself only features once in the Civil Defence incident log for the area – on 13 September 1940, when a High Explosive bomb was reported by the East Dulwich Police. However, the report has an enigmatic follow-up comment stating “uncertain if exploded” which is a perhaps a little worrying!

By January 1945, around 80 Dulwich players had been called up, of whom about half served with the RAF (the RAF relied on a volunteer intake of aircrew throughout the war). Of the remainder, the split was roughly 50:50 between the Royal Navy and the Army and at least one who served as a Bevin Boy in the coal mines (from 1943, one in ten of those called up were sent to work in this way), as well as Bert Humphreys, who served as a firefighter in the AFS. Even the club’s officials were involved in the war effort, with the Hon. Secretary Harold Clegg and Hon. Treasurer Alfred Garrett both serving as ARP Wardens locally.

Sadly, and inevitably, further players were to lose their lives in this new conflict but the first casualty we’re going to look at had only a tenuous connection to the club. He was Flying Officer Vivian Rosewarne, whose father, Vivian Rosewarne Senior, had played for the Hamlet during the 1900s. On 31 May 1940, Vivian was the pilot of a Wellington bomber from 38 Squadron which was one of five on a mission to bomb German troop concentrations in the Dixmude area in support of the British Expeditionary Force’s withdrawal to Dunkirk. It was hit by flak near Veurne in West Flanders and although the crew could have abandoned the aircraft, to do so would have caused civilian deaths on the ground. Instead, Rosewarne attempted a forced landing but unfortunately crashed with the loss of all six crew members. When his squadron commander was going through Rosewarne’s possessions, he found a letter written to his mother that was left open in order that it could be examined by the censor before being sent in the event of his death. The Squadron Leader was so moved by what he read, that he asked Rosewarne’s mother Lillian, if it could be published anonymously. The letter was duly published in *The Times* and caused quite an impact, with the newspaper receiving so many requests for copies of the letter that it was printed in pamphlet form. It also formed the basis for a book published here and, in the USA, which also became a propaganda short film directed by Michael Powell called “*An Airman’s Letter to his Mother*” featuring John Gielgud as the narrator. The letter is too long to read here but finishes with the lines “*Thus at my early age my earthly mission is already fulfilled and I am prepared to die with*

just one regret: that I could not devote myself to making your declining years more happy by being with you; but you will live in peace and freedom and I shall have directly contributed to that, so here again my life will not have been in vain.”

The first of our “genuine” 1939-45 casualties was Eric Pierce, who was born in Camberwell on 15 June 1921 and had played all of his football prior to the outbreak of war for the club’s juniors. He was also a keen cricketer who, like many of his contemporaries, also played for Dulwich Hamlet Cricket Club.

The loss to service of many of the club’s more senior players saw Eric break through into the First Team for some of the local wartime league matches but on 23 January 1941, Eric enlisted into the RAF to train as a pilot, having volunteered to serve as aircrew. He was undergoing training at 16 Elementary Flying Training School at RAF Burnaston in Derbyshire and had passed a major milestone for any aspiring pilot by achieving solo flight - about a quarter of any new intake of prospective pilots failed to go solo, so Eric was obviously a competent pilot. Unfortunately, on 12 October 1941 when undertaking aerobatic duties, his Miles Magister trainer aircraft suffered an engine failure whilst at low altitude and despite his attempts to make a forced landing, Eric’s aircraft crashed into a farmer’s field and was killed instantly.

The second to perish was 35-year-old Ron Ebsworth, who had been born in Ilford in 1906 and played for his local club Ilford FC who were at that time an established amateur club who also played in the Isthmian League. He joined Dulwich in 1936 and in contrast to Eric Pierce, was perhaps coming towards the end of his playing career. Ron was one of those people that you need at any amateur sports club – he was always available to play and would happily play in any team and in pretty much any position. He was a very popular figure at the club because of this willingness to play anywhere and his uncomplaining nature.

He preferred to play either at full-back or wing-half and whilst he played a number of times for our first team, he played the majority of his football for the reserves. He was initially Vice Captain of the Reserves but was named Captain for the 1938-39 Season and led them to the runners-up spot in what must have been a very tight competition as his team had remained unbeaten until 13 April 1939 but were pipped at the post by his former club, Ilford. He would have been Reserve Captain again for the 1939-40 Season. He was also a keen cricketer and in common with many of his team mates, played for Dulwich Hamlet CC during the summer months.

Ron volunteered to serve as aircrew and enlisted into the RAF on 13 July 1940. He trained and qualified as a Wireless Operator/Gunner and was posted to 214 Squadron, Bomber Command, which flew the Vickers Wellington bomber. Ron and his crewmates completed four operational flights, but they were not to return from their fifth, a mission to Hamburg on 30 November 1941, during which their aircraft was lost without trace near the Dutch coast. One crew member's body was found on the Dutch coast but Ron along with the remainder of his crew mates were never recovered and they are remembered on the RAF Memorial at Runnymede in Surrey.

Our third casualty was Reg Anderson, born in Peckham on 13 September 1916 and who lived in Woodwarde Road, the location of the Club's original ground. He was a natural sportsman who had played football on the right wing for Wilson's Grammar School in Camberwell and subsequently for his Old Boys team (for whom he scored 27 goals in a season) before signing for the Hamlet in 1934 as an 18-year-old. He broke into the First Team in late 1936 and made an early mark by scoring the winner over Margate in a shock FA Cup victory in November of that year. He'd only played in the game because Bill Ingleton who was slated to play had missed the train! Margate were an unofficial 'nursery' side for Arsenal at that time and were regarded as the strongest team in the competition at that stage.

Reg was also part of the team that lifted the FA Amateur Cup in 1937 when they defeated Leyton 2-0 in front of 33,000 spectators at Upton Park. He played in another cup final that same season when he scored in a 2-0 victory over Kingstonian in the Surrey Senior Cup final that was played at Plough Lane.

His form also attracted the attention of the selectors for the England Amateur side and he scored a hat trick on debut against Wales in an 8-2 victory at Rhyl in January 1938. Almost certainly as a result of this performance, Reg was approached by Sir Herbert Merrett, the industrialist and chairman of Cardiff City to play for them as an amateur, with the offer of a job in Wales as a sweetener. He accepted the offer and made his debut in a 1-1 draw at Notts County on Easter Saturday 1939 – he played at home against the same opposition two days later when he scored in a 4-1 win, in which he was by all accounts man of the match. Reg made three wartime appearances in late 1939 for the Bluebirds but shortly decided to leave Cardiff and return to Dulwich – this was possibly down to a change of manager at Cardiff and is recorded as playing some wartime football for the Hamlet as well as representative matches.

He volunteered to serve as RAF aircrew and enlisted on 22 July 1940. Reg trained and qualified as an Observer and was posted to Bomber Command, joining 106 Squadron at RAF Coningsby. Whilst based here in November 1941, he guested for Lincoln City, remarking on a subsequent visit to Champion Hill, that this appearance for the Imps was also the first time that they had lost that season!

Sadly, Reg was lost on his fifth operational flight, when his Hampden bomber was shot down over the German island of Sylt whilst on a minelaying mission, with the loss of all four crew. Reg and his crewmates are buried together at Kiel War Cemetery in Germany.

The final name currently on the Roll of Honour is 26-year-old Bill Parr, who unusually for the time was an established England Amateur International when he joined Dulwich Hamlet in early 1939, having already played seventeen matches for Blackpool in the old First Division of the Football League. Bill had played alongside Reg Anderson during the latter player's England Amateur debut against Wales and the two men had run riot down the right hand side of the pitch, with Bill scoring four goals and Reg a hat trick, so he undoubtedly joined Dulwich in order to replicate this partnership with a player with whom he had formed an immediate rapport. The new club partnership bore immediate fruit when the Hamlet lifted

the London Senior Cup but having played for Blackpool at the very highest level of English football, perhaps Bill found the Isthmian League a little too easy and in May 1939, Arsenal announced that he had signed for them as an amateur for the following season. Because this season never happened, we don't know on what basis Bill had signed and it is far from clear whether he would have still played occasionally for the Hamlet or whether he was exclusively Arsenal's man.

Bill volunteered to serve as RAF aircrew and in his case trained as a Pilot. On completion of training, he was posted to Coastal Command to fly the Lockheed Hudson light bomber on Maritime Patrol duties covering the vital convoy routes on the Western Approaches. Bill was killed on 8 March 1942 when his aircraft suffered engine failure just after take-off on a night navigational training flight.

When we produced 'For Freedom' which tells the stories of the four men just discussed, we thought that was the end of the story. We had assumed that the Club Committee at the time had kept an accurate record of the wartime casualties and had included all of the relevant names when the memorial was updated in 1947 to incorporate the Second World War casualties. At the end of the day, when the booklet was written, we had to take a leap of faith and go by the information that was available to us on the Roll of Honour.

However, I then received an email from one of our supporters which uncovered what can only be described as an astonishing oversight on the part of the then Club Committee. Wartime programmes were rare beasts and sometimes were not produced at all due to material shortages, thus causing frustrating gaps in player information. He had bid for some of these rare programmes on an auction site, which revealed that two further players – one a former player at the time of his death but the other still very much a current member of the playing staff – had died on active service during the war but had not been included on the memorial. To omit a former player was perhaps an understandable policy decision taken at the time but to ignore someone who had been acknowledged by the Club itself at the time as having represented Dulwich Hamlet in wartime matches seems unbelievable. It therefore seems only right and proper that we should record the stories of the two men concerned.

Charles Ede was born in Croydon in 1911 and had joined the club as a junior. He was a good player in his own right but unfortunately for him, played at inside right – which was the same position as the legendary Edgar Kail. Because of this, he played most of his football for the reserves but was a regular goal scorer for them. Appearances for the First Team were largely restricted to when Kail was injured or on representative duty but when he did play, he rarely let the side down, which must have added to his frustration. In early 1934, Charles requested a transfer to Kingstonian, which was granted by the club committee. He made 43 appearances for the Ks and scored 20 goals for them before he faded from the football scene at the end of the 1934/35 season, perhaps to concentrate on his job as an editor of a food magazine. He was called up in 1940 and served with 45 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which after serving on Home Defence duties outside Crewe during the Blitz, was deployed in October 1942 to North Africa as part of Operation Torch. On 20 November 1942, his unit was based in Djidjelli (now called Jijel), on the Algerian coast about 320 kilometres east of Algiers, which

was the location of an Allied airfield. On this day, Charles was killed during an air raid when the building he was sheltering in was hit. He is today buried at the Deli Ibrahim War Cemetery, near Algiers.

Alan Adams was yet another local boy, born in Camberwell in 1925 and thus by far the youngest of our casualties, being only just 19 when he died. Alan was a pupil of Archbishop Tenison's Grammar School in Kennington and on the outbreak of war, he'd been evacuated with the entire school down to Reading in Berkshire. He was an accomplished sportsman and represented his school at athletics, cricket and football – these latter two at First XI level. He left school in 1941 and took up a job as a junior insurance clerk but also joined his local Home Guard unit in Dulwich the following year once he turned 17.

He made his senior debut for Dulwich Hamlet at this time, having been previously a member of our junior team. His first senior match was against the London Fire Force at Champion Hill. He was a left back and his first appearance came about due to the absence of a regular player who had been detained at work.

Alan enlisted into the Army in May 1943 and after basic training with the Gordon Highlanders, he transferred to the Army Air Corps to train as a Glider Pilot and qualified in July 1944. He was the youngest pilot in his squadron and was universally known as "Boy". On 18 September 1944, the Horsa glider that he was piloting was injured by shrapnel from anti-aircraft fire whilst part of the Second Wave of landings during Operation Market Garden at Arnhem. Alan slumped over the controls and although his Co-Pilot made a forced landing, they overshot the landing zone and hit trees at over 100 mph. The Co-Pilot was catapulted through the Perspex windscreen of the glider but survived unscathed. Sadly though, Alan was killed when the load (a Jeep and two trailers of ammunition) shifted forward and crushed him. Alan was buried initially in the grounds of the Psychiatric Home at Wolfheze but later reinterred at the main British war cemetery at Oosterbeek.

After the war, Dulwich Hamlet FC began to attract large crowds to Champion Hill once again and although the club was successful in the early post-war years, it is fair to say that the club took a step back from the glory days of the 1930s and it wasn't until 2017/18 that the club was finally able to achieve high honours again by winning promotion to the National League (South) after 111 years membership of the Isthmian League.

We hope to add the names of the two hitherto forgotten men to our Roll of Honour but obviously, as we have been in exile until quite recently, it hasn't been possible to do this just yet but maybe we can achieve this at our next Remembrance Day ceremony in November.



Biography

Steve is now a full time Battlefield Guide, blogger and researcher, specialising in the Home Front and London at war, in particular. He took the plunge into self-employment some four years ago. He has been a Dulwich Hamlet fan since 1990, originally fitting in games between watching his league side, Charlton Athletic but in recent years a season ticket holder at Champion Hill. He has recently written 'For Freedom' which tells the story of four of the club's Second World War casualties.

Dulwich Hamlet

FA Amateur Cup Winners 1936/37



Back Row: Toser, Murray, Waymouth, Robbins (Captain with the cup), Hugo, Ball

Front Row: Ingleton, Anderson, Wright, Morrish, Hill (Goalkeeper)

Eric Pierce



Alan Adams



Wartime Football at The Hill

DULWICH HAMLET FOOTBALL CLUB

FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION XI

White Shirts and Blue Knickers

RIGHT LEFT

	1 J. MAPSON (Sunderland)	
2 H. S. ROBBINS (Dulwich Hamlet)	3 E. A. HAPGOOD (Capt.) (Arsenal)	
4 J. W. LEWIS (Walthamstow Avenue)	5 JOHN OAKES (Charlton Athletic)	6 S. WEAVER (Chelsea)
7 F. H. BROOME (Aston Villa)	8 R. S. ANDERSON (Dulwich Hamlet)	10 L. GOULDEN (West Ham United)
	9 J. A. MORRISON (Tottenham Hotspur)	11 F. BOSTON (Golders Green)

○

Cpl. A. J. KIRCHEN
(Arsenal)

9 Cpl. L. C. FINCH (Barnet)	11	Cpl. G. E. AINSLEY (Leeds United)	10	A/c. P. D. DOHERTY (Manchester City)	8	Cpl. F. A. R. KING (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	7
Cpl. V. F. BUCKINGHAM (Tottenham Hotspur)	6	Cpl. A. W. BROWN (Huddersfield)	5	Cpl. W. J. CRAYSTON (Arsenal)	4		

Cpl. L. SCOTT
(Arsenal)
3

Cpl. J. GRIFFITHS
(Manchester United)
2

Cpl. S. BARTRAM
(Charlton Athletic)
1

LEFT RIGHT

ROYAL AIR FORCE XI

Air Force Blue Shirts and White Knickers

REFEREE Mr. G. CLARK (London)
LINESMEN Messrs. F. T. Adams (Surrey), Pink and White Flag
and E. C. Robinson (Surrey), Blue and White Flag

F.A. XI v R.A.F. XI – 30 March 1940

DULWICH HAMLET FOOTBALL CLUB

LAST SATURDAY'S GAME.

After a very well contested game our lads managed to win 2-1 at Bromley. In the early stages the play of the forwards was very pretty to watch, although at times the close work was a little overdone. After 15 minutes Arthur Phebey scored a neat goal—no net smashing for this lad! Shortly after Tom Jover shot hard at the goalkeeper, who couldn't recover and Stan Smith netted—for some reason this goal was disallowed. However Tom Jover soon got a further point and we led 2-0 at half-time. In the second half Bromley defenders played closer to our forwards, who still refused to play an open game. Bromley gradually had more of the game and midway through the second half opened their account. Haydn Hill had to "slip himself" now and again and shewed glimpses of his old form. Stan Smith had hard luck on two occasions but there was no further scoring. This was the first game H. H. C. Hill had played for over a year and he did quite well. T. B. Lake again played a strong game at right back and J. R. Bishop had a better game than the previous week. Ron Ebsworth was obviously short of practice and Len Thornton had his hands full with the forceful Bromley centre forward. Of the forwards Arthur Phebey was the pick—Pat Connett had not quite recovered from his injury and took things quietly. Tom Jover delighted the crowd with his dashes down the wing and Ron Dicks also had a good game. Stan Smith did quite well at centre forward but did not have the best of luck with several good shots. Altogether a very pleasant game played in the right spirit. Our team was H. H. C. Hill, T. B. Lake, J. R. Bishop, R. W. Ebsworth, L. C. Thornton, J. G. Lewis, R. W. Dicks, A. Phebey, S. W. Smith, A. H. Connett, T. R. Jover.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

The South Eastern Combination will this season be comprised of the following teams—Bromley, Erith & Belvedere, Epsom Town, Metropolitan Police, Sutton United, Tooting & Mitcham, Walton-on-Thames, and Dulwich Hamlet. We regret that Nunhead have found it impossible to continue during the war period, and another club who find themselves in the same position is Redhill.

We are fortunate to enjoy the services of T. B. Lake, who is a member of the Norsemen F.C., the club that H. F. Benka played for before joining us. We trust that his association with the club will be as happy as was "Benk's".

J. R. Bishop was with Nunhead last season and with the departure of H.S. Robbins and J. W. Marsden to the services his offer to help us is much appreciated.

A welcome visitor to the ground at the last home game was Leslie Morrish, looking very fit in R.A.F. uniform.

The Dulwich Hamlet Cricket Club has enjoyed a very successful season and we will give full results in a subsequent programme.

SUPPORTERS WILL PROBABLY KNOW OF THE NEW FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION RULING re STOPPAGE OF GAMES. ONLY IN THE EVENT OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT OVERHEAD WILL PLAY BE STOPPED. SHELTER IS PROVIDED UNDER THE STAND. ENTRANCES EACH END OF ENCLOSURE FACING THE PLAYING PITCH.

Next Saturday's Game—on this ground

Dulwich Hamlet v. Wimbledon k.o. 3.30 p.m.

Dulwich Hamlet v Bromley – 20 September 1941