

White Stars. Newtown Football Team, winners of the Football Association Challenge Cup Competition 1878-79



Edward Gittins was a big man. He needed to be. He was a blacksmith by trade, a hard, physically demanding occupation. His stature and his thick, bushy black beard marked him out from the crowd, so it is easy to spot him in the photograph. He had started his working life as a 14-year-old apprentice in his uncle's smithy, next to the Cross Keys Inn in Bwlch-y-Cibau, but by the late 1870s, he was in Newtown, his own master.

Edward had arrived in Newtown, just at the time when football was really taking off in the town. Young workers were taking advantage of the Saturday half day working to form football teams. Newtown FC had been formed in 1875, rivalling the Wrexham and Cefn Druids in the industrial north east as the earliest clubs to be formed in Wales.

But Edward wanted his own team. In 1876, he formed The White Stars from his drinking pals in the Greyhound Inn in High Street. They were a motley bunch of labourers, bricklayers and flannel workers. Unable to afford a team strip, they contented themselves with a white star of varying design sewn on to any shirt they could find, to distinguish themselves from the opposition.

In 1877, a new competition was announced: the Welsh Challenge Cup of the North Wales Football Association. In 1878, Wrexham won the inaugural contest. It was Edward's dream to lift the trophy and bring it back to Newtown. Remarkably, in April the following year, he achieved just this, when the White Stars defeated Wrexham 1-0 at Oswestry. The win was made even sweeter as the Stars had defeated their bitter rivals, Newtown FC, in the semi final. It was another three months before Edward actually got his hands on the trophy. It was presented to him amidst great celebrations at the Public Rooms in Newtown in July 1879.



The Museum is fortunate to possess a truly historic photograph of the White Stars, the second team to win the Welsh Cup but the first to

receive a trophy for their efforts. Unfortunately, we don't have the trophy, but look carefully at the photograph. Two of the players pose in the foreground, and between them is a framed object. The object was a certificate, also presented to Edward, to mark the team's victory. It is comforting to note that 140 years after their victory, the photograph and the certificate remain together, preserved in the town which spawned the team.

If you want to read an account of the final, you can follow this

link:<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3854955/3854958/21/Newtown%20White%20Stars>

You can also read a detailed account of the trophy's presentation here:

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3855078/3855086/52/Newtown%20White%20Stars>