THE BLAKE CUP

A HUNDRED YEARS OF COMPETITION

AND STILL GOING STRONG

By Andy Littleton

Soon after Northumberland Schools’ Football Association had been formed, the inaugural competition for member schools was the Blake Cup. Thus, like the Association, this competition is celebrating 100 years of inter-school rivalry.

The cup was named after Sir Francis Blake, a figure of some note in Northumberland, who donated the cup in 1911 at the cost of a princely 10 guineas. The original cup is still awarded each season to the winners of our Under 15 (Y10) knock-out competition.

Sir Francis Blake was born in Berwick in 1856. He was from a famous family, being a kinsman of Admiral Blake. He attended Berwick Grammar School and Dr Bruce’s Academy in Percy Street, Newcastle, eventually choosing law as his profession. Married to Selina Colquhoun Burns, the daughter of a Glasgow shipowner in 1886 he had two sons and two daughters. He was knighted in 1907 and served for seven years as Liberal M.P. for Berwick He was awarded the Order of the Bath for his services during the Great War and the Duke of Northumberland presented him with a silver salver for his work in the County as Deputy Lieutenant and Chair of the Education Committee.

Sir Francis took a keen interest in the Association and attended the final to present the trophy whenever he could

The very first final was played at Seghill and was between Seaton Delaval and Rutherford College. These two teams were to feature consistently in the later stages of those early years of the competition. Interestingly, the semi-final replay between Rutherford College and St Andrew’s School was played at a certain St James’ Park. Seaton Delaval were the winners in 1911/12 and were presented with the cup by Sir Francis at the Seghill Institute. The Association purchased an oak shield for 10 shillings and 6 pence to give to the school as a permanent reminder of their success.

The following year saw the same finalists but with result reversed and Rutherford taking the trophy. The match was played at Hartley and the profit from the gate was £2/12/5d.

In its third year there were 62 entries, last year (2010/11) there were 29. Percy Main won the cup but Sir Francis could not attend. However, the Association minutes record that ‘his tangible support and kindly appreciation of our efforts have greatly increased our indebtedness to him’.

Last year the Blake Cup winners were Bedlingtonshire High School and the final was played at Newcastle University’s Cochrane Park . Many of those old ‘board’ schools have gone, though the buildings of some remain. Stirring fixtures like Bentinck v Scotswood, Queen Victoria v Buddle and Plessey Road v Cambois have been replaced by Excelsior Academy v Churchill College and Cramlington Learning Village v John Spence High School.

We may well seek to play our Centenary Final at its original venue. Who knows, an oak shield may be presented by the Association to the winning school, though it will certainly cost more than 10/6 (52p). Through this competition the spirit of schools’ football continues to shine under the watchful auspices of a true son of Northumberland County, Sir Francis Blake.

For the record, The Blake Cup is played for every year now, by teams representing their schools at under 15 age group. The cup itself is a very fine trophy, and has been held over the years by very many fine footballers. Made of silver, it is really quite a valuable piece and is insured for

Just recently, in July 2011, The BBC programme the Antiques Roadshow visited Seaton Delaval Hall, which is of course just down the road, or should we say “The Avenue” from where it was first won by the Seaton Delaval school team. The BBC team of experts were much taken by the Trophy, as well as by a Winners medal which was sent to the NSFA by a great grandson of an original player in that first final. This along with the minutes book of the proceedings of the NSFA executive committee in that founding season links us very closely and tangibly to those who set the ball rolling, so to speak.

**Andy Littleton**