

The Hemy Painting

Introduction

Anyone walking into the main foyer of the Stadium of Light can't help notice the stunning painting, behind its protective glass casing, of the fixture between Sunderland and Aston Villa played at our then home ground of Newcastle Road.

That this English first division match, played on 2 January 1895 ended 4 v 4 was run of the mill, that the painting is recognised as the oldest of an Association Football match anywhere in the world marks it out as something special.

The "Hemy Painting" as it is commonly referred to is in due deference to the artist Thomas Maria Madawaska Hemy.

In celebration of Sunderland AFC's third English league championship in 1894/95 the football club commissioned Hemy, a local North East artist, to paint a picture of the team in action and the game against Villa was the match chosen. The painting has over the years had two titles; "A Corner Kick" and "The Last Minute - Now or Never".

This is the story of the match, the artist and the further history of this priceless footballing artefact.



Interestingly the picture above, when blown up full size, has a plaque underneath with the inscription "Presented to Sunderland AFC by Samuel Wilson Esq., September 4 1930."

Clearly therefore from the time it was put into storage until the above date who knows where it went to. It clearly ended up in Wilson's possession but where did he get it from?



The Football Match

Both Sunderland and Villa at that time were huge clubs. A draw wherever they played and this meeting of the two sides was eagerly anticipated. Villa were the current league champions and although they had started their league campaign badly, including losing to Sunderland in the September, they had gradually climbed the table to lie just behind Sunderland who were top. With this in mind Villa were confident of winning and at odds of 6 to 4 appeared a good bet.