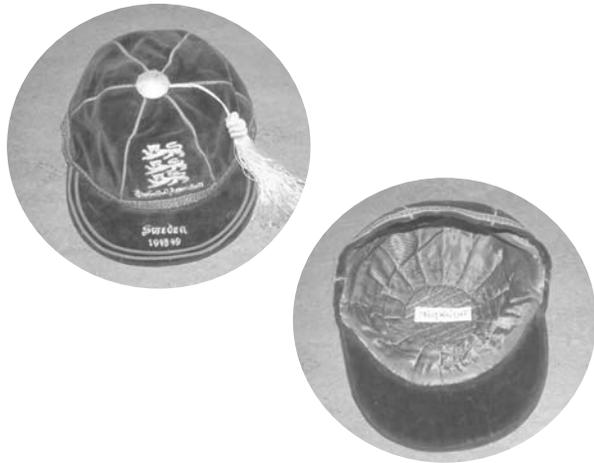


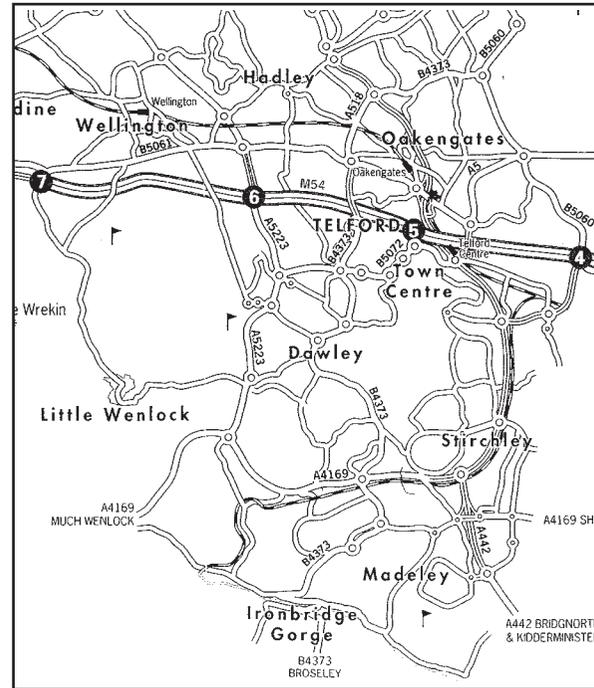
Billy Wright died of cancer on 3rd September 1994. At his funeral the Wolverhampton Wanderers anthem – *The Happy Wanderer* – was performed by the Abraham Darby band and choir. On 6th February 1997 (on what would have been Billy's 73rd birthday) his widow and her twin sisters came to Madeley at the request of local resident Phil Evans. They presented one of Billy's England caps to the Abraham Darby School (the successor of Madeley Modern School) and led pupils in a rousing chorus of *Football Crazy* while the audience clapped and cheered. The cap remains one of the school's most treasured possessions.



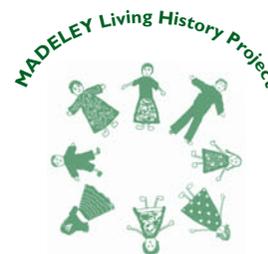
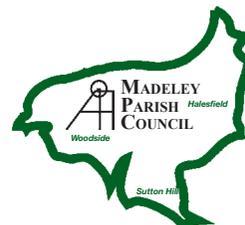
Many local people remember him and stories abound. On one occasion he went to watch his brother Laurence play football, for the Ironbridge Wolves, in a field which is now part of Coalbrookdale Park just below the Valley Hotel. Billy, wearing his team blazer, sat on the grass with the other spectators and, after the game, was asked for his autograph by a number of people. At least one person, unable to find a suitable piece of paper for him to inscribe, still treasures the abandoned Tate & Lyle sugar bag on which Billy obliged.

At the **This is Your Life** tribute to Billy in 1989 he said "Who would have believed all this could have happened to a lad from Ironbridge"?

## How to get to Madeley



Compiled by Doreen Parton and Iris Workman  
assisted by the  
Madeley History Group.



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## Parish People No. 4



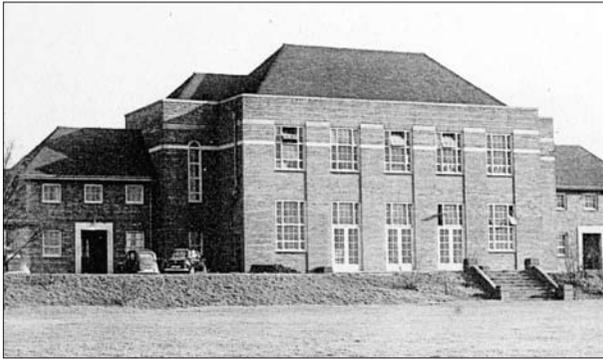
Billy Wright holding the FA Cup in 1949  
(courtesy of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club)

## Billy Wright

January 2011

## William Ambrose Wright

William Ambrose Wright was born in Ironbridge on 6th February 1924. The name Ambrose was passed down the line of Wrights as a traditional family name. His paternal grandfather (also William Ambrose Wright) was killed in action on the Somme in 1916 and is commemorated on the Coalport Memorial Bridge. Billy's father Tom, an iron-moulder, was a good amateur footballer who encouraged young Billy's natural talent as did his mother, Annie, a keen fan. His first schooling was undertaken at Madeley Wood Methodist School and when he 'moved up' to Madeley Modern School his headmaster sent a note to the new school about his footballing ability. Billy's reputation was secured when he scored 10 goals for Madeley Modern in a match against Bewdley.



*Madeley Modern School*

The head of Madeley Modern School, Mr. Simpson, later contacted Wolverhampton Wanderers FC and Billy was employed as a member of the ground staff in July 1938. The Wolves manager, Major Buckley, wrote to Mr. Simpson a few months later suggesting that Billy 'lacked the necessary stature' to be a professional footballer (he was only 5ft. 8ins. tall). At Mr. Simpson's urging he was kept on as 'boot boy', cleaning the players' boots, putting out the shirts and socks and cleaning out the baths after games.

He played his first game for the club during a wartime match in 1939 and signed professional forms at 17 in February 1941. During a League Cup game in that year he suffered a fractured ankle and was told that he would never play professionally again but, after insertion of a pin, he resumed playing and went on to enjoy outstanding success. He remained with Wolves for his entire playing career.



*Billy's statue outside the main Wolves' entrance in the Billy Wright Stand (courtesy of Wolverhampton City Council, Archives and Local Studies)*

He joined the army in 1943 as a Physical Training Instructor (ending the war as a corporal in the Shropshire Light Infantry) but played for Wolves whenever possible making over 100 appearances for the club in wartime football. He became captain of Wolves in 1947 and led them to victory in the 1949 FA cup final and to Football League championships in 1954, 1958 and 1959. In 1945 he was selected for the England reserves and the following year won a full place in the team. He played for England 105 times, being the first England player to be capped 100 times, and captained the team on 90 occasions including during three separate World Cups (1950, 1954 and 1958). With Wolves he won an F.A. Cup winners' medal and three Football League winners' medals as well as being voted Footballer of the Year in 1952.

Known to his team mates as 'Snowy', because of his blond hair, and also as 'The Ironbridge Rocket' he was renowned for his modesty, his good manners and his dedication. During his 20 year career with the club he was never once booked or sent off and over 20,000 people came to see his final match, a pre-season training game on 8th August 1959 between the Wolves first team and their reserve side. In 1959 he was awarded the CBE and, after managing Arsenal from 1962-1966, he joined the Associated Television Network as Head of Sport and Outside Broadcasts. He was ambidextrous although he generally used his left hand and, in addition to his footballing skills, he was a single-handicap golfer.

He was also the first footballer to branch out into the world of 'celebrity endorsements' advertising well-known products such as Brylcreem. In 1958 he married Joy Beverley, of the famous singing trio the Beverley Sisters, with whom he had two daughters.



*Billy on his wedding day, with his bride, Joy Beverley and her twin sisters Babs and Teddy (courtesy of the Daily Mirror)*

This was one of the first marriages linking the world of showbiz with that of sporting heroes and, despite a very different lifestyle and public profile to the Beckhams, they were undoubtedly the 'Posh & Becks' of their day. Ironically perhaps, David Beckham earns more in one week than Billy Wright picked up as a player throughout his career.