

TRIBUTE TO 'MOZART OF FOOTBALL'

Golden Boy was a diamond for Boro

Wilf's Football League '100 Legends' medal. Picture: Middlesbrough FC



In our latest feature marking 25 years since the last season at Ayresome Park, Manchester Metropolitan University historian Dr Tosh Warwick explores memories of arguably the greatest Boro player of the Ayresome era...

AYRESOME Park played host to many great players and famous names over the decades. Yet for many, one name stands out: Wilf Mannion.

The diminutive inside-forward, born in South Bank, was truly a great of the game and regarded as one of, if not the, greatest Boro players of the Ayresome era.

Mannion's story of wowing the footballing world on an international stage for England and Great Britain, and his infamous contract dispute with Middlesbrough that saw the man Stanley Matthews dubbed 'the Mozart of Football' spend a year out of the game, is worthy of several books to go, alongside Nick Varley's excellent *Golden Boy* biography.

A delve into the collections of Teesside Archives helps provide first-hand accounts from those who saw Mannion play in his prime at Ayresome Park in the 1930s and 1940s, as Middlesbrough fleetingly threatened to upset the hierarchies of British football, alongside the likes of George Camsell and George Hardwick.

Middlesbrough FC's collections also help shed light on the star's career when the boy from Lower Napier Street in South Bank penned a professional contract with the club, as well as later material including England caps, awards and memorabilia.

The recent Memories of Mannion project with Foundation Press in South Bank, supported by Creative Factory in Middlesbrough, has helped reveal the special place the "Golden Boy" still holds in Teessiders' hearts – more than six decades since his last match for Boro and almost two decades since his death.

Among the dozens of Mannion stories contrib-

uted, many inevitably reference his later days at Boro and life after football working in the industries – the sense of awe at Mannion's achievement apparent, alongside a respect for a humble man.

Barry Doyle shared memories of his father's friendship with the Boro great, visiting Ayresome Park as a child to witness the England and Great Britain star's skills first-hand and later encountering Wilf working in local industry.

Pete McCarthy recalled: "My dad used to tell me a story about when he was sent off during a schoolboy match between Grange-town St Marys and South Bank St Peters. He said he got fed up of Wilf running rings around him, so he clobbered him.

"Despite that, he and Wilf became good friends. Dad certainly worshipped Wilf as a Boro player...I was also lucky enough to see

Wilf play for a season and a half. There has still been nobody better."

Don Chesney recalled how Wilf was held in higher esteem than royalty, reflecting: "He was my dad's hero. When my late father was in Teesside Hospice, he was visited by Prince Charles and Wilf Mannion. He was very honoured and quite excited to meet Prince Charles, but it didn't come close to how he felt about meeting 'Wilfy!'"

Former South Bank centre forward Paul Kelly also shared the story of his father training at South Bank with Wilf during his contract dispute with Middlesbrough FC in the post-war era and described the South Bank legend as a man "who came from nothing and lit up the football world".

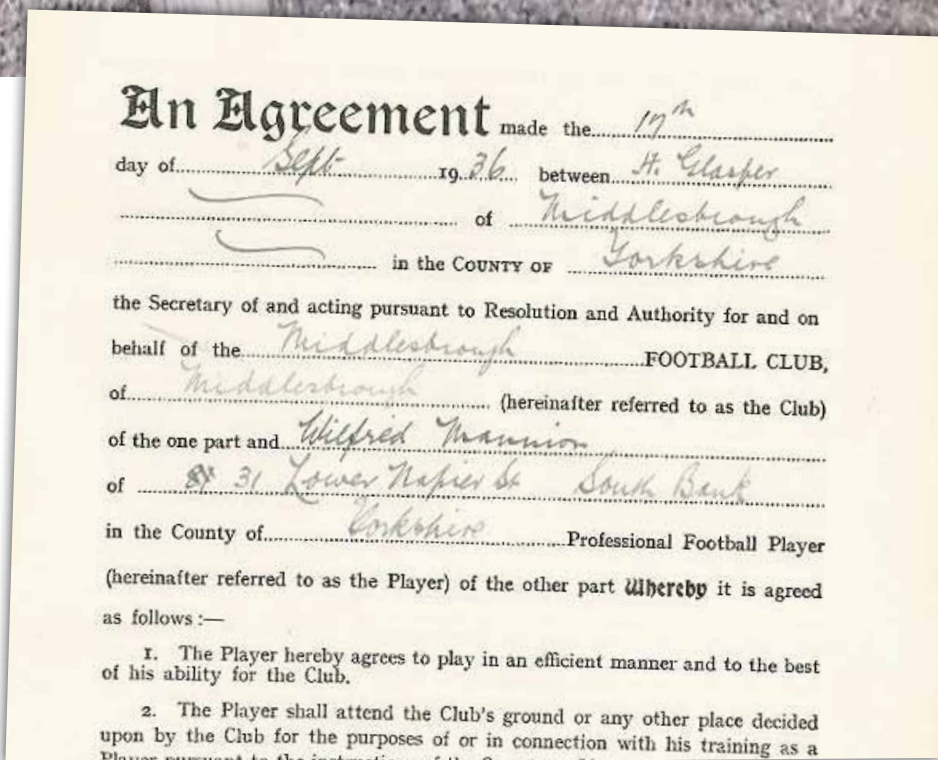
As well as memories of Wilf, the Foundation Press project also provided an opportu-



A Wilf collector's card from the collection of Memories of Mannion contributor Harry Greenmon. Right, a signed Wilf collector's card from the collection



Wilf in a pre-match warm-up, and right, his 1936 contract. Pictures: Middlesbrough FC



nity to share Mannion memorabilia.

The shared material included some of the fascinating collections of Harry Greenmon, an avid Middlesbrough collector, who showcased some of his treasured ephemera on a visit to South Bank's Golden Boy Green, including collector's cards and photographs dating back to the Golden Boy's playing days.

Clearly, as we approach the 20 year anniversary of Wilf Mannion's passing, the man immortalised with a statue outside the Ayresome Park gates at the Riverside Stadium will continue to be remembered as one of Teesside's footballing legends and a great, humble man who meant so much to so many.

■ To share your memories of Wilf Mannion, you can email info@heritageunlocked.com or visit www.heritageunlocked.com/projects/blackpathpress. Or send them in to *Remember When*, and we can pass them on.



Barry Doyle with his signed copy of Mannion biography Golden Boy.



Former South Bank forward Paul Kelly with a newspaper cutting