



# HARRY LOCKETT

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FOOTBALL'S  
**UNASSUMING,  
UNKNOWN  
AND  
UNSUNG  
FOUNDING  
FATHER**



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# CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	9
Chapter One . . . . .	13
Chapter Two . . . . .	25
Chapter Three . . . . .	35
Chapter Four . . . . .	42
Chapter Five . . . . .	49
Chapter Six . . . . .	55
Chapter Seven . . . . .	64
Chapter Eight. . . . .	73
Chapter Nine . . . . .	85
Chapter Ten. . . . .	97
Chapter Eleven . . . . .	109
Chapter Twelve . . . . .	119
Chapter Thirteen . . . . .	129
Chapter Fourteen . . . . .	137
Chapter Fifteen. . . . .	151
Chapter Sixteen. . . . .	166
Chapter Seventeen . . . . .	182
Chapter Eighteen . . . . .	192
Chapter Nineteen. . . . .	206
Chapter Twenty. . . . .	218
Chapter Twenty-one . . . . .	234
Chapter Twenty-two . . . . .	246
Chapter Twenty-three . . . . .	258
Chapter Twenty-four . . . . .	271
Chapter Twenty-five . . . . .	284
Acknowledgements . . . . .	297
Appendix . . . . .	299
Bibliography . . . . .	311



## CHAPTER ONE

THERE ARE two words that described Harry Lockett in the pages of newspapers from the Victorian era. He was noted as genial, and frequently unpunctual. So it is distinctly possible that on Saturday, 7 January 1888 Harry was running late, noticing how little time there was to get to the railway station. He had intended to cycle home, wash up in the privacy of his own room, eat dinner at a leisurely pace. Instead he could only wipe smeary hands on a towel, pour water from a china jug into the wash bowl and splash it on his rectangular face, check the looking glass for traces of ink on his pale complexion.

Calling a quick cheerio to colleagues, Harry rushed out of the printing works and leapt on his bicycle, dodging the cab heading towards him, turning faster than the driver could move his horse, ignoring shouts and whistles as he pedalled away. He cycled as swiftly as he dared, down the gentle inclines of Hanley to the mullioned windows and gables of Stoke station. As he approached the building, he jumped off his bicycle, almost catching a leg against the step of the machine, narrowly escaping a nasty injury. Drawing a coin out of his jacket pocket and tossing it at a boy, Lockett thrust the bicycle at him with instructions to store it, then ran towards the platform. Remembering his manners, he turned back to thank the lad.

The noisy crowd on the platform sounded like music to his ears, simply because it meant he hadn't missed the train. People were pushing to get away from the smoke, potsherds and coal dust of the Potteries, even if just for a few hours. Lockett elbowed his way through to the bright windows of the carriages and looked for his team. They saw him and called his name, laughing at his flushed face and breathlessness as he climbed into the compartment. Someone commented how fortunate it was that he was their manager, not a player on the team, while another callously pointed out he still seemed fitter than full-back Alf Underwood, sitting in the corner coughing. Lockett merely smiled and asked Underwood how his work in the pottery industry was going, whether his employers had made it easy for him to leave work early so he could play for Stoke, although he already knew the answer. Harry had visited the factory earlier in the week to explain the importance of today's match.

The players were jolly and light-hearted, feeling confident after recent results. It had been a good week, spending time together, training more than usual, singing afterwards as they relaxed in the public baths. Lockett, sensing a chance of victory, had been working hard making extra preparations. He took on a club trainer specifically for the fixture and talked to the press to explain how this man, a long-distance swimmer, was taking his role with the players seriously. 'It will not be his fault if they do not win,' he told journalists, explaining how little preparation time Stoke had as 'their practice hours are limited'. The team was comprised of part-time professionals who worked five and a half days each week in other jobs in the six towns and usually slotted training in where they could. Previously Stoke's workouts had consisted of cross-country runs, something Lockett himself had long enjoyed, or short races with the club trainer. Bringing in another coach, from another discipline, showed Lockett was taking today's match seriously,

encouraging his players and the club to do more than usual, making marginal gains where he saw it was possible, extending coaching hours by using the local baths for swimming in the dark evenings of early January.

Lockett talked to goalkeeper Bill Rowley as the train steamed through Staffordshire. They chatted about the FA Cup run, the longest Stoke had ever been on in the competition. The team had already won three matches. The first of these, a 1-0 victory over neighbours Port Vale, endeared Lockett to supporters. Many already liked their genial manager, or secretary as the Victorians termed the role at the end of the 19th century. Lockett regularly invited big teams to play against Stoke, and he cemented their position as the top club in the area. The cup success was Lockett's seventh win in a Potteries derby. His only defeat had been in the courtroom, when he persuaded Rowley to sign for Stoke, and Port Vale subsequently claimed damages. The judge who ruled in Vale's favour described the feeling between the two clubs as a 'deadly feud', causing journalists to joke before the cup clash about not appointing a magistrate as referee this time. But the ruling was no laughing matter for secretary Harry Lockett, who had to write an apology and 'deeply regretted' his actions in engaging the stubborn-faced Rowley. A copy of the letter was leaked and printed in the press. Perhaps the residual shame of this inspired Lockett to push his team onwards.

The rhythm of the steam engine caused Lockett to close his grey eyes for a moment and imagine his team winning the FA Cup, the same dream he always had. He saw himself lifting the trophy, holding it in his hands, running fingers over the shaped metal, his neatly trimmed nails tracing inscriptions. A craftsman himself, he could easily visualise the shape of each word on the cup and appreciate the elegant font. As an athlete, he was motivated

by prizes, a solid recognition of ability and achievements he could display for family and friends. Two years earlier he had led Stoke to a Charity Cup victory and enjoyed arranging the trophy alongside medals and photographs at the end-of-season dinner dance. That was when he first dreamed of adding the FA Cup to the haul.

Usually it was merely a pleasant fantasy, a rush of positive emotion to get him through another disappointing result. But this season felt different. He thought about returning to the Potteries with his players, taking the trophy to supporters, enjoying their celebrations. He imagined himself in the middle of crowded streets, part of a victorious Stoke team waving from a wagon as people cheered, flew flags, reached out to try to touch the cup and finally seemed carefree. Perhaps the cart would stop at Stoke Town Hall and he could address the thousands who filled the streets. His words would be greeted with deafening applause as everyone thanked him for bringing the FA Cup to Stoke. There would be singing, a band, fireworks brightening the spring evening, all manifested by Lockett's own vision and sanguine energy. He was usually the one who began the belting out of tunes after a triumph, or geed people up before kick-off with a rousing chant. Now he dreamed of everyone else singing while he listened to words immortalising his name.

A blast of icy wind hit his face and cold reality bit as Stoke's outside-right, Jimmy Sayer, opened the train window. Sayer needed fresh air to help with the headaches he was experiencing. Lockett worried about playing him today, but Sayer was reliable, pacy, had won an England cap and was popular with supporters, who nicknamed him 'greyhound'. In two previous rounds of the cup, Stoke played at home and over 3,000 fans walked down to watch, passing a shabby photography studio on their way to the Victoria Athletics Ground, where there were tennis courts, a running

track, playing pitch and impressive tiered stand. Prior to the third-round match against Oswestry, Lockett announced plans for new changing rooms under the stand, kitted out with luxurious baths and dressing tents, but it was during the match that player welfare really mattered. When Sayer collided with team-mate William Holford, Sayer was concussed. As no substitutes were permitted, and with no medical consensus on the effects of head injuries, Sayer returned to the pitch. Unsurprisingly he was unable to impact the match. Holford also played on, a huge lump forming on his head as the match progressed. He at least knew what was happening, unlike Sayer, who collapsed at the end of 90 minutes and had no recollection of his team's win. Perhaps today was too soon for Sayer's comeback. Lockett worried what to do, licking his lips anxiously and smoothing his moustache as the train pulled into the station.

The players scabbled to get out, laughing about their other trip in the cup this season. Two months earlier they were drawn away at Over Wanderers in the second round. The pitch was in the middle of a salt works in Cheshire, with only two sides of the ground accessible, the other half made up of grainy white mountains. Players had to navigate a platform of planks built specially for taking corners, while anyone straying beyond the touchlines faced a steep drop. The locals, too, were salty, bitter and argumentative. Lockett had to summon a police escort to accompany his victorious Stoke team as they left the ground.

There was no need for that today. The streets were quiet as his players made their way to face West Bromwich Albion in what looked like a tricky tie against the runners-up of the previous season's FA Cup. However, it was a straightforward journey to the ground and a decent stadium to play in, one that, like Stoke's, had a grandstand and good facilities. This season there didn't seem much of a gap between the two teams.



But not many Stoke supporters, or West Bromwich Albion fans for that matter, were there to watch. The tie seemed enticing, being last year's finalists against one of the country's oldest clubs, but the FA Cup draw had thrown up an even tastier fixture in the form of Aston Villa against Preston North End. It was generally accepted that these were the best two teams around. Having them play each other in a competitive match was a rare occurrence. In January 1888 there was no Football League and this was the first time Aston Villa and Preston North End had faced each other competitively with the stakes so high. Consequently most football fans were more concerned with this match, rather than West Bromwich Albion vs Stoke.

Lockett, standing just a few miles away from Aston Villa's home, looked around the Stoney Lane ground before kick-off. The sun's low glare had blinded him to how few spectators had turned out, but now it was blatantly obvious not many people were interested in him or his team. Even one of his best friends and long-time Stoke supporter Tom Slaney had gone to watch the big match, and maybe more Stoke fans had joined him, because there weren't many here. There was a minuscule turnout, estimated at just 300 by one journalist, although other reports were more generous. Quite possibly a fair few were only here because of work, because they were part of the club, or had jobs on matchdays manning the entrances, serving drinks and refreshments, pies and oranges.

Harry Lockett pointed out opposing players, the sloping pitch and strong wind that stood between his team and victory. He thought even with these obstacles it would be easy to motivate the players. Two more wins and they were in the semi-finals. Three more and it was the final, with a weekend in London and playing at Kennington Oval to look forward to, with the chance to have

Stoke's name engraved on the trophy. Lockett, 31 years old and in middle age according to the life expectancy rates of Victorian times, was halfway to achieving his dream.

Still, he had to send his players out on the pitch before the biggest match in Stoke's history and try to explain why people didn't want to see their efforts. He needed to convey the message that it mattered, even with barely anyone to watch. He clarified how this match would define the season, how a win would see supporters returning in the next round, especially if Stoke were drawn to play the victors of the Aston Villa vs Preston encounter. He would leave it to the players to determine whether they wanted their season to carry on being competitive, although he pointed out a win took them a step closer to the final, while defeat would leave the season effectively over in early January, with only local trophies and friendlies left on the fixture list. If the team lost, they wouldn't have another meaningful match until the FA Cup began again in the autumn.

A few years earlier, all of Stoke Football Club's matches had been friendlies. Their first recorded match was in 1868, three years before the FA Cup began. Although Stoke were one of the oldest and most well-known teams, the club hadn't entered the cup until the 1883/84 season, after Blackburn Olympic beat Old Etonians in the 1883 final, the first northern team to lift the trophy. Stoke were possibly spurred on by this, along with other teams such as Preston North End, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Hull and Middlesbrough, who all decided to enter the competition for the first time at this point. Lockett became manager of Stoke in 1884 and a cup run had eluded him until now, however much he wanted one. Before this 1887/88 season, Stoke and Lockett had one solitary win in the prestigious competition.

So here he was, trying to stay calm and motivate his team, but also knowing his dreams were in their hands and feet. Although

Stoke, as was typical for a football team in 1888, always played 2-3-5, Lockett likely put a lot of thought into team selection and chose not to play Sayer, giving him more time to recover from his concussion. With seven previous losses as manager in matches against West Bromwich, no wins and only two draws, Lockett focused this time on not conceding goals. He played local lads Tommy Clare and Alf Underwood as full-backs, completing a defence that, along with Bill Rowley in goal, would one day play together for England.

The teams kicked off and Stoke started quickly, playing together as a unit, rushing up the sloping pitch and scoring within the first five minutes with a goal from Jimmy Owen, another player Lockett had poached from Port Vale. Lockett stood tall and proud, his dream starting to become a reality. The players were fired up, playing with passion, defending well. But without fans to keep the momentum going, to sing and support the Stoke team, the pendulum soon swung the other way and West Bromwich Albion began to turn up the pressure. The goal had woken them. Now Stoke faced attack after attack. They held out only for a few moments until West Bromwich Albion equalised.

Still the attacks continued. The home team were going all out for a win. They didn't want a replay; they wanted to get the result wrapped up today, on their own ground. After coming so close to lifting the cup last time around, West Brom were determined to go one better. They were used to getting the job done in cup matches. In the 1880s they appeared in 13 finals of various competitions, winning six trophies. For Stoke, this fifth-round tie was their most important fixture, and now they had to play the match of their lives if they were going to advance to the next round.

Harry Lockett rubbed his hands to warm them, and paced beside the pitch. At half-time he hid his nerves and tried to gee

the players up. If he didn't, he could see this chance of cup glory draining away. But no one else seemed to care. The sparse crowd simply wanted to know the latest score from the Aston Villa vs Preston match, and possibly an update reached Stoney Lane via telegram or carrier pigeon. Perhaps Lockett, who had contacts in the press, made sure updates were shared. He too was interested in the match at Perry Barr, and couldn't begrudge the fact it meant many were absent from Stoke's most important match.

However, with the stakes so high both for him and for Stoke, he must have been surprised that his friend Tom Slaney chose to attend the Aston Villa vs Preston fixture. Slaney had played for Stoke Football Club throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, had managed the team before Lockett and still took an active part in club matters. He guided and supported Lockett with big decisions, but the two men also followed their own paths. Slaney had taken the lead in forming the Staffordshire FA a decade earlier and frequently sat on various FA committees. It was likely that Slaney went to Aston Villa's ground in this capacity, but it is strange he missed the biggest match in Stoke's history.

Later Lockett would hear how Slaney was part of a crowd of people journeying to the match in Birmingham, some travelling on trams, others jostling along busy streets in carts or on foot. There were Aston Villa fans, Preston North End supporters and hordes of neutrals too, along with officers from Staffordshire police. Trains brought people in from across the country, from all manner of different clubs. Stoke supporters who were there would recognise Slaney's distinctive long face and sideburns, his tall, thin body striding quickly as he tried to get to the ground, perhaps jumping on a steam tram, while some of the other spectators chose to ride in ancient-looking buses drawn by horses. Both groups soon realised walking was a better option and the only way to get through

crowded streets in time for the match, through the thousands of people and line of vehicles heading slowly to the ground, and the queue of empty vehicles moving away adding to the chaos on the roads.

It was no better at the football ground. Here Tom Slaney tried to bypass the jostling for tickets, fans packed in like sardines, journalists unable to get to their desks. Slaney had a ticket for Aston Villa's new stand, in the most expensive seats in the stadium and the only section that wasn't yet overflowing with people. He managed to enter and sit near Preston chairman William Sudell, who was watching with his wife and six-year-old son Will. Like many others, they talked about the money all these fans were generating for football, and laughed as they watched supporters race across the pitch, chased by constables and Aston Villa's Santa-doppelgänger chairman William McGregor. One supporter stood out, a woman in red stockings who was cheered as she ran from the crowded enclosure to the new stand.

Then the mood changed. Too many people were here. An estimated 27,000 supporters were inside, while others climbed trees, roofs and even a flagpole to try to catch the action. William McGregor later wrote that he thought there were as many as 35,000 watching. One journalist recorded Slaney looking calm and peaceful as he sat before the long-awaited clash. But that would soon change. He and the Sudell family began to sweat, hearts beating faster as they noticed the swell of fans, the mounted police struggling to keep control. Slaney wouldn't be the only person who became concerned about fan safety, as iron railings snapped like pieces of thread and barriers gave way. Spectators tumbled forwards. People were scared, worried about injuries, anxious for their own safety and uncertain what it meant for the match itself.

The news that things weren't going to plan made its way down the road to Stoney Lane, to the few who were watching West Bromwich Albion against Stoke. Rumours spread quickly and the sparse crowd were soon aware of the chaos at Perry Barr. Fans were muted even when the second half started, and West Bromwich Albion scored almost immediately to take the lead. Stoke appealed for offside, but the goal was given, and Rowley had to make several decent saves to keep Stoke in with a chance. Both he and Stoke's defence were later praised in the sports pages, but West Bromwich Albion's clever passing tactics were noted too and proved to be the difference. They won the match 4-1, Jem Bayliss scoring all of their goals, and Stoke were out of the FA Cup. Lockett's dream was over for another season.

At Aston Villa, dozens of mounted police and extra officers deployed especially for the match couldn't cope with the confusion. Someone summoned the Royal Hussars, a cavalry regiment, as police struggled to keep the surging crowd away from the pitch. The players came out and the match started. Within ten minutes Aston Villa scored, and after another few minutes had a second goal disallowed for offside. Waves of spectators broke on to the pitch. It was impossible to continue the match. Aston Villa players tried to help police clear fans. Club captain Archie Hunter addressed supporters, asking them to move back. Unsurprisingly, given their experiences of crush, chaos and broken barriers, they were reluctant to return to the packed enclosure. The arrival of the Hussars and their horses did force some fans to retreat, enough for the two captains and match officials to agree to carry on. Afterwards, Hunter revealed that at half-time the referee announced he had abandoned the cup tie, and this was now a friendly. While Aston Villa subsequently dropped off in the second half, saving their energy for the rematch, Preston cannily kept going and won the

match, but the result seemed secondary to the overcrowding. All anyone could talk about was the miracle of no serious injuries.

Not many predicted William Sudell and his victorious Preston North End team would insist the match was competitive and the result should stand. No one could guess that these matches involving Aston Villa and Preston North End, and West Bromwich Albion and Stoke would change football forever. As for Harry Lockett, it wasn't yet clear what his next step would be to bring the FA Cup to the Potteries. But he would persevere, if he was anything like his parents.