

BIRTH OF THE BLUES

Auckland Castle to host landmark exhibition dedicated to the most successful amateur side in UK football

Friday 22nd May to Monday 28th September 2015,
Auckland Castle, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham

Press View: Thursday 21st May 2015

- *Birth of the Blues* is the first public exhibition devoted to the remarkable story of the most successful amateur side in British football
- Founded in 1882 by Reverend George Eden, the Bishop Auckland Football Club was formed from theological students training for the priesthood under Joseph Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham
- ‘The Bishops’ went on to make footballing history, playing in every year of the Amateur Cup competition, winning it ten times and touring throughout the world
- The largest exhibition ever to be devoted to amateur football, ‘*Birth of the Blues*’ has been developed in collaboration with the Durham Amateur Football Trust and the National Football Museum, Manchester



Bob Hardisty with the FA Amateur Cup and winner's medal at Wembley stadium, 1955
© Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Football is a faith for many who follow the sport, but a landmark new exhibition charts how it was religion that gave rise to one of the most astonishing true stories in the history of the Beautiful Game.

Bishop Auckland Football Club earned its place in footballing history for winning the FA Amateur Cup an astonishing 10 times – three in succession between 1955 and 1957 – and being losing finalists on eight occasions. The side has over its 133 year existence produced a string of top players, several of whom were to go on and earn international honours.

So renowned is Bishop Auckland FC that it holds the distinction of being the only amateur line-up to have featured in the popular table top soccer game Subbuteo.

What is perhaps less well-known is that the team owes its origins to a boisterous kick-about among theology students studying at Auckland Castle.

Now the club's hallowed beginnings and illustrious history are being celebrated in an exciting new exhibition opening on May 22 at the ‘*Two Blues*’ spiritual home – Auckland Castle in County Durham.

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PRESS RELEASE

'Birth of the Blues' is a community collaboration between Auckland Castle, the Durham Amateur Football Trust with support from the National Football Museum in Manchester.

It tells the story of Bishop Auckland FC from its inception in the 1880s, to the amateur game's glory days in the 1950s, up to the club's recent successes.

Bringing together rare objects, memorabilia and archival film footage the exhibition tells the remarkable story of the club, the players and the 'religion' – both sacred and secular - that gave rise to the most successful side in amateur football.



Huge crowds attend the victory parade through Bishop Auckland Market Place, 1950s, ©Ernie Johnson Evening Gazette

Key exhibits will include the FA Amateur Cup on loan from the FA and the National Football Museum in Manchester; Olympic medals won by the greatest amateur player to have pulled on a Bishop Auckland jersey, Bob Hardisty, and historic team strips.

The fans' story will be told through vintage collectibles, including postcards, newspaper clippings, yearbooks, magazines, match tickets and the rare Subbuteo players wearing Bishop Auckland's distinctive light and dark blue colours.

A programme of commemorative matches, tournaments and question and answer sessions with former Bishop Auckland players and respected football journalists, will also be held over the summer at the castle. Georgina Ascroft, Auckland Castle's Community Archivist who is co-curating *Birth of the Blues* in collaboration with Durham Amateur Football Trust, says:

"Bishop Auckland FC is one of the oldest, most successful and famous amateur football teams in the country. Players like Bob Hardisty, Derek Lewin, Bob Thursby and Ernest Proud were household names in their day, and the club was so feted that in 1923 the team travelled to Spain to play a friendly against FC Barcelona."



Bishop Auckland Church Institute team outside Auckland Castle, 1886, ©Keith Belton

"The club won the FA Amateur Cup a staggering 10 times and has been Northern League Winners 19 times, an astounding five times in the 1950s alone. So successful was the club during that period that in 1958 Bob Hardisty, Derek Lewin and Warren Bradley were sent to play for Manchester United after they lost seven of their players in the Munich Air Crash."

"But what few will probably know is that this powerhouse of amateur football was born at Auckland Castle by theological students studying for the priesthood under Bishop Joseph Lightfoot."

PRESSRELEASE

“It’s fitting that the first exhibition dedicated to the fascinating history of Bishop Auckland FC should therefore be held here at Auckland Castle. It shows not just a different side of life at the Bishop’s palace in the late 19th century, but is a true celebration of a pioneering football team.”

The ‘Two Blues’ began life in 1882 as the Bishop Auckland Church Institute after theology students having a kick about in the Market Place broke the Reverend George Eden’s window. Incensed, the private chaplain to the Bishop marched to the castle to confront his employer, demanding to know what was to be done with the unruly members of the so-called ‘Auckland Brotherhood’ of theological students. So a game was arranged between the Auckland Castle students and pupils from the local King James I Grammar School. Eden chose the name Bishop Auckland Church Institute Club and the team colours combined the famous blues of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, where most of the students came from. The new team got off to a winning start, picking up the Durham Challenge Cup in 1886. But that same year a series of suspensions and disciplinary proceedings saw the creation of a new Auckland Town team, combining Church Institute players and local lads. The new town team became founding members of the Northern League in 1889, when the name was changed to Bishop Auckland FC. In homage to the club’s origins, however, the two blues were kept as the shirt colours.

The rest, as they say, is history.

“People talk about football being a religion. Well, in this case, that’s true on a number of levels. Sadly amateur football clubs only attract crowds of a few hundred these days, but in the game’s heyday when the sport was still community based, thousands would turn out to watch teams like Bishop Auckland. The ‘Two Blues’ drew huge numbers of fans to both their home and away games and attendances of 20,000-60,000 were common. We hope through this exhibition the public will see that Bishop Auckland, both as a team and a town, has been successful and that both can be successful again. We are celebrating the past with a mind to inspiring today’s generation.” - Georgina Ascroft, Auckland Castle’s Community Archivist

The exhibition – which will run until September 28 – has been deliberately timed to incorporate the end of the current football season, with the FA Cup Final scheduled for May 30.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- ‘Birth of the Blues’ runs between May 22-September 28 at Auckland Castle, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL14 7NR, 01388 743 750, www.aucklandcastle.org
- The castle and Library Tea Room are open 10am until last admission at 4pm every day except Tuesday.
- Admission prices are Adults, £6; Concessions, £5; Under-16s, free.