

By Rob Sawyer

# ALF HARLAND: A TOFFEE AND A LINNET

Born on 26 November 1897 in Cookstown, County Tyrone, Alf Harland was one of eight siblings. Lying about his age, at 14 he enlisted with the 12th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. On the football field, the goalkeeper graduated from Dunmurry FC to Linfield in the spring of 1920, winning a clean sweep of the seven domestic competitions they entered, including the Irish League and Irish Cup, in 1921/22.

In 1922, Harland was capped twice by the Irish Football Association (the excellence of Liverpool's Elisha Scott - brother of Everton's Billy - stopped him from adding to the tally) and an Everton director witnessed his superb display in one of them. Club secretary Tom McIntosh and director Bill Sawyer promptly travelled to Belfast to convince Linfield and their player to agree to a transfer.

At 23 years old, Harland duly joined the Toffees for a £1,500 fee, making his debut within a month of arriving and keeping a clean sheet in a narrow victory over Arsenal, playing alongside Hunter Hart and Sammy Chedzoy.



• Everton's team in the early 1920s

In all, Harland made 70 appearances for the Toffees, competing with Tom Fern (who won the League with Everton in 1914/15), Jack Kendall and Harry Hardy for selection. He was released in 1926, not long after a bout of appendicitis, joining Runcorn AFC before retiring from the game. He went on to serve on Runcorn's board for nearly 30 years and he became the landlord of The Darwell Vaults in the town and, later, the Bridge Hotel in Ashridge Street - standing in

the shadow of the giant road and rail bridges over the Mersey.

His Toffees career had overlapped with that of Dixie Dean - Harland was in goal when the legendary striker made his Everton debut in March 1925 and they were teammates when Harland made his last appearance in October 1925, a 3-2 home defeat to Huddersfield Town. He would have his former clubmate over to Runcorn on several occasions for functions, which always drew a crowd. In later life, Harland would occasionally send a football to the FA, asking that year's cup finalists to sign it and send it back for him to keep as a treasured possession.

Alf Harland passed away in May 1968. Some years later, his widow Doris and sister Loretta (over from Australia) attended a match at Goodison and were given the VIP treatment by the Club, with an announcement about their presence being made over the public address system.

Harland's son, Alf Jr. took up water polo while his grandson, Graham Abel, played professional football for Chester City.



• Alf Harland and his wife Doris with their grandsons