

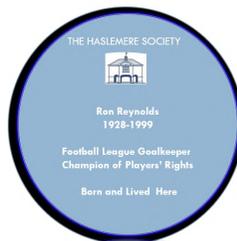


## Ron Reynolds

Blue plaque at 125 Lion Lane, Shottermill

Unveiled 13th July 2019

By kind permission of Stuart Wilson and Kate Croucher  
Funded by The Shottermill Great War Memorial Trust



## Early Life



Ronald Sydney Maurice Reynolds was born On 2 June 1928. His parents lived at 125 Lion Lane, Haslemere, and it is on this house where he lived as a child that we are commemorating his achievements as a footballer.

His paternal grandfather, who had changed his name from Jacobs to Reynolds at some point between 1896 and 1899 had moved from Kingston to Hammer some time between 1901 and 1909. His son Harry, Ron's father was born in 1895.

Like Ron's mother's family, the Riddles, who lived in Lion Lane, both father and son were painter decorators.

Ron's early life was marked by tragedy, his mother dying when he was six. His maternal grandmother agreed to take in his younger sister Joan, aged three and Ron and his older sister Gladys, aged nine continued to live at 125, presumably looked after by their grandmother during the day while their father was at work.

Ron attended Shottermill Primary School from where he won a scholarship to Godalming Grammar School and then embarked on a course of draughtsmanship. He worked briefly at the Admiralty Signals Establishment in Lythe Hill, Haslemere, before joining Dennis Brothers in Guildford shortly before the end of the Second World War, where he worked as a draughtsman.

## Interest in Football

We can safely assume that Ron's family encouraged his early interest in football. His grandfather, Alfie Riddle, played for Small Heath FC before they turned professional and became Birmingham City. When he moved south, he was one of the founders of Shottermill FC, a team that boasted assorted members of the Riddle and Reynolds families for many years. A team photo from 1919-20 shows Ron's uncle Alfred as Honorary Secretary and Ron's father Harry as a member of the team.

Few goalkeepers choose the position, typically the last to be filled in school teams. Ron was no exception. Nor was he a natural choice for the position, being shorter than average as a child, and rather wiry. He liked to cast himself as an outfielder, but one day at school, the team short of a goalkeeper he clearly performed rather too well and his career as a goalkeeper began. Nevertheless, when playing for the ATC he usually played in his preferred inside forward position.



Godalming Grammar football team 1940-41. Ron already in goal and several names with family still in the area.



Hindhead ATC team 1944-45: Ron in front row, second from the left and not playing in goal

After leaving school, Ron continued to play local non-league football for Shottermill at weekends.

Local professional football team Aldershot FC, then in the third division had a distinguished club record. During the war it was never short of footballers, drawing heavily on the military garrison for resource. As the war in Europe neared its end, the team needed to be rebuilt and scouting in the local area, on the recommendation of Debby Rapson, Ron was spotted as a promising young goalkeeper and signed for the club in early 1945, initially playing as an amateur while continuing to develop his career at Dennis.



*Debby Rapson, who discovered Ron, on his signing for Aldershot*

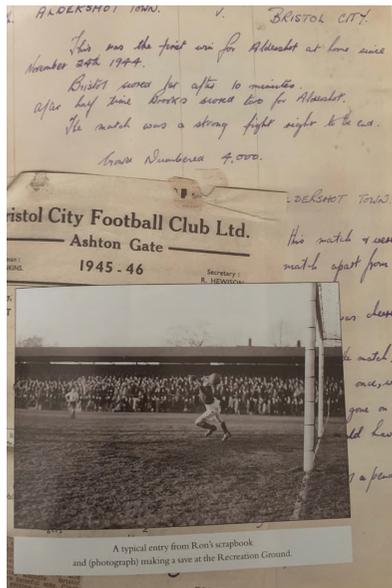
## Professional Career

On 8 December, 1945, Ron signed as a professional on £6 14s per week, still retaining his day job at Dennis.

His career as a professional did not start well. Injury was to end his career and so it began. In his first game, away at Bournemouth, with Matt Busby guesting for the team, he was injured at the outset, conceding 4 goals in the first half and 3 in the second, with no respite from the other end of the pitch. Nevertheless he retained his position and his reputation began to build helped no doubt by the relatively lacklustre performance of the team giving him plenty to do. Local press cuttings suggest that he began to attract minor celebrity status and he began to also be noticed further afield. During the Second World War, league football was largely mothballed which meant that many goalkeepers had left the game, so the field was open for a young goalkeeper at the beginning of his career.

Initially, Ron did not see football as a career, keen to focus on developing his skills

as a draughtsman but by the end of 1949, buoyed by continued positive press coverage, he began to look for a transfer to higher division club. The problem however was that Aldershot were not selling, and contracts at the time gave Ron no options. The relationship between club and player at the time was something of that between master and servant. Requested transfers to 'big clubs' Arsenal, Blackpool, West Brom, Birmingham and Southampton were declined. Ironically it was the club's lamentable performance in the 1949/50 season that led to his final release. Against mounting fan discontent, the club's directors pleaded poverty and the manager resigned. Goalkeepers do not win games, and as the only saleable asset of the club Ron was let go, having helped to rescue the club from the bottom spot in the 3rd division through a 5-0 win against Ipswich in the last match of the season, Ron's 167th and final appearance for the club.



## Tottenham Hotspur –early years

When Ron was sent by the club to a meeting at Waterloo station in July 1950 he thought he was meeting representatives of Arsenal, such was the treatment of players by Boards at the time. In the event he was swapped by Tottenham with a forward and £3000. Arsenal, who had finished 4th in the First Division the previous season would have been the better club: but newly promoted Spurs, whose international class goalkeeper Ted Ditchburn was nearing 30 offered the greater prospect of first team football and were happy for him to commute by car from Haslemere. Now married to Betty Knott who he met at a dance in Haslemere Hall, and living in a flat in St Christopher's Road, Ron was keen not to uproot his young family. David, his first son had been born earlier that year. Throughout his career, Betty focused on her role as homemaker, giving birth to Peter in 1953 and Amanda in 1960.

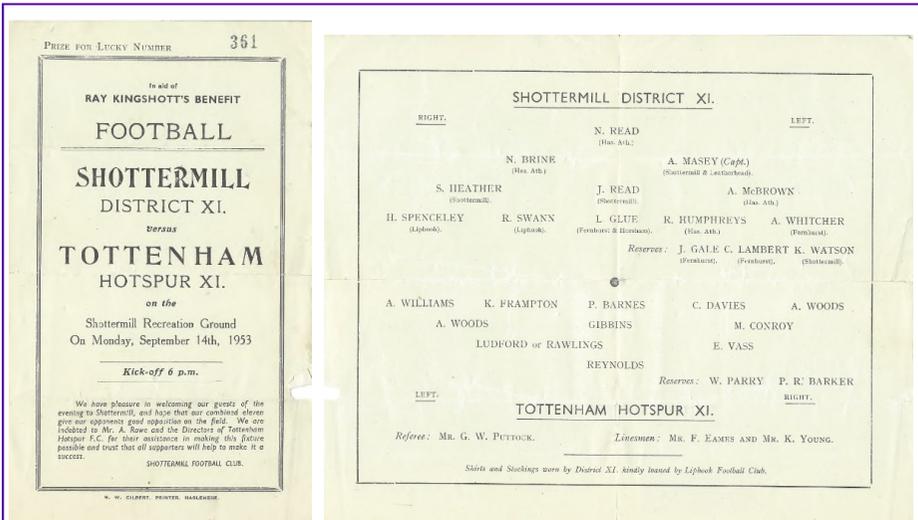
He was also attracted by the vision of manager Arthur Rowe, who was experimenting with a new style of play learned from the Hungarian national team which saw each player as an intelligent attacking force rather than a piece on a chess board. At this time, most players had limited education and in this sense, Ron, like team mates Alf Ramsey, Bill Nicholson and Ronnie Burgess were unusual in having a secondary education.

Despite an improved wage of £11 per week, Ron continued his studies although he left Dennis at this time. The family also moved to 8 Fir Tree Avenue at this time.

The problem with being the number two goalkeeper in a club is that there is only one person in competition for your place in the first team. With Ditchburn obstinately refusing to fade, and newly promoted Spurs taking the title with a four points lead over Manchester United, it was hardly surprising that Ron spent his first season in the reserves. This did however enable him to take one of the very first courses in coaching, an interest he developed throughout his career and which he used to supplement his meagre income.

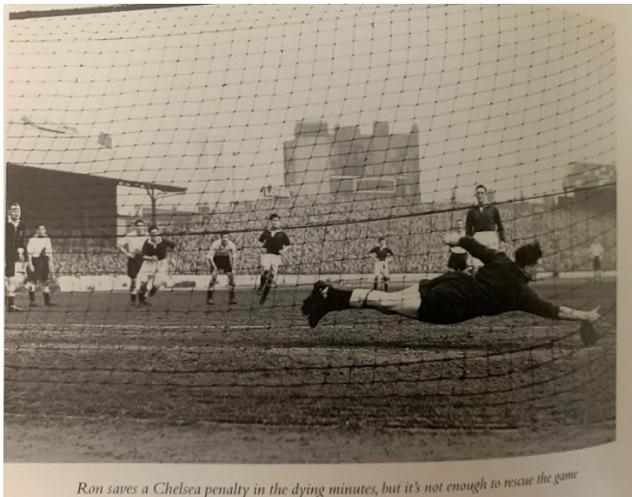
No opportunities for first team appearances came in the 1951/52 or 1952/3 seasons either, but Spurs' performance started to fade. Runners up in 51/52 they ended mid table in 52/53. Manager Rowe, nonetheless continued to encourage Reynolds and as a mark of appreciation for his value, In 1953 something took place in Haslemere that would never happen nowadays - a benefit match was held in September for a local player, Ray Kingshott, with the local side up against Tottenham Hotspur who actually brought down a team to play at Shottermill Recreation Ground, now the site of Tesco! Ron himself was in goal for Tottenham. In the Shottermill team at that time were many names whose families still live in the area including Norman Brine (of Between the Lines), S. Heather (the taxi firm), Arthur McBrown, A G Whitcher (Town Clerk for Haslemere), Reg Swann, Norman Read and Lambert (the removals firm in Fernhurst). The referee was Wesley Puttick and linesman F Eames and Ken Young. The substantial sum of £90 was raised.





## Life in the first team

Ron's opportunity finally came in the spring of 1954 when Ted Ditchburn succumbed to injury although he conceded three goals in his maiden appearance against Sunderland who had only previously won one game that season. Two further opportunities came in the 1953/54 season: the highlight for Ron being saving a penalty given away by Alf Ramsey against Chelsea in the dying minutes of the game.



Ron saves a Chelsea penalty in the dying minutes, but it's not enough to rescue the game

Spurs ended another lacklustre season seven points of the bottom of the league.

The 1954/55 season was a turning point for the club, and for Ron. The season started badly and manager Arthur Rowe, under huge stress, resigned towards the end of the season despite the recruitment of Danny Blanchflower whose performances transformed the club's fortunes in the second half of the season. Ron appeared 26 times and established himself as the first team goalkeeper for the first time. Assistant Manager Ron Anderson, who had recruited Ron took the top job, favouring Ditchburn as goalkeeper. He and Ron did not get on, in Ron's view because as players' representative on the Player's Union he was regarded as a trouble maker.

Nevertheless Ron shared the top spot in the 1955/56 season—another year of dismal performance in which Spurs ended the season in 18th place. Again he was dogged by injury: he suffered a head injury, resulting in him being the first professional player to wear contact lenses while playing. These were described as "big as ashtrays" by one of his contemporaries!

These lenses also caused difficulties under newly introduced floodlights.

Spurs performance improved under Anderson's management, even if Ron's relationship did not and they finished the 57/58 season in third place. Much of this improved performance was down to player Danny Blanchflower with whom Ron struck up a firm and enduring friendship.

This period marked the pinnacle of Ron's career. He was rumoured to have been in consideration for the England World Cup squad in Sweden in 1958 but unfortunately was injured a month beforehand, and missed the one opportunity to play in perhaps football's most prestigious tournament. The England manager at the time was Walter Winterbottom, a contemporary of Ron's from his Lilleshall FA coaching courses where he attained his qualifying badges.



At White Hart Lane with team mate Alf Ramsey looking on

26. 6. 2019

Returning from a training match in August 1958, and distracted by an incident in which a teammate had broken his leg in a tackle, he sliced the end of his finger off by catching it in his garage door. This couldn't have happened at a worse time. He had finally established himself as the first choice goalkeeper and now had to sit out and watch youngster Johnny Hollowbread take his place. It did not help that he had no respect for former coach and now manager Bill Nicholson, and the final insult came when Bill Brown was recruited to replace the ageing Ditchburn—something Ron first read about in the post. He managed one game off in the 1959/60 season in which a revived Spurs came third in the league, but did not hesitate when an offer came to join Southampton, then in the third division, and Spurs made it clear that they would be happy for him to go. The transfer fee was £10,000

## Highs and Lows at The Dell

Ron described his first season at The Dell as the happiest of his career. Straight into the first team, freed from the politics of Spurs, and no doubt enjoying an easier commute, he helped the team secure promotion to the second division in his first season. His second season began well. However, in a home midweek game against Leeds he was involved in a terrible collision with the Leeds centre forward and ended up in hospital. Further injuries dogged his season as the club ended a respectable eighth, but on a downward performance trajectory.

Nevertheless the 1962/63 season had many highs although ending the season in mid-table did not live up to earlier hopes. The team reached the semi-final of the FA Cup, losing to Manchester United while at Spurs and to Manchester City at the same stage of the tournament in 1956.

Ron's career ended in the tenth game of the 1963/64 season against Portsmouth when he dislocated his shoulder and broke his collar bone. He would never play again.

On his move to Southampton he had moved his family, but they returned to Haslemere, moving to 6 Manor Close as he hung up his boots.



Betty and sons David and Peter outside their home in Haslemere

## Later career

After this injury he scouted briefly for Saints and Crystal Palace. Whilst a player he had been an active coach, building on his early training in this field and supplementing his modest income as a professional player. He continued coaching at public schools including Winchester, Harrow, Eton and Charterhouse, before starting a financial services business, Border Insurance, in Liphook in 1967. Initially the firm focussed on providing financial advice to contacts in the footballing world and this was the bedrock of its success. His son David, an accountant, joined him in 1971 and the firm grew and ultimately merged to become The Ashcombe Border Group. Ron also contributed much to the Chamber of Trade and the Parish Council in Liphook. In 1987 Ron retired and his son stayed on for a further eleven years.

## Ron—the man

The picture we have of Ron emerges from his actions on and off the pitch and from a book co-authored by his son David with Dave Bowler, a collection of his late father's memoirs and career biography - Ron Reynolds, the Life of a 1950s Footballer – published in 2003.

In a recent humorous and satirical podcast, former England player Peter Crouch highlights the peculiarities of professional goalkeepers and how they are different from other players. They often train alone, are alone for much of the game and unlike other substitutes, only have one chance to join a game: if the first chosen keeper is injured. They are also frequently seen as the villains of the piece: seldom, but occasionally as the heroes. Like Ron, few have chosen their role in the team.

Ron compounded this 'difference' by having a good education, something not common among players at the time, and choosing to live in Haslemere when playing for Spurs. A ship's manifest from 1957 as the team returned from a tour in Canada reveals that aside from Ron and another team member who lived in Reading, the rest of the team lived in North London close to White Hart Lane. Himself not keen on drinking, it is easy to imagine Ron heading home to Haslemere as the team came together to bond after home matches.

Football in the 1950's and 60's was a brutal game. The ball, especially when wet, heavy, the players often inclined to rough tackles and the rules offering few safeguards compared to the modern game. Goalkeepers needed to be fearless, almost reckless and Ron was no exception.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that we have a picture of a reserved man, not given to displays of emotion and with firmly held and intractable views. Fastidious, principled and outspoken, he had an acute sense of fairness and always championed the underdog. He was a formidable PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) representative and was behind many of the perceived insurrections of his more famous soul-mate Danny Blanchflower, with whom he shared a passion for the glory

of the game. His strength of character made him a natural champion of employees' rights, but this sense of purpose was also ideal in his career as a goalkeeper.

Today's professional footballers owe a great debt of gratitude to the likes of Ron Reynolds, Jimmy Hill, Danny Blanchflower and others for substantially improving contract conditions although, ironically as the maximum wage cap was removed in his final seasons at Southampton, he seems to have shared the sense of injustice that attended the introduction of significant pay differentials among players.

Aside from his footballing talents, as we have seen, Ron was a good friend of Danny Blanchflower who, as a very well-known footballer in the 1950s was asked to write columns for national newspapers. To lessen the load Ron would often ghost-write these on Danny's behalf. On the strength of these he was given his own column in the Eagle comic.

Ron died on his 71st birthday, shortly after celebrating his 50th wedding anniversary.



*Ron and Betty celebrate fifty years of marriage in 1995*

