



Press Release

11 November 2005

Did our First World War POWs hold the answer to Sven's England tactical formation?

A football team sheet for an 'international' match inside Ruhleben POW camp in 1915 - featuring an England side captained by the great Steve Bloomer - has been discovered in newly catalogued World War One Prisoner of War files at The National Archives in Kew.

Billed as the 'Great International Match' between England and The Rest of the World, the team sheet may even hold the key to Sven-Goran Eriksson's tactical indecision, with the POWs taking on a 2-3-2-3 formation.

In July 1914, three weeks before war was declared, Steve Bloomer travelled to Berlin to coach Berlin Britannia Football Club. He was captured and spent three and a half years in Ruhleben camp. The internees, among them a number of footballers, created a remarkable camp society for themselves in which organised sport figured prominently. Bloomer captained his barracks to the League Championship, aged 43.

The David Beckham of his time, Steve Bloomer (1874-1938) played inside-right for Derby County, Middlesbrough and England from 1892-1914. By 1905, when he broke the England scoring and appearance records he was a national institution...football's first 'superstar'.

Bloomer made his England debut in 1895 against Ireland, aged 21, scoring twice. He bowed out against Scotland in 1907, scoring once...from the halfway line. He scored in each of the first ten internationals. His 28 goals in 23 appearances for England were a record until 1956.

The team sheet was found hidden among the 547 volumes of Foreign Office documents recently catalogued. The Prisoner of War files reveal how British internees refused to let capture and confinement dampen their spirits.

Besides football, if gambling was your bag then the casino at Ruhleben, an internment camp 10km West of Berlin, should have made your stay slightly more bearable. A plan of the camp, formerly a racecourse near the now notorious Spandau, shows some of the perks enjoyed by the 4,000 British Prisoners of War housed there - a printing department, playing fields, grandstand, athletic stores and an array of shops selling over 20 different kinds of tobacco were on all offer to relieve the monotony of camp life.

The document is part of newly catalogued Foreign Office files. The project has just been completed and offers members of the public the opportunity to view paintings, photos and reports that give an intimate insight into life in WW1 Prisoner of War camps.

Camp conditions did not appear to be as plush for German Prisoners of War held in the UK. Plans of Alexandra Palace detail the pleasant surroundings on offer to some internees but a

pencil drawing by a German soldier, housed in a former workhouse in Islington, London shows that the sleeping arrangements weren't exactly anything to write home about.

Other documents in the series have unearthed some fascinating stories. They include interviews with soldiers and airmen on their experiences while interned in Germany. Some of these reports are annotated and signed by Edgar Wallace, who was working as a special interrogator for the War Office.

Press Enquiry / Images:

For press enquiries, photos and images please contact Stuart Brennan in The National Archives Press Office on 020 8392 5277 or stuart.brennan@nationalarchives.gov.uk

The Catalogue:

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