

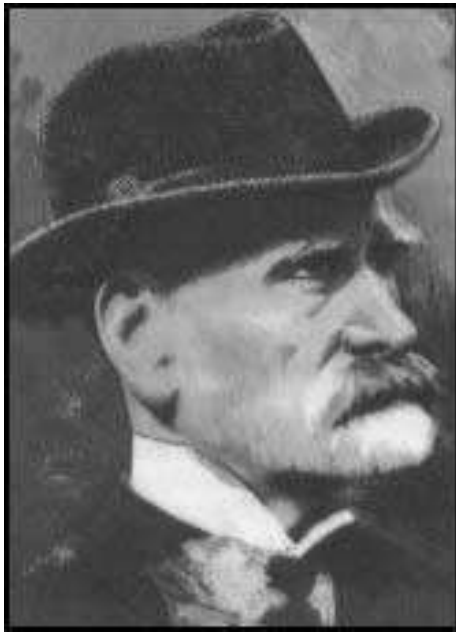
THEY MADE THEIR MARK**EBENEZER COBB MORLEY, FOOTBALL ADMINISTRATOR**

Photo : Spartacus Educational

Back in May of this year, the business magazine Forbes informed us that the Portuguese footballer Cristiano Ronaldo had for the fourth time topped their list of the world's highest paid athletes. In the preceding twelve months Ronaldo had earned – if that's the right word – some £205 million. Poor old Lionel Messi of Argentina, by contrast, had to get by as best he could on a little over half that. I wonder if either of them realised how far a minister's son born in Hull nearly 200 years ago had paved the way for them to make their fortunes.

Ebenezer Cobb Morley (Cobb was his mother's maiden name) was born in Princess St in Hull near where the New Theatre now stands in the August of 1831. He was the oldest of four children and was brought up and educated in the town. His father was the Rev Ebenezer Morley and he baptised his son in his Holborn Street chapel in September of that year. Not much is known about the young Ebenezer's early life, but despite apparently not being educated at a public school he became articled to a solicitor, qualifying as a lawyer in 1854. At around this time the family moved to South London and Morley practised as a solicitor with chambers in King's Bench Walk, Temple. He clearly retained an interest in Hull though, as records show him selling land in Linnaeus Street as late as 1876.

Morley was an all round sportsman and after he settled in Barnes in South West London he joined the London Rowing Club where he founded the Barnes and Mortlake Regatta. He acted as secretary to the regatta for some eighteen years and was one of the rowing club's eight in the Henley Grand Challenge Cup in 1864. He was a busy man. Together with friends from the rowing club, Morley founded the Barnes Football Club in 1862, becoming the club captain. The club's website proudly tells us that it is the sixth oldest club in England, taking part in the first ever FA Cup competition in 1871/2. He was also a keen foxhunter, eventually keeping his own pack of beagles.

Back then football was popular, but there were no generally agreed laws of the game and no organised competitions.

Rules varied from place to place and in the event that teams from different areas played each other there were often lengthy discussions about what rules should apply. Morley felt that this was no basis for the sport to develop, and noting that cricket had a set of laws drawn up by the Marylebone Cricket Club he wrote to *Bell's Life* - the leading sports paper of the day – setting out his ideas for a governing body for football. This led to a far reaching meeting of a dozen or so London clubs at the Freemasons' Tavern in Holborn on Monday 26th October 1863. They agreed to form the Football Association of England with the aim of establishing a unifying code and common rules for the sport. Inevitably perhaps Morley became the Association's first Secretary, serving from 1863 to 1866 before becoming its second President from 1867 to 1874. He carried on playing though, and we know that he represented London in a match against Sheffield in 1866.

I doubt if the likes of Ronaldo and Messi would have been so successful had they played their football back in the comparatively lawless early 1860s. Morley, who drafted the first set of laws for the game thought it necessary specifically to rule out some pretty vicious practices. His draft Law 13 reads '*No player shall wear projecting nails, iron plates, or gutta percha (a form of natural rubber introduced to the west in 1843) on the soles or heels of his boots.*' But drafting the laws turned out to be the easy part – getting general agreement was much harder. For one thing Morley's proposals controversially included some provision for running with the ball in the hands, but his most contentious suggestion came at Law 10 – '*If any player shall run with the ball towards his adversaries' goal, any player on the opposite side shall be at liberty to charge, hold, trip or hack him, or to wrest the ball from him, but no player shall be held and hacked at the same time.*' Some members thought this 'uncivilised', others argued that hacking and tripping were important components of the game. One – sadly unnamed – supporter of hacking and tripping robustly declared that if it were outlawed '*you will do away with the courage and pluck of the game, and it will be bound to bring over a lot of Frenchmen who would beat you with a week's practice.*' Quelle horreur! The staunchest supporter of hacking was one F W Campbell of the Blackheath club who thought it developed 'masculine toughness', but the vote went against him and he went off to form the Rugby Football Union instead. Eventually the laws were agreed, published and first put into practice in a historic game between Richmond and Barnes just before the Christmas of 1863, Morley playing for Barnes. He had turned his dream of a governing body for football into a reality.

In later life, Ebenezer Cobb Morley represented Barnes on Surrey County Council from 1903-1919, and was a Justice of the Peace and Conservator of Barnes Common. He was also the agent of Donald Nicholl, the Radical Member of Parliament who represented Frome in Somerset from 1857 to 1859.

He came to be known as 'The Old Sportsman of Barnes' and as late as 1913 when he was in his eighties was frequently to be found sculling on the Thames. He died of pneumonia in 1924 at the age of 93 having lived a full and varied life.

Neither he nor his siblings had children so his particular branch of the Morley line ended with him.

The Football Association celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2013 and its then Chairman, Greg Dyke, paid Morley a glowing tribute. 'All year' he said 'we have been celebrating 150 years of the FA, and of football, but none of this would have been possible without Morley. We owe him a great debt. What he did to set football on its incredible journey to become the only true global game was a truly remarkable achievement.' Ronaldo, Messi and millions – perhaps billions - of other players and lovers of the game similarly owe him more than most of them will ever know.

Don Knibb

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